

The new wave of parenting

Flexible and forward-thinking, Shared Parental Leave is changing how we raise children



Whether the thought of taking nine to 12 months off work to raise a baby feels thrilling, daunting or a mix of both, maternity and paternity leave are among the biggest considerations

when starting a family. Shared Parental Leave (or SPL) – an initiative from the government – offers couples an entirely new way of parenting.

The government policy, which was introduced in 2015, allows two eligible partners to divide the standard maternity leave between them, allowing more options in how they approach the first year of their child's life. Here are three ways that Shared Parental Leave can offer flexibility...

1. Take time off together

If you qualify for maternity leave, statutory maternity pay or maternity allowance, any leave, pay or allowance you don't intend to use can be turned into leave or pay for your partner to use instead (to find out if you're both eligible for SPL, check out gov.uk/sharetheleave). You and your partner can also take time off together. So, you could both take the same six months off after your baby is born. Nappy-changing duties don't get much fairer than that.

2. Split your leave

As long as you give your employer eight weeks' notice, you can convert your maternity leave into SPL whenever you like. This means you can return to work after a couple of months, allowing your partner to stay at home for the next 10. The only legal requirement is that mothers need to take at least two weeks of recovery time off work immediately after giving birth. This is covered by maternity leave and maternity pay/allowance.

3. Do a bit of both

Another major bonus of SPL is that you can take time off in blocks if you wish. So, one parent could return to work for a major project before heading back on leave. Or, if you went back to work and decided it wasn't the right choice, you could go back on leave for a period. You can also share this leave with your partner, taking time off simultaneously for a spell before one of you heads back to work.

APPLYING FOR SPL

If you are eligible for Shared Parental Leave and decide you would like to take it, give your employer a 'notice of entitlement', stating how much time off you'll need and when. SPL is flexible, too – you can change the dates as long as you give eight weeks' notice.

To find out more about Shared Parental Leave and whether you're eligible for SPL, visit gov.uk/sharetheleave

