



# The Parental Leave Playbook

How to plan your leave, understand your pay  
and protect your career



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# Welcome

Welcome to the 2026/27 Edition of From Bump to Boardroom

I'm writing this as both the founder of Maternity Mentor and as a mum navigating this season myself.

Pregnancy and parental leave are transformative — not just emotionally, but professionally and financially too. Whether you're preparing for your first child or growing your family, this transition can feel exciting, uncertain, empowering and overwhelming all at once.

Over the past few years, conversations around parental rights and workplace flexibility have grown louder. Yet many parents still find themselves piecing together information from multiple sources, trying to understand policies, pay calculations and return-to-work expectations without clear, structured guidance.

From Bump to Boardroom was created to change that.

This annual publication is designed to sit beside you through pregnancy, parental leave and the return to work — offering clarity where there is confusion and reassurance where there is doubt.

Inside, you'll find practical explanations of your rights and options, financial planning guidance and thoughtful insight to help you approach each stage with greater confidence.

You'll also find our new Parent Perks section — a curated collection of aligned brands offering practical support to families during this chapter.

Our mission remains simple:

- To equip parents with clear, reliable information about their rights and choices.

This publication exists because working parents deserve clarity during one of life's biggest transitions.

Thank you for being here.

Natasha  
Founder & Editor

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# Pregnancy & Preparation

## PREGNANCY SYMPTOMS AT WORK

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The early weeks of pregnancy can be both thrilling and challenging. Fatigue may become a constant companion and nausea or pregnancy sickness can feel debilitating — particularly when you are expected to show up and perform as normal at work.

For too long, first trimester symptoms have been minimised. The reality is that if you are struggling to cope at work, you are not being dramatic and you are not without protection.

There is no legal obligation to inform your employer of your pregnancy until the 15th week before your due date (around week 25 of pregnancy). However, if you wish to access certain protections — such as paid time off for antenatal appointments, adjustments to your working arrangements or health and safety protections — you will need to inform them.

If you decide to share your news early, your manager or HR department should handle the conversation sensitively. If you wish for confidentiality, be clear about this. That said, where health and safety assessments or practical adjustments need to be made, your employer may need to inform specific colleagues as part of their duty of care.

If pregnancy symptoms are affecting your ability to work, you can request reasonable adjustments. These might include:

- Adjusted working hours
- Temporary remote working
- More frequent breaks
- Reduced physical tasks

If you are too unwell to work, you are entitled to take sick leave as you would for any other illness. If symptoms persist, speak to your GP or midwife. If you require a fit note, ensure it records your absence as pregnancy-related. This is important, as pregnancy-related sickness absence must not be used in disciplinary or absence management procedures.

You are protected from unfavourable treatment or dismissal because of pregnancy-related illness. This protection applies throughout your pregnancy.

Maternity Mentor Pro-Trips (childcare considerations & supplements) - you might be thinking, “Why are we talking about childcare already? I'm barely out of the first trimester.”

The reality is that in many areas of the UK, nursery waiting lists are exceptionally long. Even if you are unsure what your return-to-work plans look like, it is worth researching local childcare providers early so you understand timelines and availability.

In terms of supplements, the NHS recommends 400 micrograms of folic acid and a vitamin D supplement during early pregnancy. Speak to your healthcare provider for personalised advice.



# Health & Safety for Pregnant Employees

When you inform your employer of your pregnancy they are legally obliged to carry out a pregnancy risk assessment. Risks could be caused by:

- heavy lifting or carrying
- standing or sitting for long periods without adequate breaks
- exposure to toxic substances
- long working hours

Where there are risks, the employer should take reasonable steps to remove them. For example, offering the employee different work or changing their hours.

Some professions involve travel as an essential part of work. It is generally considered safe to undertake moderate travel up until between 32 – 36 weeks of pregnancy. However, in cases where it is considered high risk to travel, pregnant individuals can be given a note from a healthcare professional stating that travel should not be undertaken.

Pregnant employees who think they're at risk but are in a disagreement with their employer should talk to their health and safety or trade union representative. If your employer still refuses to do anything, talk to your doctor or contact the Health and Safety Executive.

We consider it best practice for the H&S risk assessment to be reviewed between yourself and your manager every month as your pregnancy evolves. This is likely to be something you will need to request from your manager as is not standard practice in most companies..



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# Maternity Rights

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Pregnant employees have 4 main legal rights

1. Paid time off for antenatal care\*
2. Maternity leave
3. Maternity pay or maternity allowance
4. Protection against unfair treatment, discrimination or dismissal

\*antenatal care' is not just classed as medical appointments - it can also include antenatal or parenting classes if they've been recommended by a doctor or midwife.

The father or partner has the right to unpaid time off work to go to 2 antenatal appointments.

## Your rights on maternity leave

While you're on maternity leave, you'll still be entitled to all the employee rights you normally get from work – for example:

- o Paid holiday
- o Protection from unfair dismissal
- o Pension payments and rights during your period of Statutory Maternity Pay payment
- o Any other employee benefits – for example, gym membership and medical insurance – for your whole maternity leave period.

## Your NHS maternity exemptions certificate

Your NHS maternity exemptions certificate is usually provided to you by email following your first appointment with your midwife (around 8 weeks of pregnancy).

This entitles you to free NHS dental appointments and prescriptions.

Most local authorities and leisure centres also provide free swimming facilities - check this with your local swimming pool.

This exemption expires 12 months after your due date or the birth of your baby.



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## **Pregnancy and maternity discrimination**

It is against the law (Equality Act 2010) to discriminate against anyone because they are pregnant, breastfeeding or recently given birth. Your protection against pregnancy based discrimination starts when the employer finds out you're pregnant and lasts for up to 18 months after the birth of your child.

If you're treated unfavourably after 18 months post birth- it could still be treated as discrimination it would just be classed as sex discrimination rather than pregnancy & maternity.

Some examples of pregnancy and maternity discrimination could include:

- Having pay or hours reduced solely due to pregnancy.
- Facing pressure to resign or being dismissed or passed over for a promotion due to becoming pregnant.
- Being treated differently due to taking time off because of pregnancy related illness
- Missing out on a payrise you otherwise would have received if you hadn't been pregnant/on maternity leave

Discrimination can be very obvious or it can be subtle & not always noticed by other people such as unconscious bias, microaggressions & stereotyping.

If you think you are being discriminated against start collecting evidence as soon as you can.

### **Citizen's Advice recommend taking the following steps :**

1. Make an informal complaint by talking or writing to your employer
2. Make a formal complaint to your employer - this is called 'raising a grievance'
3. Negotiate with your employer to reach an agreement - this is called 'settling'
4. Use mediation - a trained mediator will try to help you and your employer reach an agreement before legal action
5. Take legal action at an employment tribunal - an employment tribunal should be treated as a last resort.

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# Pregnancy & Preparation

Once your health, rights and workplace protections are clear, the next step is to think ahead. Maternity leave can feel far away in early pregnancy, but planning early gives you control over what can otherwise feel uncertain.

## **Start by understanding:**

- When you intend to begin your leave
- How long you plan to take (note this can change during leave & you don't need to commit to anything at this stage)
- What your maternity pay structure looks like (check for any enhanced company policy)
- Whether you may want to use annual leave before or after maternity leave
- What your partner's leave arrangements might be

Consider creating a simple leave plan document outlining:

- Key dates
- Your intended return window (even if provisional)
- Important handover milestones
- Contact preferences while on leave

## **Handover Preparation**

A thoughtful handover protects both your team and your peace of mind.

You are not responsible for solving every future challenge before you leave but documenting your role clearly reduces last minute stress and protects your professional reputation.

Your handover might include:

- A summary of current projects
- Key contacts and stakeholders
- Deadlines and reporting cycles
- System access notes
- Password handover protocols (following company policy)
- Decision making guidance for ongoing work

If possible, schedule at least one structured handover meeting with the colleague covering your responsibilities.

Maternity Mentor Pro-Trips -write a handover document for yourself - the future you - for your return back to work. A fact sheet/ some affirmations reminding you of the key aspects of your role is a really useful technique to help you with your reintegration



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## Keeping in Touch (KIT) Days

Keeping in Touch (KIT) days are optional days you can work during your maternity leave without ending your leave or maternity pay.

You are entitled to up to 10 KIT days during maternity leave. These days are voluntary — you cannot be forced to work them, and you are not required to request them. They must however be agreed by both yourself and your employer.

KIT days can be used for:

- Team meetings
- Training
- Strategic updates
- Phased re-engagement before return

They can massively help ease the transition back into work, particularly if your leave has been lengthy.

Before your leave begins, it is sensible to discuss:

- Whether you anticipate using KIT days
- How they will be paid (this can vary by employer) but best practice is that you will receive a full days' pay even if you work just a couple of hours.
- How much notice you would like before being contacted

Clear boundaries matter. You are not “on call” while on maternity leave. KIT days are structured, agreed work days — not informal check-ins.

