



# Planning the Parental Leave Journey

A toolkit for managers and employees



# Introduction

This toolkit provides support in managing parental leave, covering the run up to the period of leave, the time away and return to work. The intention is for managers and employees to work through the toolkit together; however, some sections are specifically for either managers or employees (see key below).

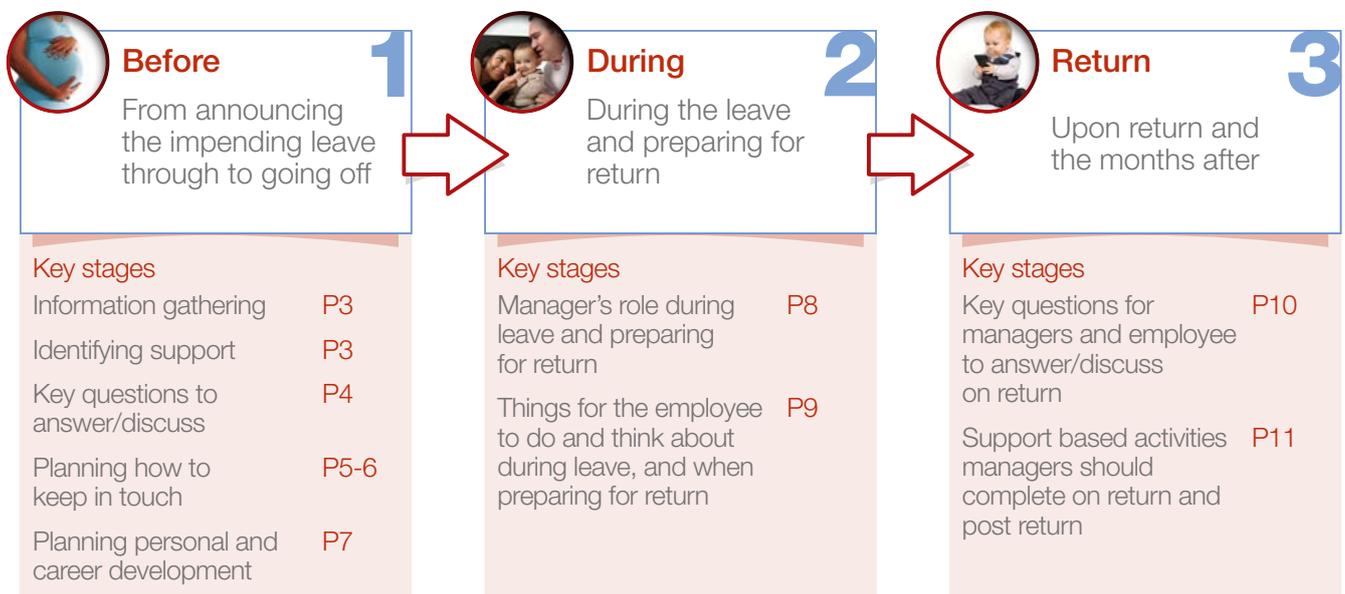
This toolkit has been designed in recognition that more can be done to support and develop our employees, ensuring that they can achieve their potential whilst balancing the demands of taking time out of work to care for children. It's about going above and beyond legal entitlements, to ensure parents can access the range of support on offer.

In this document the term parental leave refers to any leave taken related to caring for children. This includes maternity, adoption, paternity, shared parental leave, unpaid parental leave and career breaks.

Working through the toolkit will help managers and employees have quality conversations about how best to approach the different phases of parental leave.

The conversations you have are important to help plan the way you will keep in touch. Circumstances might change and it's OK not to be certain, but you do need a joint understanding of a suitable approach.

Drawing on first-hand experience of what works well, the toolkit is structured around what happens before, during and after parental leave.



# What's in it for you?

Jointly agreeing an approach to parental leave can have a positive impact whilst away and on return to work, and has benefits for both managers and employees.

## For you as a manager it will help you:

- plan ahead to identify and manage the practical issues
- work more collaboratively with your employee
- offer support that can really make a difference
- understand and agree how best to keep in touch
- keep employees engaged and connected
- support a smooth return to work, with employees settling back into their role quickly and maximising their potential.

