

Parental leave toolkit for parents

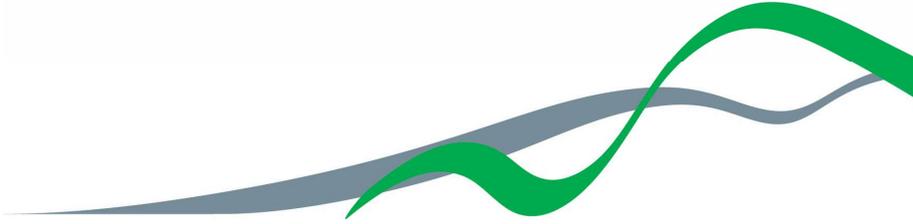
Checklists and self-coaching exercises for parents before, during and after maternity leave, shared parental leave and adoption leave





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Overview

Introduction

This toolkit is for parents in the NHS who are ambitious about their career development and want to enjoy their young families at the same time.

It includes practical advice and checklists on what to do before, during and after your maternity/shared parental or adoption leave, so you stay in the driving seat of your experience and get the most out of it.

This toolkit has been co-designed with a large group of leaders from a range of professions, roles and trusts across the NHS – many of whom have young children. You can use this toolkit to access their experience and benefit from what they have learnt along the way.

There is a corresponding toolkit available for line managers, including useful checklists, so they can better support team members before, during and after their parental leave.

This toolkit has two parts and you can dip in and out of it as you see fit:

- Checklists on what to do before, during and after parental leave
- Self-coaching questions to help you think through how to get the best out of your experience

This toolkit is for anyone who is expecting to become, or has recently become, a parent. It is for everyone, regardless of sex, gender identity or gender expression, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership, or any other equality characteristic.

About this toolkit

The toolkit has been developed by the Social Enterprise Leaders Plus in partnership with the NHS London Leadership Academy. The NHS London Leadership Academy is a pan-London NHS leadership development organisation, working to support healthcare leaders across the capital. Leaders Plus is an award winning social enterprise enabling talented women and men with young children to continue to develop their ambitious careers. Parents from across a number of trusts, professions and roles have contributed to the toolkits as have HR leaders from several trusts.

Helpful principles



- Allow your thinking to evolve. You do not need to make all the decisions right now.
- There is no right way of combining parenting with an ambitious career, give yourself permission to find what works for you.
- Do what feels right for you. Some parents prefer to have limited contact with their employers during parental leave, others want to engage regularly and both approaches are fine.
- Don't feel the need to apologise for having a child or having to look after them.
- If you are experiencing parenting guilt accept it, but don't allow this to define your career.
- Blow your own trumpet: celebrate yourself and your achievements in front of others so people remember them.
- It can pay to look after your professional network while you are on parental leave. You might keep up to date on social media, for example, or by having coffee with work colleagues.

Before you go on maternity/shared parental/adoption leave

Checklist before parental leave

- **General:**
 - Keep celebrating and sharing your achievements so they are at the forefront of your colleagues' minds while you are on leave.
 - Find out about your [legal rights](#) as an expectant mother or as an expectant father (e.g. time [off to accompany the mother to antenatal appointments](#), [shared parental leave](#), [paternity leave](#) and read your employer's maternity/shared parental leave/paternity/adoption policy.
 - Policies: familiarise yourself with your employer's maternity/shared parental leave/adoption leave policies, flexible working policies and health and safety policies.
 - Don't forget to plan your annual leave.
 - You may want to look into tax-free childcare, childcare vouchers or similar options to manage the cost of childcare and annual leave.

- Networks:

- Find a buddy who has taken parental leave from a similar role and go for a coffee to learn from their experience.
- Find out about local support networks and antenatal groups.
- Consider which additional networks at work you want to connect with such as your parent or fathers' staff network if there is one.

- Set yourself up for continued career development:

- Appraisal: think about downloading your last appraisal and making notes on it before you go on leave. That way you can remind yourself of what you have done and said you are going to do. Equally, if the appraisal is due to happen shortly after your return to work, make notes for it now.
- Update your CV before you go on leave. It may be hard to recall your achievements on your return to work, should you wish to apply for a new position.

The Fawcett Society (2016) found that four in ten people think mothers are less committed to work than other women or men. This can have an impact on career prospects and is a sign that a wider shift is needed. With this in mind, it's worthwhile shaping your manager's thinking by reiterating repeatedly how passionate you are about your work. Keep celebrating your achievements.

