



FACTSHEET

Resources for employers

Supporting dads through parenting leave

Traditionally, employers approached parenting leave as a benefit primarily of interest to female staff. That's hardly surprising, given the fact that until recently the UK had the most unequal parenting leave system in the developed world, with new mothers entitled to up to a year off work while employed fathers got just two weeks statutory paternity leave.

By law, all qualifying dads are eligible to take two weeks' paternity leave when their baby is born, paid at a statutory minimum of £139.58 or 90% of earnings (whichever is lower). For more details, check out this [paternity pay overview](#) on the Government website.

In 2011 additional paternity leave was introduced to allow mums to opt out of their maternity leave and transfer the remainder to their partner, but only 20 weeks after the baby was born – at which point the dad would receive statutory pay at a rate lower than the minimum wage. Needless to say, few couples took advantage of this option.

Shared Parental Leave

With the arrival of shared parental leave in April 2015, things are changing and it's now much more important to think and communicate about your parenting leave policies to men as well as women.

Shared parental leave is actually a form of transferable maternity leave. How it works is that after two weeks of compulsory maternity leave, mums can choose to opt out of their remaining 50 weeks of maternity leave, and turn it into SPL, which can be used by either parent.

Couples can take all or part of the leave simultaneously, and each parent may take up to three separate blocks of leave – so either one could return to work for a particular project, or to help with a seasonal increase in workload.

New Flexibility

Both parents need to be working, but only one has to be an employee. By the 15th week before their baby is due, one parent must have been continuously employed for six months. The other could be in a new job or self-employed as long as they meet the "employment and earnings test" (basically, working full- or part-time for at least 26 of the 66 weeks before the due date).

Each parent on SPL may work up to 20 Shared Parental Leave in Touch (SPLIT) days. These are optional and paid at the employee's usual rate. The new rules apply to couples who are adopting, in a same-sex partnership, or bringing up a baby from a previous relationship, as well as to birth parents. For more details on how SPL works, check out the [ACAS guide](#).

Watch this space

It's too soon to know for sure how many couples are making use of the new flexibilities, and nobody expects legions of new dads to swap their suits for slings straight away. Before SPL came in, the government predicted that between 2 and 8% of the estimated 285,000 eligible couples would apply for SPL in the first year. So that's somewhere between 5,700 and 22,800 families across the country.

But the rate of pay you offer during SPL will be crucial to take-up. By law you only have to offer 39 weeks at £139.58 or 90% of earnings (whichever is lower). It's worth noting that the right to six weeks' leave at 90% of full earnings – available under the provisions of maternity leave – does not extend to SPL. So for most couples, it would only make sense to transfer to SPL after six weeks rather than the two that is theoretically possible.

Leading the way

Many companies and organisations, including Citi, PwC, Shell and the Civil Service, are taking the opportunity to 'get behind' parental choice by offering enhanced pay for SPL, to mirror their enhanced maternity offer – thus levelling the playing field for eligible parents in their workforces, to make their own decisions about how to share the earning and caring.

As an employer, deciding whether and how to enhance SPL gives you a real opportunity to reflect on your whole policy towards supporting fathers in your workforce. If you are serious about supporting men as involved fathers, what message would you be sending out by sticking to just the statutory provisions – especially if your company offers mums a generously enhanced maternity leave?

You might face some big changes if your workforce is heavily male-dominated, because up to now you won't have had to cover maternity leave very often. But apart from under such circumstances, why should it matter to you any more if you 'lose' men rather than women from your workforce during their leave period?

Opportunities to model change

Of course, as with women taking maternity leave, you'll need to have procedures in place to ensure dads' shared parental leave runs smoothly. (see *Supporting dads' through the transition to parenthood*).

Here are some other ideas for ways you could enhance the benefits and support you offer dads during their first year as a dad:

- At the same time as introducing shared parental leave, the government brought in a right for dads (and/or partners of pregnant women) to attend two antenatal appointments. You

don't have to pay dads for this time – but why not take the opportunity to demonstrate how much you support men's early involvement as dads, by paying for this time?

- The law says paternity leave must be taken as one or two week-long chunks, consecutively and immediately following the birth. But you could be more flexible than this, allowing dads to break the time off into smaller chunks and spread it over the first month or six weeks, for example. Perhaps you could also pay it at full or 90% salary, to match it more closely to maternity leave?
- There are qualifying periods for paternity leave and shared parental leave – but what about demonstrating clearly to all employees that you value their parenthood regardless of when it occurs, by making these benefits a 'day one' right?
- You could offer expectant and existing dads time off (paid or unpaid) to attend school events, hospital appointments etc, over and above their existing holiday entitlement. If you can't afford to spare them for this extra time, maybe you could allow them to make the time up at a later date.
- Why not introduce a policy that line managers must inform fathers of their right to request flexible working either before their baby is due, or shortly after the baby's birth – so you're proactively making clear that this is possible?

Beyond the first year

Staff who are parents also have the right to up to 18 weeks' parental leave per child before their 18th birthday. The most they can take in one year is 4 weeks, and you can, if you wish, insist on them taking the leave in week-long chunks – unless the child is disabled, in which case they are entitled to take individual days.

Staff must give 21 days' notice before taking the leave, and you can't delay it without good reason. Find out more on the Government website about [parental leave](#).

Employees are also entitled to time off to deal with emergencies involving family or dependants – this includes their own children; and compassionate leave. In both cases you may pay staff during the leave, or ask them to take it unpaid. Find out more about [time off for dependants](#).

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