Although your employee is temporarily away from the workplace you should still think of them as part of the team. They may be out of sight, but should not be out of mind.

Some employees will want to continue with personal and career development during their time away and it's really important that you support them. Not all do though, and that's OK too.

## For you as an employee it will help you:

- plan ahead and think about how you want to approach your parental leave
- work more collaboratively with your manager
- agree how best to keep in touch
- keep up-to-date and informed about what's going on with your team and the wider organisation
- think about what you want to do on your return to work
- make a smooth transition back into work.

If you want your personal and career development plans to continue during your time away, this toolkit can help you think about how you want that to work and discuss support options with your manager. It's OK if you don't want to focus on this during your leave. You can always skip the personal and career development section (page 7) if it's not applicable to you.

By working jointly with your manager and communicating well, you should find the process of going off, being off and coming back to work a positive experience.



## Phase 1

### Before leave - information gathering and identifying support

Before leave there is a lot to think about and decide upon, some of which can have an impact on personal and career development.

This section signposts further information and guides managers and employees through some of these issues.

#### Information gathering and knowing what support is available

A useful starting point is to review the applicable parental leave policies to understand the relevant entitlements and obligations. Many of the policies covering such leave include legal entitlements, so it's really important to take the time to understand what is required.

There are a range of organisational policies, procedures and guidance that could be applicable, for example:

- maternity/adoption leave
- paternity leave
- shared parental leave
- keep in touch
- health and safety
- unpaid parental leave
- attendance management
- flexible working
- performance management
- childcare support/salary sacrifice
- career breaks
- annual leave
- special leave.

#### What other support is available for employees?

You may wish to explore whether the people around you can support you. Exchanging views and experiences with others who have been through, or are sharing, the same experience as you can be really valuable for practical and emotional support.

Here are some questions to help you think about the support available to you.

- Could you connect with a colleague who has experience of taking parental leave?
- Are there any role models you can look to?
- Would you find having a buddy useful?
- Does your department have a parental networking group? How do you get in touch with them?
- Would accessing any of the cross government employee networks or support groups help you? How do you get in touch with them? For example, take a look at the job share pages on gov.uk. You will find links to the job share finder and the Civil Service job share community on LinkedIn.

# Phase 1

## Before leave - making plans

Once you have gathered the information you need and understand what support is available, the next step is making plans.

### Key questions to answer/discuss

These questions are aimed at employees, but managers should also use them to prompt discussion when planning this phase.

- How long might you take off work? A number of factors such as finances, annual leave and childcare are likely to influence your decision.
  - What are the health and safety and well-being considerations?
  - Do you have any personal concerns and how can these be overcome?
  - What support do you want to access, if any?
  - What will be the likely impact on your current/future work priorities?
  - How will your work be managed leading up to your leave?
  - How will your work be managed during your leave?
- What needs to happen in terms of handling the impact on other colleagues?
  - What happens to any talent programmes or study commitments you are undertaking?
  - Have you already thought about your return to work plans? For example, applying for an alternative working pattern or a new job. It's really helpful for your manager if you share your plans as early as possible. This will help them understand the support you may need and to manage their resources.



# Phase 1

## Before leave - planning how to keep in touch

How and when managers and employees keep in touch is a key consideration.

Some employees will want regular communications and 'keep in touch' days, whilst others will want minimal contact. The key is agreeing an approach and re-visiting these plans if things change or it doesn't work well.

Effective communication during periods of leave has real benefits; such as a feeling of being connected with the workplace for employees, which makes for an easier return and integration back into work.

Changing plans or wanting minimum contact with work, does not in any way link to how committed an employee is.

### 'Keep in touch' days

'Keep in touch' days are a great way of staying connected with the workplace and colleagues. They can provide employees with an opportunity to earn some money and trial childcare options. Activities performed during these days can be planned to support personal development and career goals.

“ Before I went on maternity leave I joined my department's parent group – the support was great. I really appreciated talking about the decisions I needed to make with someone who had been there and done it!