Approached intentionally, they can support confidence and continuity rather than pressure and are a great tool to help you reintegrate back into the workplace.

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# Preparing to Leave Work Checklist

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## 1. Confirm the Handover Plan

By this stage, maternity cover arrangements should be in place. Before you leave:

- Ensure responsibilities are clearly allocated
- Confirm who is covering each area of your role
- Share key documents, timelines and stakeholder contacts
- Clarify escalation routes for urgent matters

A structured handover protects your team — and your future return. Think of it as leaving clear breadcrumbs for when you step back in.

## 2. Reconfirm Leave Dates & Policy

Double-check:

- Your agreed maternity leave start date
- Your provisional return date (even if subject to change)
- Any agreed flexibility

While plans can evolve, written confirmation avoids misunderstandings later.

## 3. Agree Communication Expectations

Have an explicit conversation about:

- Whether you would like updates during leave (your employer is only allowed to contact you for key updates such as a new office location/ restructure/ role change unless agreed otherwise)
- How you prefer to be contacted
- The purpose of any communication (e.g. key changes, KIT days, organisational updates)

You are not required to remain “on call.” Clear boundaries now prevent blurred expectations later.

## 4. Clarify Annual Leave Arrangements

Maternity leave and annual leave are separate entitlements.

Agree in advance:

- How accrued annual leave will be used
- Whether you plan to attach it before or after maternity leave
- How bank holidays are treated under your employer’s policy (they are usually accrued)

Putting this in writing ensures a smoother transition back to work.

## 5. Review Rights & Benefits During Leave

Before stepping away, ensure you understand:

- Your entitlement to up to 10 Keeping in Touch (KIT) days
- How KIT days will be paid
- How pension contributions will be handled
- The continuation of any additional benefits (e.g. car allowance, healthcare, bonuses)

Clarity here removes unnecessary uncertainty while you are away.

## 6. Discuss Ongoing Development (If Relevant)

If maintaining a sense of professional continuity feels important to you, you may wish to discuss:

- Access to industry updates
- Optional training opportunities
- Invitations to key team briefings

This is entirely optional. Maternity leave is a protected period, not a requirement to remain professionally active.

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Trigger Warning

In this next section we talk about your rights & support options if your pregnancy doesn't continue as expected.

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# Coping with baby loss

## & YOUR RIGHTS

*It truly breaks my heart that we find ourselves delving into this chapter. But in moments of profound vulnerability, it becomes crucial to shed light on your rights and the support available. You're not alone, and understanding these options, I hope, can offer a gentle source of support during these incredibly difficult times.*

In the UK, there are legal rights and provisions in place to support parents who experience baby loss:

**Miscarriage** - If your baby is stillborn before the end of the 24th week of pregnancy it is treated as a miscarriage. Unfortunately you do not qualify for maternity leave or pay if you have a miscarriage. An employer should still consider offering time off during what can be an extremely difficult time. Some employers may offer a specific pregnancy loss period of leave otherwise you can ask them if they will provide compassionate leave. If you need additional time you can use annual leave or agree a period of unpaid leave. You are entitled to sick leave if you are not well enough to work as a result of this & it would be useful to speak with your GP who can certify your sickness absence as pregnancy related & protect you from any potential disciplinary/redundancy risks.

**Baby Loss Certificate** - From 22 February 2024, the Government launched a baby loss certificate service for parents who have lost a baby before 24 weeks of pregnancy. Parents who have experienced this devastating loss can now apply for a certificate to formally recognise their grief & loss. It is a choice as to whether to wish to apply for one or not.

**Stillbirth** - A stillbirth certificate will be issued where a medical professional estimates that pregnancy lasted for a full 24 weeks. In this instance you are entitled to maternity/paternity leave and pay assuming you meet the standard eligibility criteria. Your maternity leave will start the day after your baby was stillborn.

**Neonatal Death** - If your baby died within the first 28 days of life this is considered a neonatal death. If your baby was born alive but did not survive, you are entitled to maternity/paternity leave and pay that you qualify for. You should also qualify for 2 weeks of parental bereavement leave/pay after your maternity/paternity leave.

Before you return to work; Speak with your employer about anything that concerns you (you may wish for your period of absence to be referred to as something other than “maternity leave” or you may wish for colleagues to reach out or not reach out). There’s no right or wrong as to what can be done to help you feel better supported.

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# Coping with baby loss

## & YOUR RIGHTS

Coping with baby loss is a unique journey for each individual or couple. Seek support from professionals or support groups if you feel it would help you navigate this difficult time. Remember that there is no "right" way to grieve, and it is a deeply personal process.

### Support & charities:

When coping with the loss of a baby you are not alone. Support is available and there are some incredible charitable organisations that can offer guidance at this difficult time.

- SANDS

SANDS offers support and a safe space for those grieving the loss of a baby. Services include a free helpline, support groups and support chats, allowing those coming to terms with the loss of a child a variety of avenues for accessing support. Services are offered to parents, siblings, grandparents, friends and NHS professionals.

<https://www.sands.org.uk/>

- Petals

Petals offers professional counselling services for those that have experienced miscarriage, stillbirth, TMFR, neonatal death, and pregnancy after the loss of a child. The counselling services available have been designed specifically to meet the needs of those grappling with the loss of a child and complications during pregnancy.

<https://www.petalscharity.org/>

- SLOW

Offering services for parents and siblings that have experienced the devastating loss of a child, SLOW provides access to support groups and spaces to meet other parents and siblings grieving the loss of a child. The charity operates in and around London, as well as over Zoom.

<https://slowgroup.co.uk/>

- Tommy's

Providing support and information for those navigating this difficult time, Tommy's is working to spread awareness about miscarriage and baby loss. The organisation offers practical guidance for those that have lost a child, and support for parents, carers and family that are grieving the loss of a child.

<https://www.tommys.org/>

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# Part Two - Your leave options

## STATUTORY MATERNITY LEAVE

Statutory Maternity Leave (SML) is a fundamental right that enables expecting birth mothers to take time off work before and after childbirth. You're entitled to a year of Statutory Maternity Leave no matter how long you've been in your job.

While you're entitled to 52 weeks off work, you'll only get maternity pay for 39 of them if you're eligible.

Key aspects of SML include:

Duration: SML lasts for up to 52 weeks and is made up of the following:

- **Ordinary Maternity Leave:** this is the first 6 months – or 26 weeks. If you return to work during this period, you have the right to return to exactly the same job that you had before you took maternity leave.
- **Additional Maternity Leave:** this is the second 6 months and affects what rights you have when you go back to work. If you take more than 6 months' leave, you have the right to return to the same job unless it's no longer available. In this case, you must be given a similar job with the same pay and conditions.

Leave Window: You can begin SML up to 11 weeks before your due date or earlier if your baby arrives early.

Please Note: If you are not taking SML you must take 2 weeks off after the baby is born - or 4 weeks if you work in a factory – this is compulsory for all birth mothers.



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# Eligibility & Mat B1

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To be eligible for Statutory Maternity Leave (SML), you only need to meet the following criteria:

- **Employment:** You must be employed.
- **Notice:** At least 15 weeks before the baby is expected, you must tell your employer the date that baby is due and the date you want to start maternity leave - you can change this with 28 days notice. Your employer must then confirm your leave start and end dates in writing within 28 days.

Employees can change their return to work date if they give 8 weeks' notice so do not feel pressured to commit to any timeline before you are ready to do so!



## Giving Your Employer Notice - Mat B1

As highlighted above one crucial step in the maternity leave process is to notify your employer about your pregnancy. The Mat B1 form plays a central role in this:

- **Mat B1 Form:** This document, provided by your midwife or GP around 20 weeks pregnant, serves as official proof of your pregnancy. It includes essential details about your pregnancy, such as your expected due date.
- **Bear in mind** you will want the official copy back if you're going to apply for benefits such as the Sure Start Maternity Grant so either send a copy to your employer or request that they send your official copy back to you.
- **Timing:** Inform your employer about your pregnancy before the end of the 15th week before your expected due date. Providing your Mat B1 form promptly ensures that your employer can make necessary arrangements for your maternity leave.

If you would like to inform your employer of your pregnancy before you are 25 weeks pregnant & before you have received the Mat B1 form, you are welcome to use our free template letter available for download from our website.

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# Statutory Maternity Pay

## What is Statutory Maternity Pay?

Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) is a financial support scheme provided by the UK Government to eligible employees who are pregnant or have recently given birth. SMP is designed to help working parents maintain a source of income while they take time off to care for their newborn.

