

Information for working parents



Family Information Service

01905 790 560

Information for working parents

Juggling work and home responsibilities can often be hard, particularly when raising a family. As an employed working parent, you have a number of legal rights to support you as well as various forms of financial help.

Expectant working parents

As a pregnant employee you have a number of extra rights which begin when you tell your employer that you are pregnant. Your employer has a responsibility to complete a risk assessment to protect the health of you and your unborn baby. You are also entitled to reasonable time off to attend antenatal appointments and you are protected against unfair treatment or dismissal connected with your pregnancy.

Maternity/paternity/adoption leave and pay

All female employees are entitled to 52 weeks' maternity leave. The first 26 weeks of leave is known as Ordinary Maternity Leave (OML) and during this time all of your contractual rights and benefits remain. The second 26 weeks is known as Additional Maternity Leave (AML) and during this time some rights may be affected, including your right to return to the same job. During maternity leave, how much money you receive and who pays it depends on the length of time you have been with your employer. Most women who work will receive either Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP), or Maternity Allowance (MA), for 39 weeks.

Depending on the length of time they have been employed, biological fathers and the mother's husband or partner may be entitled to two weeks' paid paternity leave. If you adopt a child one partner may have the right to adoption leave of 52 weeks, some of which may be paid. The other partner may be able to take two weeks' paid paternity leave. Some companies offer enhanced paternity leave options, and/or you may also be able to use annual leave, or parental leave (see page 4), during this time.

Changes planned for April 2011 may allow 12 months' paid leave to be shared between partners. Further information on current entitlements to maternity/paternity/adoption leave and pay is available on the Directgov website (see page 7), including the leaflet 'Pregnancy and work – what you need to know as an employee'.

Flexible working

Flexible working is a term used to describe a range of working patterns which can help with work-life balance. Flexible working requests can relate to hours, times, place and patterns of work.

Do I have the right to ask for flexible working?

If you are an employee with parental responsibility for a child under 16 (or under 18 for disabled children) you may have the right to ask for flexible working. You must have worked for your employer for 26 weeks continuously and not have made another application during the previous 12 months.

You may also have the right to ask for flexible working if you are an employee who cares, or expects to care for a husband, wife, partner, relative, or someone who lives at the same address as you.

How do I apply?

You must ask your employer in writing. Your employer must consider the request and only turn it down if there are good business reasons for doing so. They may take up to six weeks to make a decision so it is important to plan ahead. Further advice on making a flexible working application is available from Directgov or from the organisation Working Families (see page 7).

Types of flexible working

Below are some common examples, many other arrangements are possible:

- **Part-time** – working less than full time, usually either fewer hours each day, or fewer days each week.
- **Job share** – one full-time job normally split between two employees.
- **Flexi-time** – employees choose when they start and finish work each day. There may be standard (core) hours or total flexibility.
- **Term-time working** – employee takes either paid or unpaid leave during school holiday periods.
- **School hours working** – working part-time hours to allow for dropping children off at school and/or picking them up at the end of the day.
- **Compressed working hours** – e.g. working nine longer days in a fortnight to take the tenth day off.
- **Career break** – an extended period of time off, either paid or unpaid.

Rights to time off

Parental leave

If you are an employee with a child under five, you may have the right to take up to 13 weeks (in total, not per year) of **unpaid** parental leave. The reason for this should be related to caring for your child, but could include spending more time with them, settling them in to a new childcare provider or school, or to stay with them in hospital. To qualify for parental leave you must have worked for your employer for more than one year and be either named on the child's birth/adoption certificate, or have legal parental responsibility for them. You must take the leave in blocks of a week, up to a maximum of four weeks in a year.

If your child is disabled you may be able to take up to 18 weeks' **unpaid** parental leave (in total, not per year) until their 18th birthday. You can take this time in days as well as weeks.

You must give at least 21 days' notice before you wish to take parental leave, and it is best to do so in writing. If your employer feels that your leave would disrupt the business, they can postpone it for up to six months.

Time off for dependants

All employees are entitled to reasonable **unpaid** time off to deal with emergencies involving someone who depends on them. A dependant could be your husband, wife, partner, child, parent, anyone living in your household as a member of the family, or someone else who reasonably relies on you for help in an emergency. An emergency could be one of many situations including illness, injury and/or a breakdown of childcare arrangements. You can take this time off regardless of how long you have worked for your employer, you do not have to make a request in writing or provide evidence, but you should let them know as soon as possible. You are allowed reasonable time off so there is no set amount of time, it will vary depending on the emergency.

Further information on parental leave and time off for dependants is available from Directgov.

What happens if there is a dispute about rights at work?