- With your manager:

- Let your manager and your human resource department know that you are expecting. It is up to you when you inform your employer. However, you will need to meet the statutory deadlines to get [maternity/shared parental leave/adoption pay](#). At the time of writing, employees must tell their employer about their pregnancy at least 15 weeks before the beginning of the week the baby is due. Your employer can support you once they know you are expecting.
- Send our accompanying toolkit, 'Parental leave toolkit for managers' to your manager.
- Schedule a pre-parental leave conversation soon.

During your pre-parental leave conversation with your manager:

- Cover: discuss interim cover arrangements with your line manager. If you want to, tell them you'd like to be involved in the planning.
- Communication while on leave: tell your manager whether you want to be kept informed about certain topics while you are on leave and make it clear how this may change during your leave. If there are any key strategic decisions you want to be consulted on or meetings/events you want to

"Being empowered to lead the recruitment of my own maternity leave cover meant I had confidence that my team would be well led and supported in my absence and I could relax and enjoy being with my family."

Anna Bokobza, Programme director
integrated care, Imperial College
Healthcare NHS Trust

be invited to, say so. Tell your manager if you'd still like to be included in team lunches or socials during parental leave.

- Organisational dates and deadlines: Discuss with your manager how you will manage the organisation's life cycle: i.e. if you are in an organisation that decides on funding for CPD courses in January, but you are on leave, who is representing your needs? If you are in an organisation that does appraisals between January and April, and you are off, how do you receive feedback on your performance and have a discussion about career aspirations? If you are back in November, but everyone puts their Christmas annual leave requests in in September – what do you do?
 - Your career development: keep talking about where you want your career to go and what opportunities you are interested in i.e. special projects. Some managers make well-meaning assumptions that parents aren't interested anymore. You may want to use the appraisal or talent management process in your organisation to outline career aspirations or you may want to set up alerts on NHS jobs to ensure you get notified of progression opportunities you may be interested in during leave.
 - Keeping in touch (KIT)/shared parental leave in touch (SPLIT) days: discuss how you'd like to use these (see below).
 - Flexible working: if you may want to work flexibly, share your current thinking with your manager at the earliest opportunity, but make it clear that your thinking may evolve.
- You may want to consider flexible working if you are pregnant and feeling unwell.

"I really appreciated still being kept in the loop. My manager informed me of a more senior role which I ended up being successful in. I returned to work in that new role and without that I wouldn't have had this opportunity". Anonymous

Self-coaching exercise before leave

Your strengths

Why: this exercise is useful because many parents report forgetting their strengths during parental leave. You will be able to look back at this list before you go back to work.

1. Sit down for ten minutes and write down what you are good at. Write down whatever comes to mind and try to fill the whole space below. Do use the whole ten minutes for this exercise, it is fine if you pause to think. You may want to set a timer.

You may consider:

- What have your friends, colleagues or stakeholders said you are good at?
- Which activities do you enjoy and thrive doing?
- What moments have you been most proud of at work?
- You may want to ask your colleagues and superiors for feedback about your strengths for this toolkit before you go on leave.

Your support network today and in the future

Why: many parents report that the support network is critical when they return to work.

1. What support will you need at work or at home when you return to work? What will you need your support network to think, feel or do?

2. Who is in your current support network at work and at home?

3. If you had a magic wand, who else would you bring into your support network?

Many parents say that it has been incredibly useful to go for a coffee before parental leave with a senior colleague who has been on parental leave to ask for advice. People are usually flattered to be asked for advice and you will build a useful network.

4. What concrete actions can you take to bring new people into your support network and engage your existing support network?

Managing your professional brand

Why: some parents experience that colleagues can forget about their achievements while they are on leave because there is so much going on. This can be managed well by proactively celebrating your achievements.

You may want to send a 'see you later email' to colleagues mentioning some of your recent achievements. You may also want to arrange a feedback conversation with your manager before you go on leave. Some parents found it useful to form groups with colleagues who celebrate each other's achievements.

1. What are the top three achievements you want your colleagues and superiors to remember about you while you are on leave?

2. How can you remind them before you go on leave and before you return to work?

During maternity/shared parental/ adoption leave

Checklist during parental leave

- Enjoy your leave
- If your thinking evolves about your return to work or your working pattern, get in touch with your manager early.
- You may want to attend keeping in touch days or shared parental leave in touch Days (see Top Tips below).
- Towards the end of your leave, many parents find it helpful to set up a meeting with their manager to take place before they return to work

"I learnt so much during my maternity leaves. I gained new skills and resilience and returned to work each time with a fresh perspective and energy".