To qualify for SMP, you must meet the following criteria:

1. **Continuous Employment:** You must have worked continuously for the same employer for at least 26 weeks by the end of the 15th week before your expected due date. This roughly means you must have been working for your employer non-stop since you were 1 week pregnant.
2. **Minimum Earnings:** You must earn at least £123 per week on average in the eight weeks leading up to the 15th week before your expected due date.
3. **Mat B1 Form:** You must provide the necessary proof of pregnancy 15 weeks before your expected due date.
4. **Notice:** You have given at least 28 days' notice of the date you want to start your SMP (this is usually the same day as you wish to start SML).

## How SMP is Calculated

SMP is calculated based on your average weekly earnings. The first six weeks provide you with 90% of your average weekly earnings without any maximum limit. For the remaining 33 weeks, you will receive **£194.32** per week or 90% of your average weekly earnings—whichever is lower.

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# Statutory Maternity Pay

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## Enhanced Maternity Pay

While Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) is set by the government, many employers offer enhanced maternity pay as part of their benefits package.

Enhanced maternity pay is not a legal requirement — it is a discretionary benefit offered by your employer. This may mean full pay for a set number of weeks, followed by a period at half pay, or a longer period of pay above the statutory rate.

Because enhanced schemes vary widely, it's important to review your contract or maternity policy carefully. Look for:

- How long full or enhanced pay lasts
- Whether there are service requirements to qualify
- Any conditions attached to receiving enhanced pay

One key point to check is whether you are required to return to work for a minimum period after maternity leave. Some employers include a “repayment clause,” meaning if you do not return — or leave within a specified timeframe — you may be required to repay the enhanced portion (but you'll never be required to pay back the statutory portion).

Understanding this upfront allows you to plan financially and make informed decisions about your return.

If anything is unclear, request the policy in writing and ask HR to confirm the details.

Stat. Mat. Leave	Stat. Mat. Pay	Company Enhanced Pay (if applicable)
First 6 weeks	90% of average weekly earnings before tax	Potential top up?
Weeks 7 -40	£194.32 pw or 90% of average earnings (whichever is less)	Potential top up?
Weeks 41 - 52	Unpaid	Potential top up?

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# Statutory Paternity Leave

## & PATERNITY PAY

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Paternity Leave (& pay) is unfortunately limited to just 2 weeks in the UK. You can choose to take either 1 or 2 weeks in weekly blocks and you get the same amount of leave if your partner has a multiple birth (such as twins). Your employer may offer enhanced Paternity Leave so always check their company policies.

### **Key aspects of Paternity Leave include:**

#### Start and end dates

- Leave cannot start before the birth & it must end within 56 days of the birth (or due date if the baby is early).
- You must give your employer 28 days' notice if you want to change your start date.
- You do not have to give a precise date when you want to take leave (for example 1 February). Instead you can give a general time, such as the day of the birth or 1 week after the birth.

### **Leave for antenatal appointments**

You can take unpaid leave to accompany a pregnant woman to 2 antenatal appointments. You can take up to 6 and a half hours per appointment. Your employer can choose to give you longer.

### **Pay**

The statutory weekly rate of Paternity Pay is £194.32 or 90% of your average weekly earnings (whichever is lower). You may get more if your company offers an enhanced paternity pay package.

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# Statutory Paternity Leave

## & PATERNITY PAY

### Eligibility

You must be taking time off to look after the child and be one of the following:

- the father
- the husband or partner of the mother (or adopter) - this includes same-sex partners

### For Paternity Leave you must:

1. Be an employee
2. Give the correct notice - at least 15 weeks before the baby is due - you can do this by filling in the online form from the UK Gov website. Once you have completed the form, you will need to download or print it and send it to your employer. Check if your employer has their own form. If they do, use that instead. The notice must include:
  - the due date
  - when you want your leave to start, for example the day of the birth or the week after the birth
  - if you want 1 or 2 weeks' leave

You do not need to give proof of the pregnancy or birth.

3. Have been continuously employed by your employer for at least 26 weeks up to any day in the 'qualifying week' The 'qualifying week' is the 15th week before the baby is due.

### For Paternity Pay you must:

1. Be employed by your employer up to the date of birth
2. Earn at least £123 a week (before tax)
3. Give the correct notice as mentioned above.
4. Have been continuously employed by your employer for at least 26 weeks up to any day in the 'qualifying week'

Your employment rights are protected while on paternity leave. This includes your right to:

- pay rises
- accrue holiday
- return to work

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# NeoNatal Care Leave & Pay

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Parents whose baby requires neonatal care have the right to up to 12 weeks of Neonatal Care Leave and Pay.

This entitlement exists to give families dedicated time to be with their baby during a critical period — without having to use maternity, paternity or shared parental leave.

## Who Is Eligible?

Neonatal Care Leave (NCL) applies where a baby receives neonatal care for at least seven continuous days within the first 28 days of life. It is a day-one employment right and is available to:

- Parents of the baby
- Intended parents through surrogacy
- A partner living with the baby's mother
- Adoptive parents (where similar criteria are met)

The leave applies where neonatal care begins shortly after birth and meets the qualifying duration.

Eligible parents can take up to 12 weeks of leave, depending on how long their baby requires neonatal care.

## Key points:

- Leave is taken in full week blocks
- For multiple births, entitlement relates to each period of admission (not per baby)
- Leave must be taken within 68 weeks of the child's birth

There are two ways the leave can be structured:

### Tier 1 Leave

If taken while your baby is still receiving neonatal care, this leave can be taken in separate blocks.

### Tier 2 Leave

If taken after your baby has been discharged, it must be taken as one continuous block.

## Notice Requirements

Employees are required to provide written notice including:

- Their relationship to the baby
- The baby's date of birth
- Details of the neonatal care
- The intended leave dates

## Pay & Employment Protections

If you have at least 26 weeks' service and meet minimum earnings thresholds, you may qualify for Statutory Neonatal Care Pay (SNCP).

This is paid at the statutory weekly rate or 90% of average earnings (whichever is lower).

## While on Neonatal Care Leave:

- Your employment rights continue (except for normal pay, unless enhanced by your employer)
- You are protected from discrimination or dismissal related to taking this leave
- If you take six or more consecutive weeks, you benefit from extended redundancy protection until your child is 18 months old

These protections sit alongside existing maternity and family leave rights.

# Shared Parental Leave

## & SHARED PARENTAL PAY

Shared Parental Leave (SPL) allows the birth parent to end their Statutory Maternity Leave early and share up to 50 weeks of leave and 37 weeks of pay within the first year the child is born. One or both parents can take SPL to take time off either together, separately & in a more flexible way. It is worth checking if your employer offers an enhanced Shared Parental Pay (SHPP) package sooner rather than later - this isn't as common as enhanced maternity or paternity pay.

SPL can be used to take leave in up to 3 blocks or take it all in one go as per the examples below:

### 1. Example of both parents taking SPL leave together then in separate blocks

Birth parent took 10 weeks Maternity Leave (counting from week 3 as first 2 weeks are compulsory). This leaves 40 weeks of SPL and 27 weeks SHPP available.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52
Birth Parent	Maternity Leave & SMP										SPL & SHPP										Return to work					SPL & SHPP					Return to work					SPL unpaid					Return to work											
Partner	Paternity Leave		Return to work		SPL & SHPP										Return to work					SPL unpaid					Return to work																											

### 2. Example of both parents staggering leave

Birth parent took 42 weeks Maternity Leave (counting from week 3 as first 2 weeks are compulsory). This leaves 8 weeks of SPL of which will be unpaid as the full 37 weeks of SMP were claimed.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52
Birth Parent	Maternity Leave & SMP																																										Return to work									
Partner	Paternity Leave		Return to work										SPL unpaid																																							

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## DETAILS & CRITERIA

- SPL does not create any additional leave for parents; however it does enable you to share the leave which was only available to the birth mother on SML.
- You have the same employment protections in place on SPL as you do on SML.
- As mentioned previously, being on SPL allows you to take your leave in up to 3 blocks which can be useful for returning to work for certain projects (teachers take note as this can be very useful for “returning to work” during the school hols)
- If your company offers you enhanced maternity pay you may not be able to transfer this across if you move to SPL so it's worth checking your contract first.
- The birth mother is usually better off on SMP for the first 6 weeks as this is paid at 90% of her average earnings whereas ShPP is paid at statutory rate.
- SPL enhances your SPLIT day (known as KIT days on SML) entitlement to 20 days

There are certain criteria that expectant parents must meet to qualify for SPL and ShPP. These criteria include:

- 1) Both parents must share the responsibility of the child from birth.
- 2) Both parents must meet the Work and Pay criteria

### **Work and pay criteria**

To meet the work and pay criteria for SPL and ShPP eligibility, both parents must:

- Earn a minimum of £123 per week on average.
- Have been employed by the same employer on a continuous basis for a minimum of 26 weeks by the end of the 15th week prior to the due date (so from 1 week before your pregnancy)
- Remain with the same employer until the point of commencing SPL



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# Applying for SPL & ShPP

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Assuming you meet the eligibility criteria you must give your employer 8 weeks' notice of your intention to take SPL &/or ShPP and follow the below steps:

You can use [Shared Parental Leave forms and templates](#) available for free download from our website or Acas to:

1. Give your employer notice that you plan to take SPL &/or ShPP
2. Give your employer notice of when the mother is going to end their maternity leave and when they'll stop getting maternity pay.
  - a. Note the mother does not also need to apply for SPL if they have provided their employer binding notice of when their maternity leave will end. - (Once notice to end maternity leave is provided is it usually irrevocable.)
3. Book your leave dates

If your employer has their own forms you can use those instead.

