

Please find below my circumstances as a father after the birth of my daughter in 2006.

Leave my Wife took

My wife took 12 weeks paid and 14 weeks unpaid leave plus 2 weeks annual leave from her full time job. With medical clearance my wife was able to work up to 2 weeks prior to the due date and coped quite well. By reducing her prenatal leave this increased her postnatal leave however this was not a major factor in making this decision. My wife felt healthy and well to be able to work this close to full term.

My leave

I am an employee of the APS.

On the day my daughter was born I accessed carers leave for 1 day followed by the maximum available of 5 days paid parental leave. I then took 7 days purchased leave (explained below) and 3 days flex time leave.

Purchased leave is where I can acquire up to 4 weeks paid leave over each 12 months in return for a pro rata reduction in annual salary. This gave me a total of 3 weeks to spend with my wife sharing in the joy of our new family member.

Access to the above leave options definitely affected the time I took off work. If the options were not available then obviously I would not have taken the time off. This is especially so as we had planned for my wife to take as much time off work in the early 2 years as possible including unpaid leave. It goes without saying that having a child is an important part of family life so being available to support my wife during this change both emotionally and financially was important to us. Helping in the hospital so my wife could rest and regain her strength, being apart of new family events such as the first bath, being there when extended family members visited and taking our daughter home are just some examples. There were no problems with either my wife or child however had there been it was important to know that I had one less thing to worry about in work and our financial situation. Receiving a lump sum baby bonus was part of this. To be able to assist at home with the running of the house while my wife spent time breast feeding made this adjustment easier for all. Most importantly this gave me time to spend getting to know my own daughter and adjust to my new role as a parent.

Having access to different types of leave depending on ones situation for example purchased leave and paid parental leave are supportive aspects of the leave arrangements with my employer. A negative impact was that only 1 week was provided for parental leave. The majority of this period was spent in the hospital so had I not had access to other leave types this would have meant that I would not have been as involved with the early transition period in the home. It would have meant less time to spending bonding with my daughter. This period is important as it only occurs once. One is not given the time over again with the same child.

I would like to see an increase in the parental leave referring to leave provided to fathers to spend time adjusting, supporting and bonding. My workplace is currently negotiating a new agreement which includes an increase in parental leave from 5 working days to 10 working days. Two weeks leave for the father is definitely not enough especially if there are other young children in the family.

From my experience I propose the following:

Fathers Parental Leave

- 1 week for the hospital period
- 1 week for family bonding, adjustment and growing
- 1 week for mums adjustment
- 1 week for dad's adjustment.

The events listed above are not intended to occur in the order listed other than the hospital period as they occur regularly over the 4 week post birth transition period building family health and wellbeing.

Changes at 7 months after birth - My wife returns to part time work and I change my work arrangements

My wife took a total of 7 months off work. After this period my wife began working 2 days per week with the same employer in the same position. Her parents volunteered to care for our daughter for one day a week.

My wife breast fed for 11 months. This involved expressing milk while at work. My wife was able to manage this with her work however this was not always without its problems. Her employer, a local capital city council did not provide a breast feeding/expressing room. Late nights up expressing milk, finding an appropriate place and balancing with work commitments where some of the other problems faced.

In relation to continuing breast feeding on my wife's return to work she had to go into the back room in the office which was not setup for this activity. If my wife had to return to work earlier, say after 3 months leave or earlier for example this would have had a major impact on her ability to breast feed. Reasons being the amount of milk required, the babies feeding pattern regularly changing and convenience both at home and work on top of feeding the expressed milk via a bottle. It was like having to feed each round twice. It would have been stressful going back to work earlier and putting our daughter in child care for example on the family unit. Employers should be forced to provide family friendly rooms for breast feeding or expressing milk.

When my wife returned to work I accessed what is referred to as Regular Hours. This is where I work 5 days in a 4 day period by working longer hours. This way I have a day off a week to spend with my daughter without loss of full time pay while my wife works. This means I work a 9 hour 15 minute day. This in one hand reduces the time I spend at home however provides me with the extra day per week to spend with my daughter. A negative of this arrangement with my employer is that on days that are public holidays where I would normally work 9 hour 15 minutes I can only record our standard day. This is 7 hours 24 minutes on my time sheet. This means that I have to make up the 1 hour 51 minutes difference each time this occurs. In this year alone I have to make up another 9 hours. This is significantly hard to do as considering I already work a 9 hour and 15 minute day and one can only work a maximum of 10 hours per day as per our agency agreement. Being away from the home for 10 working hours is not a healthy family/work balance and I guess an unintended consequence of this policy in our agency agreement.