

# University of Oxford Department of Psychiatry Parental Leave Guide



## **A Time of Transition**

The process of leaving work temporarily to care for an infant, and then returning, can be emotional, complicated, and at times overwhelming. We want to ensure this transition is as smooth as possible for parents, managers and teams.

## **Expectations**

Many parents in the department who have been on parental leave noted how much they appreciated having the support of their line manager and colleagues. But what does this mean exactly?

Here we have outlined some basic things that are expected from employees going on leave, managers, and colleagues before, during and after parental leave so that everyone understands their role and responsibilities, and feels supported through this transitional time.

## What is expected from employees going on parental leave?

1. *For pregnant women:* Advise HR (in confidence) of your pregnancy as soon as you feel you are able to. For women working in environments where there might be particular hazards (e.g. labs, neuroimaging environments), this should be as soon as you know that you are pregnant in order that an appropriate risk assessment can be carried out
2. As soon as you feel able, inform your manager
3. Set up an initial meeting with HR to be briefed on the University's parental leave guidance, confirm key dates and develop an action plan
4. Where appropriate, communicate any changes in situation to HR, your line manager, and your team
5. Ask for help and seek additional support if it is needed
6. Provide feedback to HR on the parental leave process so that the department can make changes to assist you and future leavers



*If you have concerns about any aspect of your parental leave or return to work, it is important to communicate this with your team and seek support or further advice.*

## What is expected from managers?

1. Offer congratulations when an employee (male or female) notifies you they are having a baby or adopting a child
2. Ask if there are any recommendations from the pregnant employee's health professional (e.g. GP / midwife) regarding work, and carry out a risk assessment
3. Respect your employee's desire for confidentiality, and suggest working together to plan how to tell others at work
4. Allow time for antenatal appointments
5. Hold a meeting with HR and your employee before the parental leave starts
6. Hold a meeting towards the end of the parental leave to make arrangements for your employee's return to work
7. Prepare for your employee's return to work. Be ready to support your employee through postnatal / parental / post-adoption depression
8. Be sensitive to any complications that may have occurred during parental leave
9. Be aware of unconscious bias and assess your own views and values and how these may affect the way in which you manage your employee

## What is expected from colleagues?

1. Continue to support and engage with your colleague who is going on parental leave as you usually would
2. Respect your colleague's desire for confidentiality and privacy
3. Be supportive of time taken out for antenatal appointments
4. Make sure your colleague feels welcome when they return to work
5. Be aware of unconscious bias and assess your own views and values and how these may affect the way in which you interact with your colleague

## Effective Planning

Having early conversations regarding leave intentions will enable everyone to be clear regarding the leave arrangements. HR will provide you with the information you need on practical matters, such as: working while on leave to attend training sessions or team meetings; accruing leave days; and so on.

## Terminology and unconscious bias

When discussing parental leave, it is important to be clear that it is inclusive of all parents and parenting relationships (ie. mums, dads, and adoptive parents), and that it is a normal part of workplace leave, alongside annual leave or sick leave. The tendency to refer to it as "time off" can unintentionally devalue parenting work and imply that the person is not serious about their career.

## Keeping in touch

Before the parental leave starts, employees and their line managers should discuss arrangements for staying in touch. Although there is no legal obligation for the person on leave to keep in touch with their team, many have found that it helps create a smooth return to work. For managers and teams, it is important to respect the privacy of the person on leave, but also to show how much they are valued and/or missed. There are different ways to do this and it will vary between individuals and teams.

Employees who have previously gone on parental leave have appreciated their line managers being flexible and open to answering questions during the transition process. Some teams have stayed in touch over Skype, email, and WhatsApp, while others have had regular home and office visits. The key is to agree on something that works for you and your team.

Employees may carry out up to a maximum of 10 days' work in the department during their parental leave, for which they will be paid. These are known as 'Keeping in Touch' (KIT) days and could include attending a conference, meeting or training activity. HR will advise on how to claim payment for KIT days.



There is a legal requirement for employers to offer to inform employees of changes at work, training opportunities, and job vacancies during parental leave. The employee can opt not to receive this contact.

## Returning to work



Returning to work after a period of parental leave can be difficult with many new circumstances to take into account. There may be adjustments to work, such as changes in hours and responsibilities, and flexible working.

Prior to returning from parental leave, individuals and line managers should arrange a meeting to discuss arrangements to facilitate a smooth transition.

## Key Departmental Contact

Philly White, HR Manager – Main departmental contact for guidance on parental leave and return to work arrangements.

## Other Resources

**University guidance on all forms of parental leave (maternity, adoption, paternity, shared parental leave):**

<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/personnel/during/family/>

**For employees taking parental leave:**

- ParentsNet: a forum for people in the Medical Sciences Division <https://www.medsci.ox.ac.uk/support-services/teams/athena-swan/links/parentsnet>
- Oxford University My Family Care <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/personnel/staffinfo/benefits/family/mfc/>
- If you would like a buddy or mentor to guide you through the period surrounding your parental leave, please discuss with HR.

**For line managers / team members**

- Concepts of work and family often tap into unconscious biases about gender roles or commitment to work. Recognising that these biases are learned is core to avoiding their pitfalls. The University's Unconscious bias: online course ([www.learning.ox.ac.uk](http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk)) provides an introduction to understanding the subject and its relevance to working life.