You can change your mind later about how much SPL or ShPP you plan to take and when you want to take it however you must give notice of any changes at least 8 weeks before the start of any leave.



Once you've sent your employer your application for SPL they can ask you for more information within 14 days. They are allowed to ask for:

- a copy of the birth certificate
- a declaration of the place and date of birth (if the birth has not been registered yet)
- the name and address of your partner's employer or a declaration that your partner has no employer

You must provide this information within 14 days of being asked for it.

## Shared Parental Pay

ShPP is paid at the rate of £194.32 a week or 90% of your average weekly earnings, whichever is lower.

This is the same as [Statutory Maternity Pay \(SMP\)](#), except that during the first 6 weeks SMP is paid at 90% of whatever you earn (with no maximum) - so you are usually better off on SMP to begin with.

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# Parental Leave

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Parental leave is a statutory entitlement designed to allow parents additional unpaid time off work to care for their child. It can be used to spend more time together, support key transitions (such as starting school) or help balance work and family responsibilities at different stages of childhood.

Parental leave is usually unpaid (although some employers may offer enhanced terms — check your contract or policy).

You are entitled to 18 weeks of unpaid parental leave per child, which can be taken at any time up to the child's 18th birthday.

Unless your employer agrees otherwise:

- You can take a maximum of 4 weeks per child per year.
- Leave must usually be taken in whole weeks (not individual days).
- If your child is disabled, you may take leave in single days.

## Eligibility

To qualify for parental leave, you must:

- Be an employee (not a worker or contractor)
- Have or expect to have parental responsibility for a child under 18

## How to Request Parental Leave

You must give your employer at least 21 days' notice before the intended start date.

Your request should:

- Be made in writing
- Include the start and end dates
- Confirm your eligibility

Your employer cannot refuse parental leave outright, but they may postpone it for up to six months if the business would be unduly disrupted. They must explain this in writing within seven days of your request.

They cannot postpone leave if it is requested immediately after the birth or adoption of a child.

## Protection During Parental Leave

While on parental leave:

- Your employment contract continues (except for pay)
- You are protected from unfair treatment or dismissal for taking parental leave
- You have the right to return to the same job if the leave is four weeks or less
- 

Understanding this protection can help you make decisions with confidence.

Although often associated with early years, parental leave can be useful later — for example:

- Extending maternity or paternity leave
- During nursery or school transitions
- When childcare arrangements change
- To support a child with additional needs
- During exam periods or health challenges

Because it is unpaid, planning ahead financially is important. Consider budgeting in advance if you anticipate using this entitlement.

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# PART THREE - PLANNING FINANCIALLY

## Financial support

One of the biggest sources of stress during maternity leave isn't the baby — it's the uncertainty around money.

Understanding exactly what financial support you're entitled to gives you clarity and control. This section will help you identify what you can receive, what you need to check, and how to factor it into your wider financial plan.

In addition to the statutory payments referenced in the earlier chapter, it is worth you taking a look at the below mechanisms:

### 1. Maternity Allowance (if you don't qualify for SMP)

If you're self-employed, recently changed jobs, or don't meet SMP eligibility criteria, you may qualify for Maternity Allowance instead.

Maternity Allowance is paid for up to 39 weeks at:

- £194.32
- 90% of your average weekly earnings (whichever is lower)

It's paid directly by the government rather than your employer.

### 2. Child Benefit

Once your baby is born, you can apply for Child Benefit.

Currently:

- £27.05 per week for your first child
- £17.90 per week for additional children (2025/2026 rates)

Even if your household income means you'll repay some or all of it via the High Income Child Benefit Charge, it's still worth registering. Registration protects your National Insurance credits, which count towards your state pension.

### 3. Universal Credit and Other Support

Depending on your circumstances, you may be eligible for:

- Universal Credit
- Council tax reduction
- Healthy Start vouchers
- Tax-Free Childcare (when you return to work)

Eligibility depends on:

- Household income
- Savings
- Employment status
- Partner income

If finances feel tight, it's worth using an online benefits calculator to check entitlement. Many families are surprised by what they qualify for — especially during maternity leave when income temporarily drops.

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# PART THREE - PLANNING FINANCIALLY

## FINANCIAL SUPPORT

**4. Free prescriptions and dental care:** All prescriptions and NHS dental treatment are free while you're pregnant and for 12 months after your baby's due date. It is no secret that finding an NHS dentist is no easy feat in the UK at the moment but you don't have to be limited to dentists in your immediate local area - so it is worth calling around further afield.

You'll be sent a maternity exemption certificate (MATEX) that lasts for 12 months after your due date. You must have a valid exemption certificate to claim free prescriptions and dental care.

### **5. Workplace benefits you may be overlooking**

Check whether your employer offers:

- Salary sacrifice childcare schemes (if previously enrolled)
- Private healthcare that covers postnatal support
- Employee assistance programmes (EAPs)
- Financial wellbeing services
- Pension contributions during leave

# Budget Planning during Leave

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Maternity leave is temporary. But the financial decisions you make during it can have long-term impact. The key is visibility.

When you know exactly what's coming in, what's going out, and where the pressure points are, you move from reactive to strategic.

## Step 1: Map Your Maternity Income Month by Month

Don't just calculate your total entitlement — break it down monthly.

Your income may look something like:

- Months 1–2: Full pay or 90%
- Months 3–6: Statutory rate
- Months 7–9: Reduced or no pay
- After leave: Possible childcare costs

Most financial stress happens when:

- Enhanced pay ends
- Statutory pay drops

If you can see the drop before it happens, you can prepare for it.

## Step 2: Separate Fixed vs Flexible Expenses

Divide your household outgoings into two categories:

Fixed (Non-Negotiable)

- Mortgage or rent
- Utilities
- Insurance
- Loan repayments
- Nursery deposits (if applicable)

Flexible

- Subscriptions
- Eating out
- Shopping
- Holidays
- Gym memberships

This isn't about cutting everything. It's about identifying what can flex temporarily if needed.

You may decide:

- To reduce certain subscriptions during months of lower pay
- To redirect bonus income or tax refunds into a maternity buffer
- To temporarily shift lifestyle spending while income is reduced

## Step 3: Build a Maternity Buffer

Ideally, aim for a savings cushion that covers:

- 1–3 months of essential expenses
- Any “no pay” period
- Initial childcare costs
- A small contingency for the unexpected

If that feels overwhelming, start smaller:

1. Cover one reduced-pay month
- Then extend from there

Even a modest buffer significantly reduces anxiety.

## Step 4: Don't Forget the Hidden Costs

Babies don't just change sleep patterns — they shift spending patterns too.

Common overlooked costs:

- Nursery deposits
- Increased utility bills
- Baby classes
- Travel for family support
- Professional support (lactation, physio, sleep consultants)

You don't need to budget for everything. But acknowledging the categories prevents surprises.

## Step 5: Factor in Childcare Early

Even if you plan to delay nursery, begin exploring costs now.

Questions to consider:

- When will you return?
- Full-time or part-time?
- Is shared parental leave part of the plan?
- Will grandparents support?

Childcare can be the biggest post-leave expense. Knowing the numbers early shapes smarter return-to-work decisions.

## Step 6: Consider Pension and Long-Term Impact

Reduced pay may affect:

- Pension contributions
- Bonuses
- Commission
- Career progression timing

You may choose to:

- Make voluntary pension contributions later
- Adjust long-term savings goals temporarily
- Build a return-to-work negotiation strategy

# Budget Planning during Leave

Financial planning during leave isn't just about surviving 9–12 months. It's about protecting your long-term earning trajectory.

## A practical tool to make this easier

If you want this mapped clearly and simply, my Money & Maternity Toolkit walks you through:

- A maternity income calculator
- A month-by-month cashflow planner
- A reduced-pay survival budget template
- A return-to-work financial planning sheet
- A Money & Maternity guidebook

It's designed to remove guesswork and give you calm, strategic control over your numbers.

Use code **GUIDEBOOK10** for **10% off** from our website.



### Planning Your Finances Before Baby

**Step 3: Understand What You're Actually Going to Be Paid**

This is where most people bury their head in the sand — don't!

- Read your company's maternity policy in full.
- Ask HR for a pay illustration (most will do this if you ask directly).
- Plot your maternity pay month by month on a simple spreadsheet.