Lucy Purdy, assistant director of HR, Ashford and St Peter NHS trust.

Top Tips for keeping in touch (KIT) days and shared parental leave in touch (SPLIT) day success

If you are on maternity or adoption leave, you can take up to ten keep in touch days you don't have to take any. If you are on shared parental leave, you can take an additional 20 SPLIT days. They are fully paid, but they are not mandatory. You don't have to take the whole day.

Bringing along your baby to a KIT or SPLIT day, if feasible, can send a powerful message to more junior colleagues that it is possible to have an ambitious career while enjoying young children.

How to create a successful KIT/SPLIT day:

- Agree a clear purpose with your manager.
- Many parents report that arranging childcare you are comfortable with helps with enjoying the KIT/SPLIT day. You may want to consider bringing your baby along to the KIT/SPLIT day. If you are a woman, breastfeeding and not bringing your baby along, you may want to check where you can pump milk.
- Don't be afraid to ask if you can use KIT/SPLIT days for events and conferences you are interested in.
- Do check that your line manager has completed the necessary documentation to ensure you receive full payment for the day.
- Own the day: decide what you want to do and take ownership of making it a success.
- Activities could include:
 - Staying informed about what is happening at work. For example:
 - o Catch up meetings with other members of the team
 - Study or mandatory training

- Activities that support your career development. For example:
 - o Shadowing senior colleagues
 - o Attending training
- Using your expertise or insight. For example:
 - o Review a new practice or draft the design of a new process.
 - o Delivering training in an area of your expertise.
- Some individuals in clinical roles found it useful to use KIT/SPLIT days to shadow colleagues or catch up on specific clinical skills training to prepare for their return to work.

Self-coaching during parental leave: your career and family vision

1. Task: spend an hour and create a vision for your career and family life

Why: Writing down your vision and goals makes it more likely that you achieve them. A research study by Gail Matthews (2015) found for example that 35% of people who didn't write down their goals achieved them, 62% of people who wrote down their goals and shared them achieved them and more than 70% of the participants who wrote down goals and sent weekly updates reported successful goal achievement.

“When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.”

Audre Lorde, American writer, feminist and civil society activist

You may want to use a vision board or write a letter to yourself from the future describing what 5 years' time or 10 years' time is like from a career perspective and from a family perspective.

- What would your career look like if nothing was to stop you?
- What would your family life look like if nothing was to stop you?

“During parental leave is an ideal time to reflect on your long term vision or that you can make sure that you are actively steering yourself towards it during this time of change rather than be driven by the tide”

Verena Hefti, CEO and founder, Leaders Plus

2. Define 2 or 3 goals

Write down 2-3 specific and measurable goals for three years' time, one for your career and one for your family, that are part of getting to your long-term vision. E.g. something your child would say about your family life, a specific job you'd have, someone you'd report to, a salary level etc.

State the goal in positive terms and give the goal a name (be creative) and a picture or symbol to represent it.

3. What small signs of progress would you notice if you were starting to move towards this in the next four weeks?

4. How can you keep your progress towards this vision at the forefront of your mind?



Preparing for your return to work

Checklist before returning to work

- Meet with your manager and include key things such as practical arrangements (if applicable a room to pump milk), induction plan to get up to speed with how the team and role have evolved, any specific needs around your childcare. Do discuss your long-term career development to ensure this stays part of the conversation.
- Communicate early your current thinking around any formal flexible working requests.
- Discuss how you will handle informal flexibility. Many parents say that the line manager responding flexibly in critical crunch point moments is even more important than formal flexible working arrangements.
- Discuss with your manager what the current culture of the team is around leaving time and presenteeism and whether there are any unwritten rules. Discuss whether there is anything about the culture you want to change together.
- Some parents find it useful to use social media to keep connected with what is happening in the organisation.
- Some parents in clinical roles have found it useful to ask for refresher training, shadowing or reduced clinical workload for a period on return.

Getting flexible working requests agreed

- Read the flexible working policy.
- Most employees have the legal right to request flexible working and employers need to respond to these requests in a structured manner.
- Flexible working isn't limited to part time work. There are a variety of options including compressed hours, job shares or agile working.
- Here are some things parents who have had flexible working requests found useful:
 - o Many parents found that their managers were positive about flexible working requests when they clearly explained the benefits to the organisation.
 - o If you are working outside 9-5, consider service priorities, thinking outside the box and delegation. Sell it as an opportunity for a department or trust rather than a challenge to overcome – e.g. you will pioneer flexible working in your department, this will help address workforce retention and recruitment issues by building best practice.
 - o Offer to trial it for three months with clear parameters for success.