Personal experience (employee)

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### Key questions to answer

For you as an employee

- What are your preferences for maintaining contact? For example, emails, newsletters, telephone updates, visits, lunch/coffee dates, 'keep in touch' days.
- How often would you like contact to occur? For example, only if essential, monthly, quarterly.
- Who else can be involved with 'keep in touch'? For example, a buddy, a mentor or coach, work colleagues.

You may change your mind on these plans later and that's OK, just remember to discuss it with your manager.

# Phase 1

## Before leave - planning how to keep in touch

### Key questions to answer

#### For you as a manager

- How will you ensure you maintain the contact you have agreed?
- Is there anything that needs to be put in place to ensure effective communication? For example, update of distribution lists, diary reminders, ensuring correct contact details.
- How will you work with any other parties involved with 'keep in touch'?
- Can you use existing staff communication channels? For example, sending the team newsletter to your employee's home email.
- What information technology (IT) can you enable to support 'keep in touch'?
- What do you need to do to support personal and career development? For example, seeking suitable work opportunities to offer for 'keep in touch' days.
- Who will you handover to if you move on during the parental leave period?
- What are the things you must communicate? For example, organisational changes, changes that may impact the employee's job, internal/team career development opportunities.

“ My manager sent me the team newsletter each month and we met a few times for a coffee. This amount of contact was the right balance for me. It allowed me to keep up-to-date and still feel part of the team, even though I wasn't there for a year.

Personal experience (employee)

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### Top tips

- Make a note of your agreed approach. This can be as simple as noting down what, when and how. There is a template available at [Annex A](#).
- If the 'keep in touch' plan is not working, make contact and change it.
- Schedule agreed contact.
- 'Keep in touch' doesn't have to be formal; a catch up over coffee can be just as effective.
- Register for access to Civil Service Learning and Civil Service Jobs before leave starts. If you experience any access issues, help is signposted on the websites.



# Phase 1

## Before leave - planning personal and career development

Just like ‘keep in touch’ arrangements, approaches to personal development and career planning during periods of leave are led by the needs of the individual.

Some may want to put their plans temporarily on hold, whilst others may wish to continue on their career/development journey. Either way is fine, and having the conversation will provide clarity on requirements.

Time should be put aside to complete the usual performance management actions and ensure reviews are up to date.

The Civil Service Learning portal is packed with resources that can help with development and career planning and is accessible via the internet at any time (once registered). There are a variety of resources available, for example, face-to-face and online learning, reading materials, toolkits, self-assessment and career planning tools, access to professional coaching, to name but a few. A blank learning plan can be downloaded to complete. If you enter ‘learning plan’ into the search field, you will be directed to the document.

For those seeking new opportunities, the Civil Service Jobs website is accessible at any time. Once you are registered, you can set up job alerts to your personal email account.

“ I took over line management of an employee on adoption leave. I contacted them to introduce myself and we agreed a ‘keep in touch’ arrangement. It was good to understand their expectations of me.

Personal experience (manager)

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### Key questions to answer/discuss

These questions are aimed at employees, but managers should also use them to prompt discussion when planning this phase.

- What are your personal development/career priorities?
- What outcomes are you looking for?
- What activities can support your development needs?
- What stretching and challenging work can help you achieve your goals?
- What other learning interventions can help you? For example, e-learning, face-to-face training, reading resources.
- How can you use ‘keep in touch’ activities to support your development? For example, completing a short-term strategic project, working on a consultancy basis, attending a training course.
- Who can help support your development needs and career goals and how? For example, a manager, a mentor or professional coach.



## Phase 2

### During leave and preparing for return (managers)

This section covers the manager's role during leave and when preparing for return.

This is the crucial period when any 'keep in touch' and career/development arrangements happen. As highlighted earlier, there are real benefits when this works well. If you do the prep work, then this is about bringing those plans to life. The following lists highlight what you need to do.

#### What do I need to do during leave?

- Stick to the 'keep in touch' arrangement you have agreed.
- Actively support employees wanting to continue personal development and career plans.
- Keep alert to stretching work opportunities that may be suitable for 'keep in touch' days.
- Periodically review and refresh 'keep in touch' and development plans during the period of leave.
- For those on extended career breaks, offer twice yearly opportunities to discuss evolving career plans. This should be with the most suitable person, such as a manager, or possibly a HR/talent professional.
- Proactively approach your employee about each suitable role that becomes available if they are returning to a new role.

