

Parental leave

You have the right to unpaid time off to look after your child up to their 18th birthday. This is called 'ordinary' or unpaid parental leave.

Parental leave is usually unpaid – check your contract.

Reasons you might take parental leave to be with your child could be to:

- spend more time with them
- look after them during school holidays
- care for them when they're off school sick
- go to school open days or events with them
- settle them into new childcare arrangements
- visit grandparents with them

Taking parental leave

Each parent can take up to 18 weeks for each child. If you take it, it should be:

- in blocks of a week at a time
- a maximum of 4 weeks a year for each child

If your child has a disability

You can take parental leave more flexibly if you receive a disability living allowance or personal independence payment for your child.

For example, you could take 1 or 2 days' leave rather than blocks of a week at a time.

Checking you're eligible

To get parental leave for your child you must:

- be [legally classed as an employee](#)
- have worked for your employer for a year or more

You must have parental responsibility for your child. This means you must be named on one of the following:

- their birth certificate
- their adoption certificate
- a parental order, for surrogacy
- a legal guardianship

If you're a step-parent, you can also have parental responsibility if it's agreed by both biological parents.

If you're separated from the other parent or do not live with your child, you still have the right to parental leave if you keep parental responsibility for your child.

Asking your employer for parental leave

You must ask your employer 21 days before the date you want to start parental leave.

It's against the law for your employer to dismiss you or treat you unfairly just because you have asked to take parental leave.

When your employer can postpone parental leave

Your employer can postpone your parental leave if it's going to be disruptive to work.

For example, you want to take a week of parental leave in mid-March, but because a big project is starting then, your employer has to tell you to take the leave later in the year when the project is finished.

Parental leave can be postponed for up to 6 months after the date you originally asked for.

If your employer decides to postpone your parental leave, they must write to you within 7 days of your request to:

- tell you why the leave is being postponed
- give other suitable dates

They must make sure that you can take the leave you asked for before your child's 18th birthday.

Your employer cannot refuse or completely cancel parental leave.

If there's an emergency

If there's an emergency or unexpected event and you need time off to care for your child, you can ask your employer if you can use:

- [time off for dependants](#)
- [sick leave](#)
- [holiday](#)

Adding parental leave to paternity leave

You can use parental leave to make your paternity leave longer if either:

- you're the biological father
- your partner is having a baby, adopting a child or having a child through surrogacy

You could take parental leave once your baby is born or adoption placement starts, before you take paternity leave. Your employer cannot postpone your parental leave if you choose to take it straight after the birth or adoption.

For example, you could take a week of parental leave after your baby is born and then take your 2 weeks' paternity leave entitlement, so you'd get 3 weeks off altogether to care for your child.

If you want to take parental leave this way, you should tell your employer at least 21 days before your baby is due or your adoption placement is due to start.