Compare your usual monthly pay to your projected maternity pay — the gap is your 'target savings buffer'. Our spreadsheet is built to help understand this.

**Step 4: Tap into Free Money**

**Life happenings**

- **Child Benefit** — apply as soon as baby is born (worth up to £1,331 a year for your first child if you're eligible).
- **Tax-Free Childcare** — even if you're not using childcare now, set it up early.
- **Workplace perks** — check if your company offers salary sacrifice schemes (travel, gym fees, cycle to work, even gym discounts).
- **Ensure any savings you do have are benefitting from competitive interest rates.**

**Being pregnant and a new mum comes with unexpected financial perks:**

- **Prescriptions:** Free while pregnant and until your child's 1st birthday.
- **Dental care:** Free NHS dental treatment for the same period. Yes, it's a mission trying to find an NHS dentist but worth the search — dental care especially adds up fast.

The more you put in place before baby, the less you'll have to worry about during your first year together.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q
<b>The Empowered Parent Budget Planner</b>																
Take control of your money, plan your leave with clarity and make empowered decisions.																
Maternity Mentor																
<b>Expenses</b>								<b>Income</b>								
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Be consistent</b> — always add joint costs in the Shared tab, not under one parent.</li> <li>✓ <b>Be honest</b> — review your past 3 months' bank statements so you don't miss anything.</li> <li>✓ <b>Use round monthly figures where possible</b> — if something's paid weekly or quarterly, convert it to a monthly average. There will be an option to manually input actual costs later.</li> <li>✓ <b>Review your entries every few months</b> — small subscriptions and baby items creep up quickly. Bottom line: Use Shared for family costs, Parent 1/Parent 2 for personal costs, and let the spreadsheet do the maths for you.</li> </ul>								<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each row in the table = one pay period (e.g. 6 weeks at 90% pay or 13 weeks at statutory pay).</li> <li>• For each row enter: the start week and the end week, the net weekly amount, the actual amount you take home for that period.</li> <li>• For unpaid periods, simply create a row with Start Date, End Date, and £0 in the amount column.</li> <li>• Behind the scenes, the sheet spreads your weekly/monthly figures into a daily rate. Then it adds up all the days in each calendar month to give you your monthly projection. That way, if you period changes in the middle of a month, you'll see just one rate — not two.</li> <li>• <b>Important Notes</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Do not pay only</b> — don't enter gross figures.</li> </ul>								

# Protecting Your Pension

Thousands of British women could be missing significant sums from their pension due to a "common error" made by their employers while on maternity leave. Sky News and Nugget Savings have highlighted how pension mispayments can exacerbate the gender pension gap, leaving women at a long-term financial disadvantage.

## Understanding pension rights on maternity leave

When you take maternity leave, your employer is legally required to continue making pension contributions based on your full salary—not your reduced maternity pay - during your first 26 weeks of leave (known as the period of Ordinary Maternity Leave). However, many women have discovered that their contributions were wrongly adjusted to match their lower income, leading to shortfalls that can compound over time due to lost interest.

## Why this matters

A small pension shortfall now can have significant long-term consequences. The gender pension gap already means that the average woman retires with a pension pot 55% smaller than the average man's. Missing employer contributions and the subsequent loss of compound growth further widen this divide, potentially leaving women with less financial security in retirement.

## What you can do

1. Check payslips and pension statements – review your pension contributions before, during, and after maternity leave. Compare these with your expected employer contributions based on your full salary.
2. Raise concerns with your employer – If you spot discrepancies, contact HR or payroll immediately. Request a breakdown of how your pension contributions were calculated.
3. Refer to workplace policies and legal protections – Employers are legally required to maintain pension contributions based on your pre-maternity salary. If they refuse to correct an error, seek advice from your union, a financial advisor, or an employment lawyer.
4. Act quickly – Some women have faced pushback from employers claiming too much time had passed to correct the error. Addressing issues early can increase the likelihood of resolution.



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# Childcare Costs

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For many families, childcare becomes the largest expense after housing. Understanding the likely cost early allows you to make informed, strategic decisions about your return to work rather than reacting under pressure.

## Types of childcare

### Nursery

Often the most structured option, typically operating full working day hours. Costs vary significantly by location, but full time care can range from approximately £1,000–£1,800+ per month. Fees are usually fixed monthly payments.

### Childminder

Home-based care in a smaller setting. Costs often range from £5–£8+ per hour depending on region. This option can offer more flexibility and a more personal environment.

### Nanny

In home childcare and usually the most expensive option, typically £16–£18+ per hour. A nanny share can reduce costs. This option may suit families with multiple children or non-standard working hours.

Costs vary significantly by postcode, child's age, number of days required, and provider structure. Always research locally rather than relying on national averages.

## Government Support

You may be eligible for:

- Tax-Free Childcare: The government adds £2 for every £8 you pay, up to £2,000 per child per year (subject to eligibility).
- 30 funded hours, depending on working status.

Note that "free hours" often do not usually cover meals, additional hours or extra services and they are only given during term time weeks. Most providers will spread this across the year for you. Factor in these additional costs when budgeting.

## Plan for the transition period

Before returning to work, you may need to cover:

- Nursery deposits
- Registration fees
- Settling-in sessions
- A temporary overlap between reduced maternity pay and childcare starting

This short term squeeze is common and should be planned for in advance.



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# Part Four - Life After Birth

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## Post-birth rights and support

Firstly, congratulations on the birth of your baby! You may now be experiencing the highs & lows of the “newborn bubble” and so we wanted to take this opportunity to remind you of your rights for the initial post-partum period & support options available to you.

### **Birth Reflections Service**

The act of giving birth doesn't have to mark the end of the birthing process. You have undergone a significant life changing experience and should you wish to ask questions or talk through your delivery look into the Birth Reflections Service in your local NHS trust. Operated confidentially by local midwives, this service is here to assist you in addressing any gaps or questions regarding the care you received.

### **Lactation Support**

Midwives, health visitors and peer volunteers are available to help you with breastfeeding support. There are also local breastfeeding support groups/ drop-ins/cafes that are all worth paying a visit to. To find out what's available in your area talk to your midwife, health visitor or GP or contact the National Breastfeeding Helpline on 0300 100 0212 (9.30am to 9.30pm, daily). You may also find one of the groups on Facebook!

For additional tips, consider following experts on Instagram. We are delighted to have a partnership with Olivia Hinge (@Olivia\_lactation\_consultant) who I personally followed throughout my own postpartum journey.

**Reminder:** UK law protects breastfeeding mums. You are legally allowed to breastfeed your baby in public (Equality Act 2010) & it is illegal for anyone to ask you to stop or to leave a public place.

Feeling self-conscious when you begin breastfeeding in public is completely natural. Rest assured that with time, it will become second nature for you and your little one. You do not need to cover yourself but if you feel more comfortable doing so you can use a muslin and/or look into the “2 piece approach” ie where you wear an under shirt and an over shirt/jumper so you simply pull the under shirt down and the over shirt up for a feed!

# Life After Birth

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## **Sleep & Mental Health**

The newborn stage rarely allows uninterrupted sleep, but prioritising rest where possible is important for physical recovery and emotional stability.

If you have a partner, consider sharing shifts to allow each of you some consolidated sleep. For those exploring co-sleeping, follow guidance from trusted organisations such as The Lullaby Trust.

It is very common to experience “baby blues” — feeling tearful, anxious, irritable or low. Hormonal changes, birth recovery and sleep deprivation all contribute.

Around 1 in 8 mothers develop postnatal depression or anxiety, and around 1 in 10 partners may also be affected.

If feelings are intense, persistent or affecting your daily functioning, please speak to your GP. Postnatal mental health conditions are treatable, and recovery is absolutely possible.

## **Physical Recovery**

Your 6–8 week GP check is an opportunity to discuss:

- Pelvic floor recovery
- Abdominal separation
- C-section healing
- Ongoing pain or discomfort

You do not need to “just live with” symptoms. Specialist pelvic health physiotherapy (NHS or private) can be transformative.

The NHS also recommends 10 micrograms (mcg) of vitamin D daily. If breastfeeding, your baby should also receive vitamin D supplementation.

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# New Baby Admin

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Below is a simple checklist of the key things I worked through after the birth of my babies — not to overwhelm you, but to give you a reference point when you're ready.

## **Birth registration (England & Wales)**

You'll need to register the birth within 42 days. This is usually booked online, followed by a short in-person appointment at your local registry office. You can purchase certified copies of the birth certificate at the appointment — it's often helpful to order a couple at the time.

## **Register your baby with your GP**

Once registered, you can arrange immunisation appointments and book your joint 6-week check. These appointments can feel rushed, so it's worth jotting down anything you'd like to discuss in advance.

## **Claim Child Benefit (if eligible).**

Even if one partner earns above the High Income Child Benefit threshold, it can still be worth registering in order to protect National Insurance credits.