“One thing that I found really useful was talking honestly with my manager about the challenges for me and my new family. She was able to give some helpful and objectives insights into my situation which led me to change my flexible working request to better work for my family.”

Matthew, adoptive father, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust

- You may want to consider a variety of flexible working approaches such as full-time working in an agile environment, compressed hours, part-time working or job shares.
- If you go part time, discuss which part of your workload will reduce.
- Do take a look at the NHS Employers resources such as [focus on flexible working](#) and [flexible working case studies and resources](#).
- [Working Families](#) has guidance around how to make a flexible working request.
- [If you are interested in the policy environment, read this report on flexible working in the NHS on the NHS London Leadership Academy's website.](#)

You don't have to work fulltime to be a good employee and you don't have to work flexibly to be a good parent. Find what works for you.

Self-coaching exercises before your return to work

What are you looking forward to about returning to work?

What, if anything, are you worried about linked to returning to work?

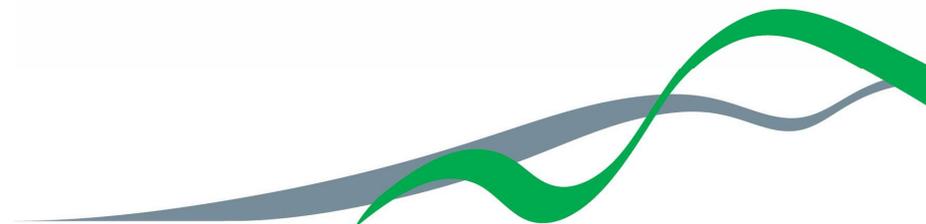
What assumptions are underlying these worries?

Out of these assumptions, which assumption has the biggest negative impact on you?

If you rephrased this assumption and turned it on its head, what would it be?

E.g. if your assumption is “I have forgotten all my skills”, the rephrased opposite assumption might be: “I remember most skills when faced with the task there and then and will pick up anything new quickly”.

If you knew that this rephrased assumption was true, what would you think, feel and do?



After your return to work

Checklist after your return to work

- Plan a review meeting with your manager 4-6 weeks after your return to work
- With your line manager, plan an induction as if you were starting a new role. Ensure that roles and responsibilities are clear and you have handover meetings with team members.
- Have lunch with your team members to find out informally what has been happening, both at work and in their social lives if you connect socially.
- Ask for feedback from your manager on how you are performing soon after arriving back to work.
- Have update meetings with colleagues you work with in different departments and teams.
- If you have a role that requires advanced technical skills (i.e. you are a surgeon), ensure there is supervision in place the first few times you use your skills again and identify if any training is needed.
- Seek out a buddy who has recently returned from work in your organisation and ask them for a coffee.
- Join relevant parent-staff network groups.
- Keep talking to your manager about your long-term career development.
- Remember, many parents say coming back from parental leave feels as intensive as starting a new job, so be kind and patient with yourself.

“ I changed my day off to Wednesday from Friday after my baby had a sleep regression. It allowed me time to rest and return to work Thursday to Friday fresher.”

Sally, Imperial Healthcare College
NHS Trust

Self-coaching exercises after your return to work

To be completed 4-6 weeks after returning to work.

What has made you proud over the last month? Write half an A4 page without stopping.

What, if anything, are you finding challenging at the moment?

How can you use your strengths as identified before going on leave to overcome these challenges?

Who can help you address those challenges?

What do they need from you in order to support you?



Access to further support:

- Your HR department
- Social media, e.g. Doctor Mums Facebook Groups
- Maternity Action run a helpline as do Working Families where you get advice on maternity rights. If you have questions on flexible working Working Families is a good charity to contact and you may find this [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website helpful.
- [NHS maternity pay](#)
- NHS Flex for ideas around NHS flexible working.
- Networks: any women's network in your organisation.
- Books such as "She's Back: Your Guide to Returning to Work" by Deb Khan and Lisa Unwin.
- FlexNHS
- Counselling services
- SANDS
- IAPT for parent groups, parenting, postnatal depression
- You may seek out further coaching and support programmes such as the Leaders Plus Fellowship.

Acknowledgements

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