The organisation Acas (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) offers free, confidential and impartial advice on employment rights and issues (see page 7).

Help with childcare costs for working parents

Working Tax Credit – Childcare element

If you are working 16 hours or more each week, and are on a low income, you may be able to get working tax credits. The childcare element of the working tax credit can help with up to 80% of eligible* childcare costs. The maximum you can claim for childcare costs is £175 per week for one child, and £300 per week for two or more children. This means the maximum you could receive is £140 per week for one child, or £240 for two or more children. If you have a partner, you must normally **both** work 16 hours per week or more to receive the childcare element and the amount you receive will depend on your household income and other factors.

For more information on tax credits, and to use an online calculator, visit the Directgov website. For telephone advice, call the Tax Credit Helpline (see page 7).

Employer supported childcare vouchers

Some employers run childcare voucher schemes to help their employees with childcare costs. Voucher schemes are usually run on a salary sacrifice basis, where you can choose to have up to £55 per week, or £243 per month, taken from your salary. This amount is free from Income Tax and National Insurance contributions (NICs) and can be paid towards eligible* childcare costs.

Please note:

- Joining a childcare voucher scheme may affect working tax credits, including the childcare element. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) have an online better-off calculator, where you can work out and compare your savings (see page 7).
- Statutory Maternity Pay can be affected by childcare voucher schemes. You should check with your employer's voucher company whether remaining in the scheme whilst pregnant will affect your maternity pay.
- You should also check with the voucher company whether taking up vouchers will impact on your pension contributions, or other benefits such as statutory sick pay.

***Eligible childcare is childcare that is registered with Ofsted, including childcare that is registered on the voluntary part of the Ofsted Childcare Register, and childcare run by schools on school premises. For more information on childcare available in your area, please contact the Family Information Service (see page 7).**

Help with childcare costs for education and training

If you are thinking of returning to education or training, there may be help available towards the cost of your childcare. Further information is available on Directgov or from the Learner Support Helpline (see page 7).

Free early years education places for three and four year olds

Every three and four year old can have 15 hours of free early years education per week, for 38 weeks of the year. This starts the term following your child's third birthday, and continues until they start full time education. For more information about free early education places, and for a list of childcare providers registered to offer free places, please contact the Family Information Service.

Other benefits/financial assistance may be available, visit Directgov or call the Family Information Service for further information.

The Citizens Advice Bureau (see page 7) can do a full check to make sure that you are claiming all the help and benefits you are entitled to.

Choosing childcare

There are many types of childcare available and you will want to decide which will be best for the needs of your family. The Family Information Service can give you free and impartial advice on how to choose childcare as well as lists of childcare providers in your area. Support is available for parents of children who have additional needs. For further information and to ask for a Choosing Childcare leaflet, please call the Family information Service on 01905 790560.



Useful contacts

Employment rights and issues

Acas

tel: 08457 47 47 47 visit: www.acas.org.uk

Directgov

visit: www.direct.gov.uk

Working Families

tel: 0800 013 0313 visit: www.workingfamilies.org.uk

Financial support and benefits

Citizens Advice Bureau

visit: www.adviceguide.org.uk

Directgov

visit: www.direct.gov.uk

HMRC - Tax Credit Helpline

tel: 0845 300 3900 visit: www.direct.gov.uk/taxcredits

HMRC – Better-off calculator and childcare vouchers

visit: www.hmrc.gov.uk/childcare

Learner Support Helpline

tel: 0800 121 8989 visit: www.direct.gov.uk

Childcare and Family Information

Worcestershire's Family Information Service (FIS)

Worcestershire's Family Information Service provides free and impartial information and advice to parents and carers of children aged 0 to 19 on:

- Childcare
- Activities for children, young people and families
- Information for working parents
- Financial assistance for families
- Services that support children, young people and families
- Services for children with additional needs
- Working with children, young people and families.

If you need advice or information on any issue affecting your family, call the FIS on 01905 790560, email familyinfo@worcestershire.gov.uk or visit our website at www.worcestershire.gov.uk/familyinfo.

You can contact the Family Information Service in the following ways:

By telephone:

01905 790 560 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Answer machine at all other times)

By fax:

01905 790 551

By post:

Family Information Service,
3 De Salis Court, De Salis Drive, Hampton Lovett, Droitwich,
Worcestershire, WR9 0QE

By email:

familyinfo@worcestershire.gov.uk

Online:

www.worcestershire.gov.uk/familyinfo

This document can be made available in alternative formats (large print, audio tape, computer disk and Braille) on request from the Marketing Team on 01905 728912 or by emailing cmetcalf@worcestershire.gov.uk

To the best of our knowledge all information is correct at time of printing June 2010.