## **Review your protection and paperwork**

This is one of those things that often gets postponed — but it's important.

After a baby arrives, take a moment to:

- Review your life insurance beneficiaries
- Update your will (if needed)
- Check pension nominations

## **If you're planning to travel**

You'll need to apply for your baby's passport. Applications can be completed online and usually take a few weeks to process, but allow extra time during busy periods.

## **Financial reset after baby**

This is where many parents underestimate the impact. Income may have shifted. Outgoings may have increased. Childcare costs may be on the horizon.

When you feel ready, try to set aside 30–60 quiet minutes to:

- Confirm your maternity pay is being processed as expected
- Review your household budget
- Check pension contributions during leave
- Reassess life or income protection cover



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# Adjusting to early parenthood

The early months of parenthood aren't just about caring for your baby — they're about quietly recalibrating your entire life.

Your routines change. Your energy feels different. Your body is recovering. Your priorities may shift in ways you didn't expect. And often, your professional lens starts to feel slightly different too.

This stage can feel destabilising (not because you're doing anything wrong), but because everything is new.

The reality of early parenthood often includes sleep disruption, illness cycles once childcare begins, an increased mental load, very little time to exercise, and a social life that suddenly looks very different. The list really does go on. It's a lot. And it's normal to find it overwhelming at times.

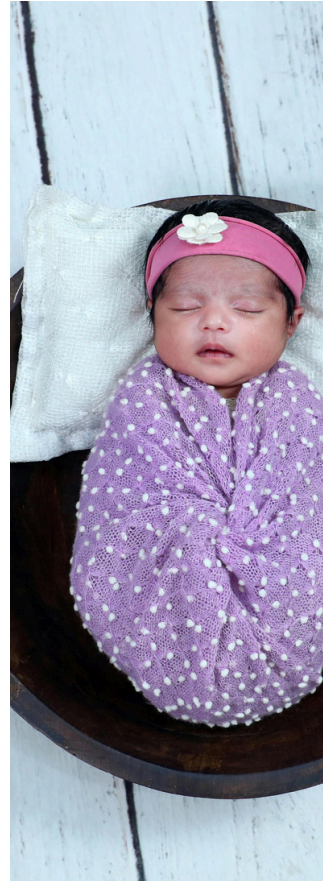
Many tensions in relationships during this stage don't come from conflict — they come from unspoken expectations. Who is doing the night shift? Who carries the mental load of appointments and admin? Whose career takes priority this year? How are finances going to work during leave?

These conversations can feel uncomfortable, but they are important. You're building a new rhythm together — and it rarely forms perfectly without discussion.

## Identity & Confidence

You may notice that you feel more protective, more emotionally sensitive, or unsure how your professional identity now fits alongside this new role. You might feel torn between ambition and presence. That tension is incredibly common.

Becoming a parent does not diminish your capability. It may, however, shift your perspective. It might cause you to re-evaluate what success looks like — and that's not a weakness.



If you are planning to return to work, you may notice:

- Confidence wobbles
- Concerns about being “out of the loop”
- Anxiety about performance
- Fear of being perceived as less committed

Remember: You have not been “away.” You have been managing complexity, logistics, emotional intelligence and time at an entirely new level. These are leadership skills!

As your return approaches, gently begin to:

- Re-engage with industry news
- Schedule a touchpoint with your manager
- Consider training opportunities
- Clarify what support you may need

Preparation will help build the confidence to give you a strong re-entry.

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# Adjusting to early parenthood

Something often has to give in this season — and that doesn't mean you are failing. The house may be less tidy. You may exercise less. You may say no to social plans. You may lower the bar in places you once held tightly. That is not a reflection of your standards — it is a reflection of capacity.

This is a time to accept help wherever it is offered, and to ask for it where it isn't. If someone offers to bring food, say yes. If family can help with childcare, take it. If outsourcing something protects your energy, consider it. And equally, try to protect small pockets of time for yourself — even if it's just a quiet coffee, a short walk, or a shower without rushing. You cannot pour from an empty cup and early parenthood asks a lot of you.

It can feel like everyone else is “coping better.”  
Let me assure you, they are not.

Early parenthood is universally destabilising in some way — emotionally, logistically or financially.

Your experience does not need to mirror anyone else's.

Gentle check in questions you may find it helpful to reflect on:

- What feels most overwhelming right now?
- What feels most fulfilling?
- What support would genuinely make life easier?
- What boundary would protect my energy?



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# Keeping in Touch Days

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Keeping in Touch (KIT) Days are one of the most underused — and misunderstood — parts of maternity leave.

They allow you to work up to 10 days during your maternity leave (or up to 20 if you are on Shared Parental Leave) without bringing your leave to an end.

They exist to help you stay connected, if you want to.

You don't have to work a full day. Even a few hours of work can count as one KIT day, and you should be paid your normal daily rate for any KIT day worked. Payment is usually made on your normal payday. For many parents, this can provide a helpful financial boost during leave.

It's always wise to agree in advance — in writing — how KIT days will be structured and paid, simply to avoid confusion later.

Remember: KIT days are entirely voluntary. You cannot be required to work them, and you cannot insist on them if your employer does not agree. They must be mutually arranged.

## **How you might use KIT days**

KIT days can be strategic.

Some parents use them to attend a key team meeting, complete a handover, or stay involved in a specific project. Others use them to attend training, keep up with developments in their role, or simply reduce the “first day back” shock.

They can also be used as a gentle bridge before returning — for example, trialling childcare arrangements or easing back into your responsibilities before your official return date.

There is no one right way to use them. The key is intentionality.

## **A practical note**

Keep a clear record of the KIT days you work. Many employers don't have a formal tracking system in place, and they must report KIT days correctly for payroll and HMRC purposes.



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# Part Five - Returning to Work

The journey back to the workplace after a period of parental leave is both an exciting and challenging time. Your career meets your role as a parent and navigating this transition is a balancing act. Not to mention your little one finding their feet with childcare and bringing home all the new bugs for you to contend with!

## Rights of return

You're entitled to return to the same job after maternity leave if you've been away 26 weeks or less. Your pay and conditions must be the same as or better than if you hadn't gone on maternity leave. If you return to work after more than 26 weeks' maternity leave you are still entitled to return to exactly the same job on the same terms and conditions as you were doing immediately before your maternity leave. However, if your employer can show that it is not reasonably practicable for you to return to the same job, you are entitled to be offered a suitable alternative job on similar terms and conditions.

## Agreeing your date

Your employer will assume you are taking the full 52 weeks off. A lot can happen while you're on maternity leave and you have the right to change your mind about the end of your leave but as previously you must give your employer 8 weeks' notice if you want to return later or earlier.

Remember you can agree your official return date but then use your accrued annual leave to have more time off (paid!) before you physically return to work. You can also use your annual leave to phase in your return such as booking in half days or shortening your working week.



## Flexible working

The right to request flexible working is a legal right which applies to all employees from day 1 of their employment. You are able to submit 2 flexible working requests per year. Take this time to consider if you want to change your working pattern, such as requesting part-time hours or flexible working arrangements.

If you wish to change or reduce your working hours on your return to work, you can make a [statutory flexible working request](#). You can find a free Gov template letter online or use the one available from our website. If you go down this route your employer will have to respond to your request within 2 months. They can only reject them if they can demonstrate specific business reasons such as costs or impact upon performance.

You do not have a right to change your hours but if an employer unreasonably turns you down then you should consider whether you are being treated unfavourably/discriminated against.

Note where you have a good working relationship with your manager, it would be advisable to deal with your request informally first by simply having a chat to ascertain what the possibilities might be.

---

# Returning to Work

Types of Flexible Working as defined on the Government website:

## **Job sharing**

Two people do one job and split the hours. This can work well if you want to return on say a 2 or 3 day week.

## **Remote working and working from home**

Working from anywhere other than the employee's usual workplace. It can include working from home.

## **Hybrid working**

A combination of working remotely and working in the employee's usual workplace. This is pretty popular at the moment.

## **Part time**

Working less than full-time hours (usually by working fewer days).

## **Compressed hours**

Working full-time hours but over fewer days - for example a 9-day fortnight. This can be an effective way of keeping your pay at the same level but can mean longer/more intense days.

## **Flexitime**

The employee chooses when to start and end work (within agreed limits) but works certain 'core hours', for example 10am to 4pm every day.

## **Annualised hours**

The employee has to work a certain number of hours over the year but they have some flexibility about when they work. There are sometimes 'core hours' which the employee regularly works each week, and they work the rest of their hours flexibly or when there's extra demand at work.

## **Staggered hours**

The employee has different start, finish and break times from other workers.

## **Phased retirement**

Default [retirement age](#) has been phased out and older workers can choose when they want to retire. This means they can reduce their hours and work part time.