- If you move on during this period, ensure an effective handover to the new manager and inform the employee about the change. For continuity, you should advise the new manager of any plans and commitments you have agreed. New managers should make contact and introduce themselves when they take over.

#### What do I need to do in planning the return?

- Plan ahead early - the time to return soon comes around. Think about induction, training, work objectives, IT access, arranging a return to work welcome meeting.
- Plan the practicalities of the return. For example, is a phased approach suitable? Consider the implications of any flexible working arrangements.
- When appropriate arrange for your employee to be matched with a buddy from relevant networking groups. This is to help them re-establish connections across the organisation and the Civil Service. This is especially important for those on extended career breaks, when networks are more likely to have diminished.

“ One of my team members wanted to use their 'keep in touch' days to complete some stretching work, linked to their career development. I identified some project work for them to complete. This worked really well for our busy team as well as the individual.

Personal experience (manager)

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## Phase 2

# During leave and preparing for return (employees)

“ I had just moved department when I took parental leave. It was important to me to keep the networks I worked hard to establish. So I used my ‘keep in touch’ days to attend some networking events. These helped me to maintain my networks, which made life so much easier when I returned to work.

Personal experience (employee)

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This section will help employees think about some of the key considerations when preparing for return.

### What do I need to do?

- Maintain your ‘keep in touch’ arrangement. To work well it needs to be two-way, and if you want to change anything let your manager know.
- Keep your manager informed of what is happening, for example, notifying them of the birth if applicable.
- Arrange childcare and consider any financial support available to you, such as childcare vouchers.
- Use the sources of support you identified earlier.
- Decide whether you want to apply to change your working pattern. Consider your preferences and how they fit with the work you do. Any changes you request will need to be considered in light of business needs and agreed with your manager.

### What do I need to think about?

- Take time to reflect on your priorities and options in terms of managing your future work/life balance.
- Think about how you want to make your come back.
- Reflect on your career/development plans. If applicable, now is a good time to review any previous talent discussion outcomes.





