

I am a contractor in IT who has one 16 month old, Amelia and another on the way. Before Amelia's birth I worked full-time in the city. Now I look after Amelia full-time and work part-time from home while she sleeps. We are renting and have made the decision to delay trying to get a house while I stay home with our children until they are school age as we believe this time is important.

Since we use private health insurance, we have found the baby bonus very helpful in paying the medical costs associated with the pregnancy and delivery. We would like to have another child in the future but without this assistance we would either have to use the public system, delay having another child or not have another child. Although I am only 25 weeks pregnant, we have already used up over \$1500 in gap payments. I will need to have a c-section, so I am expecting to use the entire \$5000, Baby Bonus payment once the anesthetist and other bills have come in.

My husband was also able to get 12 weeks paid paternity leave, which he took when Amelia was 6 months old (while I did a short-term contract). The difference that this has made on his relationship with Amelia is incalculable. Even our GP has noticed the bond and asked if he did paternity leave. She informed us that she can pick the fathers that have, by the way they interact in the surgery with their children.

During the paternity leave I continued breast-feeding Amelia using EBM. My boss was extremely understanding of the shorter hours I had to work to be able to feed Amelia before I left home and as soon as I returned. Unfortunately there was no on-site location available for me to express in so I had to go to another building to do this. The length of time it took me to express (with an electric expresser) meant that my entire lunch hour was taken up by expressing and traveling to and from the building.

My current contract is ideal and I have never met a more family-friendly boss. I work in Amelia's sleeps as little or as many hours as I can do and have monthly deadlines. Most of my communication with team-members is done over email and when needed I organise to call them when Amelia will be asleep. Anything urgent goes through my boss and he rings my mobile if needed (and it's not a problem if he can't get me). My regular meetings with my boss are usually in a café in town with Amelia in a highchair. I have only had to visit the office twice since December and took Amelia with me on one of those times. My boss is very happy with my work, particularly as they only pay for productive hours and no waiting around time. If people haven't gotten back to me, I simply don't work that day.

If a new maternity/paternity leave program was implemented, I would hope that the following would be included:

- Applicable to all employment types, including Contractors, Casual staff and self-employed. As most companies do not renew contractors once they have announced pregnancy, I would expect that this would be catered for.
- Some arrangement made so that there would continue to be funds for the private health insurance gap payments. This may be keeping the baby-bonus for privately insured people or modifying Medicare payments to reduce the cost associated with pregnancy and delivery (including obstetrician fees, ultrasounds, blood tests, anesthetist)
- Some arrangement so that both mother and father are encouraged to take maternity/paternity leave. For example, 9 weeks for mother + 9 weeks for father, but only 12 weeks if taken by only one parent.

- Availability of the leave to be taken at any time throughout the first year. I found that by 6 months I felt better about leaving Amelia.