---

# Returning to Work

## Phasing your return

Returning to work does not have to mean going from 0 to 100 overnight. While there is no automatic legal right to a formal phased return after maternity leave, many employers are open to temporary transition arrangements — particularly when approached thoughtfully and with clear reasoning.

A phased return can help you:

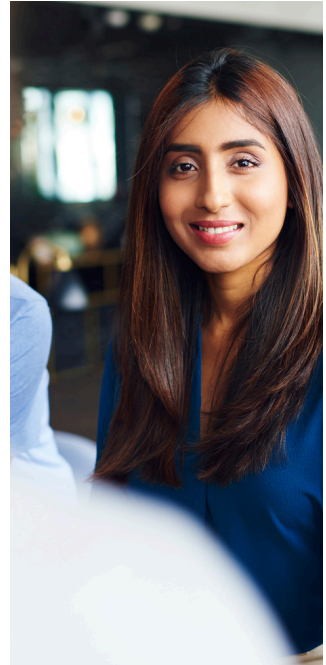
- Rebuild confidence gradually
- Adjust to childcare logistics
- Manage fatigue and sleep disruption
- Reintegrate into your role more sustainably

It is often beneficial for both employee and employer.

You can phase your return by doing any of the following:

- Reduced hours for a defined period
- Fewer working days initially
- Shorter days with gradual increase
- Temporary remote working
- A lighter workload or adjusted targets

The key theme here is temporary and structured.



## Using annual leave to support a phased return

You continue to accrue annual leave during maternity leave.

Many employees choose to:

- Take annual leave immediately before returning
- Use annual leave to create a shorter first weeks/ ie help with phasing

If a phased return is agreed:

- Confirm duration in writing
- Clarify expectations and workload
- Schedule a review meeting after 4–6 weeks

This ensures the arrangement remains structured rather than informal or indefinite.

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# Returning to Work

## Breastfeeding at work

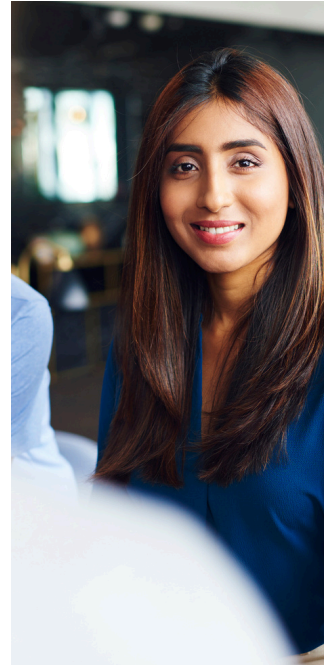
Unfortunately there is no specific legislation to protect breastfeeding breaks at work. However, breastfeeding mothers have some legal protection under current H&S and sex discrimination laws.

Employers have legal obligations to provide:

- Health and safety protection
- Flexible working hours and protection from indirect sex discrimination
- Rest facilities
- Protection from harassment

Let your employer know if you intend to pump at work. Guidance based on recent case law advises that you should have access to a private, clean, lockable -not a toilet- room with a fridge & a place to lie down. This must be made available to you at any time you need to use it.

Employers are legally required to carry out a H&S risk assessment upon your return to work (if you are breastfeeding or gave birth within 6 months). Ensure this is reviewed regularly as your requirements may change. Not all employers are clued up on this so you can explain to them that being able to pump regularly is important to reduce your risk of mastitis.



## Settling in period

You may find that no sooner then you start work, you are off battling back-to-back viruses and bugs your little one has brought home from childcare. You may be dealing with a sick child & trying to balance work, or sick yourself. This is really difficult and can feel relentless. If you are ill then you should take sick leave as you would normally, if not then some of your options are:

- **Statutory time off work to care for a dependent:** As a working parent you have the right to take reasonable time off to deal with a domestic emergency, which includes when your child is ill and you need time to make alternative arrangements for their care. Around a quarter of working parents use this right each year. Your employer may pay you but they don't have to.
- **Paid compassionate or carers' leave:** Some employers provide paid compassionate or carers' leave. This is usually around five days per year. Check your employment contract or ask your HR department if you are entitled to this.
- **Flexible working:** Being able to flex your working day can be an amazing tool for parents. However it can also lead to overwhelm if you end up having to catch up on work throughout the night. Consider if you're able to manage everything on your plate with flexing your day or whether you need to take any of the above options.

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# Returning to Work

## Confidence & boundary setting

Returning to work after parental leave can stir up unexpected self-doubt. You may question whether you're still as sharp, whether others see you differently, or whether asking for flexibility will affect how committed you're perceived to be.

These thoughts are common — but they are not evidence of decline. You have not regressed during this time. You have expanded. Navigating pregnancy, birth, recovery, sleep disruption and the emotional intensity of early parenthood develops resilience, prioritisation, empathy and decisiveness. These are not soft skills. They are leadership skills.

Confidence may feel quieter at first. That's normal. It tends to rebuild through participation — attending meetings, making decisions, contributing again — not through waiting to “feel ready.” You do not need to apologise for the time you have taken. You were exercising a legal entitlement, not stepping away from ambition.

Boundaries become especially important in this transition. Early return is not the moment to silently absorb unsustainable expectations. Consider what is genuinely workable for you now — whether that relates to finish times, travel, responsiveness outside working hours or workload intensity. When communicated calmly and proactively, boundaries create clarity rather than conflict.

For example, setting a consistent finish time for childcare pickup does not signal reduced commitment. It signals structure. Protecting time for rest does not weaken performance — it strengthens it. Returning sustainably is more powerful than returning fast.

This stage is a season, not a permanent identity shift. You can be protective of your energy and serious about your career. The two are not opposites. Confidence grows when you act in alignment with your values — not when you try to prove you haven't changed.

If there are any buddy, mentors or peer networks at your company sign yourself up as this can be a really useful resource for you to manage the first few months especially.



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# Returning to Work

## Ready to return — but want a plan?

Returning to work after parental leave is rarely just a diary date. It's a negotiation. A mindset shift. And often, an emotional adjustment too.

Many women tell me they don't feel unqualified — they just don't feel prepared.. I created the Return to Work Reset to also help myself return back into corporate after my second baby.

## The Return to Work Reset

An intimate coaching programme designed to help you return with clarity, confidence and a structured plan.

Together, we cover:

- Your communication roadmap (including flexible working and phased return conversations)
- Boundary setting and non-negotiables
- Childcare contingency planning
- Rebuilding professional confidence
- Protecting long-term progression
- Your first four-week reintegration plan

## What It Includes

- ✓ A 2-hour small group strategy session (maximum 6–8 participants)
- ✓ A personalised 1:1 session to be used within your first months back
- ✓ Practical scripts and frameworks
- ✓ Calm, structured preparation in a safe group space

A thoughtful return can protect:

- Your confidence
- Your income trajectory
- Your reputation
- Your long-term career momentum

## Investment

£750 per participant

Designed to be funded by your employer as part of professional development or retention support. (Templates to help you pitch this internally are provided.)

If you are returning within the next 3–6 months and would value structured support, you can learn more at: [www.maternitymentor.co.uk/events](http://www.maternitymentor.co.uk/events)

LIVE WORKSHOP  
Return to Work  
Reset  
with  
Natasha Kitson  
MATERNITY MENTOR  
www.maternitymentor.com

## MATERNITY MENTOR

# Return to Work Reset

## *Return to Work Reset* Workshop Agenda

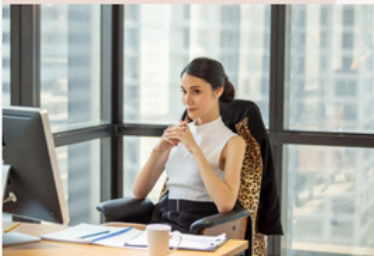
- 01** **Return Planning**  
Return date confirmation, phasing,  
flexible working conversations

- 02** **Childcare Preparation & Settling in**  
Contingency strategies, settling in  
expectations, anticipating pressure  
points, lightening invisible load

- 03** **Emotional & Identity Shift**  
Managing the emotional transition,  
normalising mixed feelings, rebuilding  
self-trust, recognising skills gained

- 04** **Communication, boundaries & language**  
Defining non-negotiable, boundary setting  
without guilt, preventing over-  
commitment & upgrading language  
choices in our Say It Like a Leader section

- 05** **Visibility, leadership & progression**  
Protecting visibility, re-entering projects  
strategically, leadership positioning,  
safeguarding longer-term progression



# Parent Perks

Alongside the guidance in this book, I've partnered with trusted brands to offer curated discounts and resources for this stage of life.



## Rockit

Rockit design innovative, award-winning products to help babies and older children sleep. Our product range includes the Rockit baby rocker that rocks any pram or stroller, Zed - the vibration sleep aid and night light for cribs and cots and Wooshh - the small but mighty rechargeable sound soother that you can take anywhere.