## Phase 3

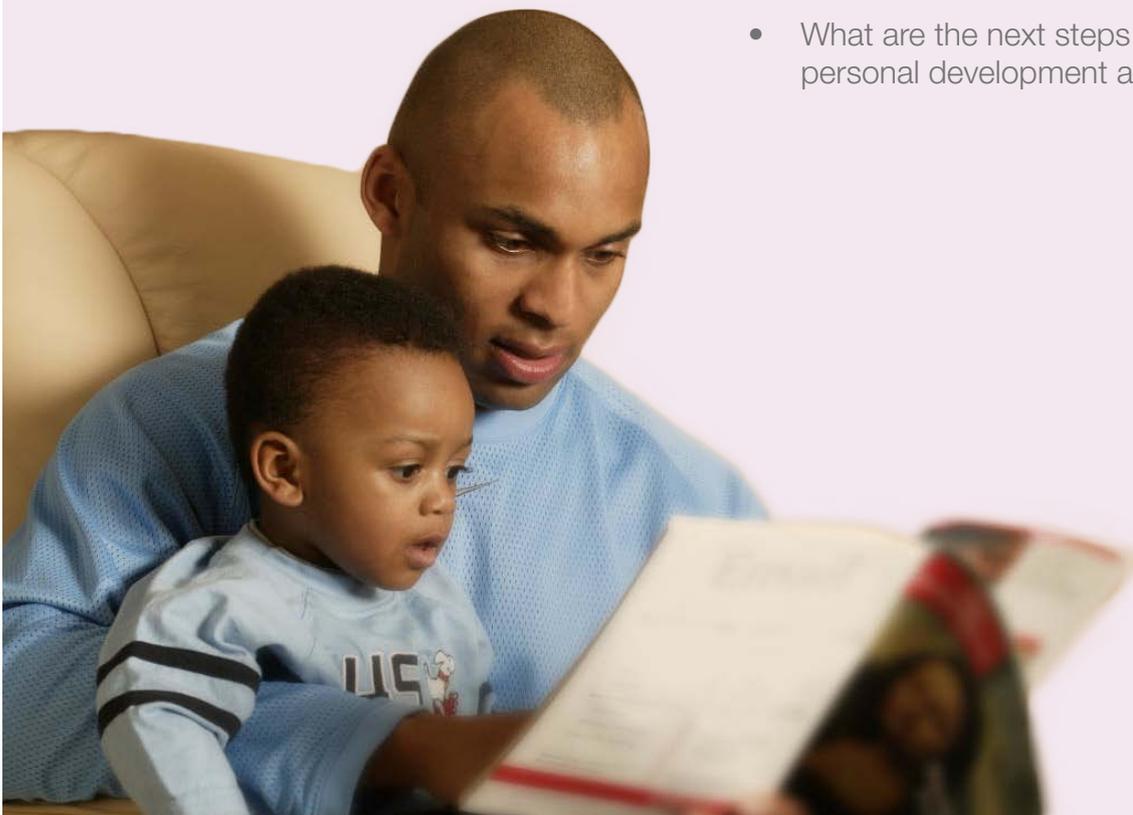
### The return and post return

The final phase of the parental leave journey is the return and the months following that.

These questions are aimed at employees and managers. They should be reviewed and discussed jointly when an employee returns to work.

#### Key questions to answer/discuss

- What areas of work should be discussed?
- How will any new working arrangements work in practice?
- Are there any adjustments that need consideration and how will they work? For example, managing travel to other office locations, facilities for breast-feeding mothers.
- How did the 'keep in touch' arrangement work and are there any lessons to be learnt?
- What factors might get in the way of a smooth transition back to work?
- Are there any concerns and how can these be overcome?
- What are the opportunities? For example, have you gained new skills or experience you can use at work?
- What are the next steps in terms of personal development and career planning?



## Phase 3

# The return and post return (managers)

“ Initially I was worried about returning to work - how was I going to balance it all and would anyone remember me? But my manager and team made me feel really welcome and had sorted out the usual domestics for my return. During the following months I worked with my manager and mentor to help me with the transition back to work.

Personal experience (employee)

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### What do I need to do?

You will need to follow the appropriate parental leave policies, procedures and guidance when an employee returns to work. Here are some support based activities you need to do on return and during the months that follow.

- Ensure all the welcome back plans are on track. Simple things like personally welcoming your employee and sorting domestics such as IT, somewhere to sit and an induction schedule, can make them feel really welcome and able to settle back into work much quicker.
- Commence performance management activities, such as agreeing work objectives.
- Have a personal development and career plan review to ascertain your employee's development needs and goals. This is really important to ensure your employee's skills and knowledge are up-to-date for their job, but also for supporting them in their next steps. After three months, offer the opportunity to revisit the plans.
- Ensure the support mechanisms your employee needs are in place. A mentor or coach is particularly valuable during the transition back to work phase. A lot can change at work in a short space of time, so a buddy on the team could also be helpful.

- Don't forget returning to work is not just about the first day back, you need to provide support in the months following. The key is to keep talking and check in regularly about how things are going.
- Gather and action feedback from your employee on what went well and what could have been better. It's really important to understand where improvements can be made.
- Remember that this phase may not always go to plan and it's important to understand your employee's situation and any challenges they foresee. For example, they may need more flexibility initially whilst their child settles into childcare.



# 'Keep in touch' Template

(when completed this template should be handled as 'Official' information)

## Employee's contact information

Name:

Home address:

Telephone number:  Mobile:

Email address:

## Communications to be sent

yes no

yes no

Internal jobs

Changes to policy and procedures

Newsletters

Project information

Office notices

Team meeting notes

Team briefings

Training opportunities

Departmental news

Social information

Other:

## We agree that we will keep in touch by:

email:  home phone:  mobile phone:  meeting:

Every: month  2 months  3 months  6 months

other:

## We will also:

(e.g. if emailing monthly you might want to also call once every couple of months)

## Additional information:

(e.g. holidays, times and dates to avoid)

### Manager's information

Manager's name:

Office address:

Telephone  
number:

Email address:

New manager's details:  
(if manager changes)

### Employee/manager discussion notes