



Working with a heart child

The aim of this fact sheet is to give parents information about their right to time off work to care for their heart child.

Telling your employer

Parents often experience emotions, such as anger, grief and denial on learning of a diagnosis. These feelings can make it difficult to tell other people, especially work colleagues that your child has a heart condition. However, it is important that you tell your line manager, especially if you are going to need time off or to change the date of your return to work after maternity/paternity leave.

When arranging time off work, try not to make promises or commitments that you may not be able to keep. It is tempting to be optimistic but if you are not sure that you will be able to return to work on a particular date then explain this.

Time off work for medical appointments and admissions

Medical appointments are almost always on a weekday, during normal working hours and can take some time. However, the appointment letter will usually give you enough notice to make arrangements for time off from work.

Sometimes children are admitted to hospital from an out-patient appointment because their condition has started to deteriorate. Let your employer know if you think there is a possibility that this could happen. It may also be a good idea to warn any colleagues whose work will be affected by your absence.

Your child's heart condition may mean that they will occasionally need an emergency admission to hospital. It might be helpful to try and make a plan for such an event and discuss it with those you work with.

Work and your rights

Maternity leave

If you have completed 26 weeks continuous service with your employer by the 15th week before your baby is due, you will be eligible for Statutory Maternity Pay SMP. If you qualify for SMP, you now qualify for 39 weeks maternity leave. For the first 6 weeks you receive 90% of your average weekly earnings and for the remaining 33 weeks you receive either the standard rate or 90% of your earnings (whichever is less). The standard rate from April 2018 is £145.18.

Paternity leave

Men can take up to two consecutive weeks paid leave to care for their new baby and support the mother. In order to qualify for paternity leave an employee must have responsibility for the child's upbringing, be the biological father of the child or the mother's partner, and have worked continuously for his employer for 26 weeks leading into the 15th week before the baby is due.

Flexible working

If you are the parent of a child under 6, or of a disabled child under 18, you have the right to apply to work flexibly.

You can request a change to the hours you work, a change to the times when you are required to work, and to work from home.

This is not an automatic right but your employers do have a duty to consider your request seriously, and will only be able to refuse if there is a clear business reason for doing so.

If your application is accepted, there will be a permanent change in your terms and conditions of employment. It is therefore important that you think carefully about which working pattern will help you best care for your child.

Parental leave

Parental Leave allows parents of young or disabled children to take time off work to look after their children. Parents who have completed one year's service with their employer are entitled to 13 weeks unpaid parental leave, per child, up until the child's 5th Birthday. Parents of disabled children are entitled to 18 weeks unpaid parental leave up to the child's 18th birthday.

Parents are able to start taking parental leave as soon as their child is born, or as soon as they have completed the one year's qualifying period with their employer. Mothers can take parental leave immediately after a period of maternity leave. The employer may limit the number of weeks that can be taken in one year to four weeks per child.

Parental leave is normally unpaid.

Evidence and sources of information for this CHF information sheet can be obtained at:

(1) GOV.UK. Maternity pay and leave. London: GOV.UK; 2017. Available at: www.gov.uk/maternity-pay-leave/pay

(2) GOV.UK. Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for children. London: GOV.UK; 2017. Available at: www.gov.uk/disability-living-allowance-children/how-to-claim

Family emergency

You have the right to take time off work to deal with an emergency involving someone who depends on you. You cannot be penalised by your employer for taking the time off, providing your reasons for taking it are genuine. Your partner, child or parent, or someone living with you as part of your family can all be considered as depending on you. Others who rely solely on you for help in an emergency may also qualify.

Examples of emergencies are when someone who depends on you is ill and needs your help or you have to deal with an unexpected disruption or breakdown in care, such as a childminder failing to turn up.

You can only take time off if the situation is an immediate emergency, rather than something of which you have had advance warning. There is no legal obligation for your employer to pay you for the time you take off and you must tell your employer as soon as possible why you are away from work and how long you expect to be off.

More advice

For full and comprehensive advice on your rights and the extra financial help available to parents who work visit the website for the Department for Work and Pensions www.dwp.gov.uk

ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) offers a free confidential advice service to anyone seeking information on employment matters. Helpline: 08457 474747 www.acas.org.uk

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To inform CHF of a comment or suggestion, please contact us via info@chfed.org.uk or Tel: 0300 561 0065

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