

When I had my first child in June 2005, I was working for a small (~30 employees) engineering contracting/consulting firm and was not eligible for any paid leave. As my husband earns a reasonable amount and we are in a comfortable financial situation, I took a year of unpaid parental leave. This fitted with our beliefs of not using child care and breastfeeding for the first 12 months.

Instead of returning to work at my previous employer, I took a part time position with a large manufacturing company on a 1 year fixed term contract. My child was cared for by my sister-in-law 2 days a week. I then fell pregnant with my second child. The new company offered 12 weeks paid maternity leave but I was not eligible for this as I had this child in late May 2007, 2 weeks short of being employed for 12 months. In addition as my contract had expired, I did not have a right to return to work.

I subsequently arranged a full time position on a 1 year fixed term contract starting when my second child was 7 months old. I was keen to return to full time work temporarily and my husband was interested in a period of being the primary care giver to our children. Just prior to having our second child, my husband's employer introduced 12 weeks paid maternity leave. Seeing this as discriminatory, he applied for the paid leave and was granted it on the provision that it occurred in the 12 weeks immediately following the child's birth. As it was not practical for me to return to work at this time, he did not receive the paid leave and arranged 5 months unpaid parental leave plus 7 months leave without pay.

For the past 5 months since returning to work, I have breastfed my child morning and night and expressed milk during the day whilst at work. This has been facilitated by access to a mothers room and use of paid teabreaks. If I had returned to work during the first 6 months whilst my child was exclusively breastfed, not had access to a suitable location to express and not been such a strong supporter of breastfeeding, I doubt I would have continued.

My husband and I are lucky that we are able to afford for only one of us to be working at any time. To both be working full time or one of us full time and the other part time with the children in care, would be detrimental for the children's development, our health and our relationship.

I believe that whatever provisions are made for paid parental leave that they should be parental not maternity or paternity and available to the parent that is the primary care giver. In addition, if the mother was not given paid leave then the father should be able to take paid leave at any point during the first year.