

The companies making it work

Stylist explores four businesses that are leading the way with parental leave

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We all need to work (well, those of us who are yet to win the lottery), and many of us would like to start a family one day. But negotiating parental leave with professional and personal expectations can be really complicated. Not only do you and your partner have to consider practicalities

such as budgets, career progression and childcare; you also have to both think about leaving your jobs, and then returning to work, should you decide to.

Shared Parental Leave (SPL), which was first introduced in the UK in 2015, is helping to make things fairer and more flexible for working parents. Allowing both you and your partner to share up to 50 weeks off and 37 weeks of pay, SPL is your statutory

right (to see if you're eligible, and for more information, see gov.uk/sharetheleave).

Yet some companies are taking things even further. Embracing the belief that a better work-life balance fosters happier staff, more productive output and greater loyalty, they're offering parents more time off, more money and more choice. Here are some of the best places to work when you're starting a family...

Netflix

Netflix has one of the most generous parental leave policies in the world. Parents are allowed to take off as much time as they want during the first year following their child's birth or adoption, and they will continue to be paid their full salary. They can choose to return part-time, full-time (or a mixture of both), or not at all during those first 12 months.

"At Netflix, we work hard to foster a 'freedom and responsibility' culture that gives our employees freedom to make their own decisions," says the company's official policy. "Experience shows people perform better at work when they're not worrying about home." All those currently Googling 'jobs at Netflix' raise their hands...

Accenture

Mothers, fathers and partners (including those who have adopted) can get equal access to 32 weeks of fully paid leave at the consultancy firm. Since launching the policy in 2015, over 250 employees have applied to take advantage, including 12% of eligible new fathers. Managing director Mark Smith took seven months off to look after his son. "It was important to lead by example," he says, "and show people that it wouldn't affect their career progression."

Etsy

Etsy refers to its parental leave policy as "gender-blind". The company says its intention is to "counteract unconscious bias", and offers all employees (regardless of gender, country of residence or family circumstance) 26 weeks of fully paid leave to be taken within the first two years.

The scheme was set up in April 2016 as a competitive necessity within the US tech industry, where companies compete to retain talent by offering generous benefits.

Nine months after the policy launched, Etsy revealed the take-up was split 50/50 along gender lines and 35% of those who'd taken leave had been promoted while they were off, combating concerns that being away for a long stint can impact your career.

Aviva

In November last year, Aviva announced that parents employed by the insurance company would be eligible for the same amount of time off work (12 months with 26 weeks at full pay), regardless of sexual orientation, gender or whether they adopted or used a surrogate. "This is one of the most groundbreaking, family-friendly policies offered by any employer," says Sarah Morris, Aviva's CPO. "It's time to create a level playing field for everyone."

What Shared Parental Leave are you entitled to?

All companies in the UK must abide by the government's SPL rules

Whatever your company's in-house parental leave policy, if you pass the government's eligibility tests, you are entitled to take Shared Parental Leave. So, with SPL, the mother can choose to convert some of her statutory maternity leave and pay into leave and pay that her partner can then use.

You and your partner can take time off together, separately or a mixture of both, and even return to work for a spell before heading back on leave.

The UK's Shared Parental Leave initiative is part of the government's Industrial Strategy to promote a range of fair and flexible working options which support employees and boost business productivity.

To find out more about Shared Parental Leave, visit gov.uk/sharetheleave

