

## **SHARED FLEXIBILITY FOR MUMS AND DADS - IT'S A WIN-WIN!**

"It's really encouraging to see more and more women and men adding 'childcare drop off', 'WFH - calls only' or 'school pickup' to their calendars. People's priorities are changing and there's no shame in it." Katie talks about how flexible working is working for her and can do for many others

Before we had our daughter, my husband and I both used to work in the city: five days a week eight-thirty until four-thirty.

I always wondered and felt slightly worried about what our options would be once my maternity leave was over. Would one of us be dashing to catch the train, rearranging our diaries at the last minute, or end up calling the nursery telling them we would be late for pick up?

### **Dreading the thought**

We weren't looking forward to a world of clockwatching, late pick up fees and negotiating schedules. I had visions of feeding our daughter her tea in the car on the way back from the childcare center and feeling generally frazzled, maybe even dreading the thought of having to log on later that night.

Actually, the reality was far from that and is so much better than I could ever have imagined.

### **Going back to work**

We were both lucky with how things turned out. Once we had talked about how we thought it would work, we both asked for what we wanted. It was agreed that I could go back to work three days a week, and although that would mean working in a new team, it also meant that I would be able to fully focus my attention on those three days. My husband was able to get his contract changed to working three days from home, meaning when I was in the office he could do all the center drop off/pickups, so there was no rushing about for either of us. As it turned out, when lockdown hit, both of us were soon working from home anyway, so the drop offs/pickups became shared.

### **More motivated, ambitious and efficient**

I was worried about returning to work part-time and how that would affect my career, but the truth is that working this way has made me more motivated, ambitious and efficient. I don't lose sleep over certain situations that I would have before and I feel I can achieve so much in three days.

Sharing our working week makes things so clear and simple for us - we know what we are doing, and if we need to swap things around every now and again to accommodate meetings or calls, then it's not too difficult. Our employers can see the consistency we provide even though we may not be working the usual office hours. We are still able to meet expectations, deliver what's required and get involved in projects.

## **There's no shame in it**

My husband was initially worried about the effect home working would have on his career - I think men especially feel it's hard to ask for flexibility so they can share the family responsibilities - but it's actually become much better for it. Remote or flexible working can be a tricky subject, but with so many of us having been forced to work from home and adapt to new ways of working virtually during the pandemic, it has opened the door to many more employers considering it. It's really encouraging to see more and more parents adding 'childcare drop off', 'WFH - calls only' or 'school pickup' to their calendars. People's priorities are changing and they are making it clear, there's no shame in it.

Of course it's not possible for everyone, but employers are starting to see the benefits of home working and shared arrangements/responsibilities, and certainly for us, the results have been really positive and rewarding.

## **Blending not balancing**

We try to blend parenthood with our careers rather than balance everything. Balancing sounds too risky and fragile like things could come crashing down at any moment. We both feel we have been able to achieve what we want without one of us sacrificing too much, and we respect each other's careers. We have no help from family so we have no choice but to support each other, take turns, and that way our daughter will see equality and have a positive relationship with the both of us.

## **Willing to embrace change**

The next challenge we face is baby number two arriving towards the end of the year. How do we blend things again? What we have in place now won't work in the same way it did the first time, so what are our needs personally and professionally? How can we compromise?

We have found it extremely helpful to address these questions early on together so that when a big life change like this happens you both have the opportunity to adapt. You have to be willing to embrace change and manage the emotions and stress that can come with it. That's what most people are afraid of: the transition between where they are and where they want to be.

## **Challenge and encourage**

Whether it's condensed or flexible hours, remote or part-time, there are often options available if you ask. Encourage your employer to be imaginative rather than overly cautious, and challenge the traditional nine-to-five. Suggest a trial period if you think that might help. You aren't asking for extra holiday, just a different way to continue to do your job - it's better for you and better for their profits