



Planning for Parental Leave

While everyone's situation is unique, our Head of Coaching & Consultancy, Iole Matthews, shares eight ideas to consider as you prepare for a smooth transition in those months before you go on leave.

Congratulations, you're expecting! Whether this is your first child or their sibling this is the beginning of a life transition which, like any journey, can be made so much smoother with a little planning.

1. Get Prepared

A good starting point is to update your knowledge of your organisation's parental leave policies. Talk to your HR partner and/or leave specialist, as well as any colleagues who've been there before, about what's included and what's worked well for others. It can be helpful to be clear on who your point of contact is for things like pay, a return-to-work date, or any other administrative tasks in your parental leave policy.

2. Sharing Your News

When and how you share your news is entirely up to you: however, some planning around communication can reap dividends and, while it may be tempting to share the news with close colleagues first, do consider that once you have told one person word travels fast. Letting your manager know first and moving quickly to tell the rest can help you keep control of your message.

3. Talk to your Line Manager

Of course, sharing that you will be taking a long period of leave from the workplace can be nerve wracking – how will people take it? Will it impact your career? Your manager can be one of your main allies. To ensure they are bought into your plans, have a conversation with them at an early point, pre-leave, to come up with an action plan to share the news more widely. This

initial conversation should be the first of many as you figure out the details of your leave plan. It is also a good opportunity to reinforce your commitment to your career, which can be especially important if your manager is unfamiliar with parental leave or has preconceived ideas about employees taking this time away from work.

4. Communication and Support

Developing and nurturing strong communication channels with a wide range of stakeholders can make a significant difference to confidence and a sense of managing the parental leave transition. Consider identifying all those colleagues, clients or leaders who might be able to support your ongoing career goals and ensure they are included in your handover and handback plans.

5. Handover and Handback Plans

You can be more influential by being pro-active in your handover and in how cover for your role is arranged and handed back. Preparing a coverage and transition plan can be a great way to help you – and the business – get clarity on whom to transition what aspects of your work to. It will also become a guide for the conversations with your manager, as well as a handy document that you can share with stakeholders as needed.

6. Keeping in Touch

Consider how, or if, you would like to remain in contact, even if you want to be completely left alone, consider if there might be a few situations in which you'll want to stay in the loop. This could be a re-organisation, the outcome of a project that you are driving, a job opportunity, reopening strategy and work get together as we move out of lockdown. Think about what will work best for you and your family while you are on leave, and then be clear about your preferences.

7. Planning Ahead for Your Return to Work

It can be helpful to set up a pre-leave review meeting with your manager to explore your performance to date, objectives for when you return and the routes to success in your career. It's not too early to open an informal conversation around possible flexible work options for when you return with a focus on what the business needs you to deliver. Conversations at this point

set the tone for those on return and take away some of the anxiety around opening a conversation while on leave.

8. Support Network

Experience shows that it's never too soon to think about future childcare needs, and while many of us find it difficult to ask for, or accept the help of friends and family, this is a great time to get over that! A strong support network makes the world of difference and now is also a good time to find out what your business offers to working families. For example, find out if they offer:

- Back up emergency childcare
- Parent transition coaching
- Support in finding childcare
- New parent or family networks
- An onsite crèche

And finally, as your leave approaches, slow down, do less, and delegate more. Disconnecting from work is hard for many of us but appreciate that your team is capable and that you've done everything you could to prepare them for this transition. And now, it's time to prepare for your next transition: becoming a parent.