Find out more at [www.rockitrocker.com](http://www.rockitrocker.com)

Exclusive Reader Benefit: 10% off with code [FBTB10] for limited time only.

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## Yoto Play

Home of the ultimate screen-free audio player for kids age 3-12+. Yoto Play kindly partnered with us for a community giveaway during the launch of this guide. You can learn more about their products at [@yotoplay](https://www.yotoplay.com)

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# References & Support

Throughout this guidebook, we've cited information from trusted sources, including government websites and reputable charities & organisations.

This guidebook was last updated in April 2025, ensuring that the information and references provided are current and accurate as at this date.

However, we understand that questions may arise or that you might come across any errors or omissions. If you have any enquiries or spot any information that needs clarification or improvement, please don't hesitate to contact us at [info@maternitymentor.co.uk](mailto:info@maternitymentor.co.uk) with your input and we'll do our best to assist you.

To ensure you receive the support you need, we've left space in this section for various charities and support groups that can provide valuable assistance.

## Maternity Action

For information on maternity and parental rights at work and benefits, see: [www.maternityaction.org.uk](http://www.maternityaction.org.uk)

Maternity Rights Advice Line:

Nationwide (except London) – 0808 802 0029

London (if you live or work in a London borough) – 0808 802 0057

## ACAS

For advice on employment rights or for Early Conciliation if you are thinking of making a tribunal claim

[www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)

Helpline: 0300 123 11 00 (offers telephone. interpreting service)

## Citizens Advice

For information about your rights see: [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

You can telephone the national Citizens Advice phone service on 03444 111 444

You can get help with Universal Credit claims through the free national Help to Claim service: England: [0800 144 8444](tel:08001448444), Wales: [0800 024 1220](tel:08000241220), Scotland: [0800 023 2581](tel:08000232581)

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# References & Support

## Civil Legal Advice

If you are eligible for legal aid you can get free legal advice on 0345 345 4 345 (offers translation service).

To check your eligibility see [www.gov.uk/civil-legal-advice](http://www.gov.uk/civil-legal-advice)

To search for specialist legal advisers or solicitors in your area see: <https://find-legal-advice.justice.gov.uk/>

## Equality Advisory Support Service

Help and advice on discrimination and human rights [www.equalityadvisoryservice.com](http://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com)

Helpline: 0808 800 0082 Mon – Fri 9am – 7pm, Sat 10am – 2pm

Textphone: 0808 800 0084

## Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

For information and advice about discrimination law [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

For information for employees and employers about pregnancy and maternity rights in the workplace see: [www.equalityhumanrights.com/about-us/our-work/key-projects/managing-pregnancy-and-maternity-workplace](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/about-us/our-work/key-projects/managing-pregnancy-and-maternity-workplace)

## GOV.UK

The government's online information service [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

## Jobcentre Plus

To make new telephone benefit claims or request claim forms, including Maternity Allowance and Sure Start Maternity Grant: 0800 055 6688 Mon – Fri 8am – 6pm

For ESA/JSA/Income Support claims: 0800 169 0310 Mon – Fri 8am – 6pm

For Maternity Allowance claims: 0800 169 0283 Mon – Fri 8am – 6pm

For Sure Start Maternity Grant claims: 0800 169 0140 Mon – Fri 8am – 6pm/For Best Start Grant claims in Scotland: 0800 182 2222

Universal Credit helpline – for new claims and existing online claims: 0800 328 5644. Mon – Fri 8am – 6pm

For help with claiming Universal Credit see: [www.gov.uk/universal-credit](http://www.gov.uk/universal-credit)

There are lots of voluntary organisations that are happy to help with claiming Benefits:

- Some local authorities have welfare rights officers – phone your social services department and ask.
- Some voluntary organisations give information and advice on benefits and rights at work – try [Gingerbread](#) and [Working Families](#).
- For advice on your rights at work, call [ACAS](#) on 0300 123 1100.
- If you're 19 or under, you can get advice on work from the National Careers Service on 0800 100 900.

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# References & Support

## HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC)

Tax Credit Helpline: 0345 300 3900 Mon – Fri 8am-8pm, Sat 8am-4pm, Sun 9am -5pm

Child Benefit: 0300 200 3100 Mon – Fri 8am-8pm, Sat 8am- 4pm

For queries about Statutory Maternity Pay, Adoption Pay, Paternity Pay and Shared Parental Pay:

Employees helpline 0300 200 3500

Employers helpline 0300 200 3200

## HMRC Statutory Payments Disputes Team

If you cannot resolve a dispute about your SMP, you can ask HMRC for a formal decision on your entitlement. You can also ask HMRC to pay your SMP if your employer has refused to pay, has dismissed you to avoid paying SMP or has gone into liquidation. This includes disputes about Statutory Maternity Pay/Adoption Pay/Paternity Pay/Shared Parental Pay/Parental Bereavement Pay or Statutory Sick Pay

See: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/statutory-pay-entitlement-how-to-deal-with-disagreements>

Telephone: 0300 322 9422

## Insolvency Service Helpline

You can currently only contact the Insolvency Service online.

For what you can claim if your employer goes out of business, see: <https://www.gov.uk/your-rights-if-your-employer-is-insolvent>

## Law Centres Network

To find out if there is a Law Centre in your area telephone 020 3637 1330 or see: [www.lawcentres.org.uk/](http://www.lawcentres.org.uk/)

## Turn2us

Online benefits calculator and grant search [www.turn2us.org.uk](http://www.turn2us.org.uk)

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# References & Support

There are a number of national support groups that you can contact for advice.

You can also use them to attend events with other parents affected by postnatal depression.

These groups include:

- Association for Post Natal Illness (APNI) – helpline on 020 7386 0868 (10am to 2pm, Monday to Friday) or email [info@apni.org](mailto:info@apni.org)
- Pre and Postnatal Depression Advice and Support (PANDAS) – helpline on 0808 196 1776 (11am to 10pm every day) or email [info@pandasfoundation.org.uk](mailto:info@pandasfoundation.org.uk)
- NCT – helpline on 0300 330 0700 (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)
- Mind, the mental health charity – infoline on 0300 123 3393 (9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday) or email [info@mind.org.uk](mailto:info@mind.org.uk)

You can also search for local support groups and find details of national telephone or email support lines on the [Maternal Mental Health Alliance website](#).

## Financial Tools and Guidance

· Money Helper – This free to use site offers a baby cost calculator and budget planning tools and advice on how to effectively manage your finances with the arrival of a new addition to the family.

<https://www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/family-and-care/becoming-a-parent/sorting-out-your-money-when-youre-pregnant>

· Banking Institutions – Many banks offer financial planning services and tools for new parents. Barclays Bank, for example, offers guidance and materials on creating a financial plan and investing to better manage money after the birth of a child.

<https://www.barclays.co.uk/journal/financial-planning-for-new-parents/>

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# Meet The Team



## Natasha Kitson

### Founder of Maternity Mentor

Creator of this Guidebook & a dedicated parent, Natasha recognises the need for a clear and concise resource to empower others on their parenting journey. This Guidebook was drafted whilst on maternity leave & has continued to grow throughout her return to corporate.

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## Olivia Hinge

### Collaboration Partner

Qualified hospital Location Consultant, Midwife and mother of three. Olivia's mission is to support families to make informed decisions around how they feed their baby. In a way that works for them as a family, based on facts and dispelling myths.

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## Lucy Bagwell

### Collaboration Partner

Founder of Second Star to the Right, a certified holistic sleep consultant living in London, and mother to two little boys. Lucy's mission is to normalise what infant sleep actually looks like, provide practical and helpful information to optimise it to it's fullest, and to empower you as their parents to trust in yourself and reinstate you as the experts on your children.

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If you've made it to the end of this guide, you're already ahead of most parents navigating parental leave.

You now understand:

- how parental leave works in the UK
- the rights and protections available during pregnancy and maternity leave
  - the financial realities of maternity pay
- how to prepare for returning to work with confidence

But parental leave isn't just something you learn about – it's something you experience, and the decisions you make during this period can shape your finances, career and family life for years to come.

If you'd like more support

### **The Maternity Money Planner**

A financial planning companion to this guide, including:

- a maternity leave budgeting system
  - income planning tools
- strategies to maximise maternity pay
- the 3-pot savings strategy for children

### **Return to Work Reset**

An intimate coaching cohort designed to help parents prepare for returning to work with clarity and confidence.

Including:

- a group coaching workshop
- a personalised 1:1 session
- practical strategies for navigating your return.

A quick favour

If this guide helped you understand parental leave more clearly, I'd be incredibly grateful if you shared it with another working parent.

And if you'd like to leave a short review, it helps more parents discover the resource.

You can do that here:  
[www.maternitymentor.co.uk](http://www.maternitymentor.co.uk)

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## Maternity Mentor

INFO@MATERNITYMENTOR.CO.UK  
WWW.MATERNITYMENTOR.CO.UK

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