

Planning leave

Parents eligible for shared parental leave can decide how they want to use the leave and pay available to them.

It can help to consider:

- dates they definitely need off
- any work projects or events coming up
- childcare options and availability
- how their work will be covered while they're off

It's a good idea for each parent who plans to take shared parental leave to talk informally with their employer as soon as possible about how and when they'll take the leave. This can help the employer plan how they'll put cover in place.

Example of using shared parental leave

Toni and Sam have had a baby. Toni earns more than Sam and wants to return to work after 2 months. Toni reduces the length of maternity leave to create a shared parental leave entitlement for Sam.

This allows Sam to take more time off after paternity leave to care for their child when Toni goes back to work.

Plan your shared parental leave

To work out how and when you can take shared parental leave, use the [shared parental leave and pay planning tool on GOV.UK](#).

Shared parental leave templates

Download and use:

- [shared parental leave forms and templates for parents](#)
- [shared parental leave templates for employers](#)

Step 1: Ending maternity or adoption entitlement

The birth parent or primary adopter must give their employer notice to end their maternity or adoption leave ('notice of curtailment') to create an entitlement to shared parental leave.

This could be for a date in the future, which will allow the other parent to take shared parental leave while the birth parent or primary adopter is on maternity or adoption leave.

If the parents change their mind

The birth parent or primary adopter cannot restart maternity or adoption leave once they've returned to work.

If they've given a notice of curtailment, they cannot cancel 'revoke' (cancel) it, unless:

- the notice was given before birth, it can be revoked up to 6 weeks after the birth or adoption placement start date
- the other parent dies
- it turns out neither parent was entitled to shared parental leave or shared parental pay

Step 2: Giving notice of entitlement to shared parental leave

To create an entitlement to shared parental leave, the parent must give their employer a 'notice of entitlement'.

The [notice of entitlement form](#) includes information such as:

- how much maternity or adoption entitlement has been used
- how much leave and pay is left over from the maternity or adoption entitlement
- how much leave each parent wants to take
- when they want to take the leave
- the signature of both parents

The parent must also provide a declaration from the other parent that confirms at the time of the birth or adoption placement they:

- share responsibility for the care of the child
- meet the employment and earnings test
- agree to the amount of shared parental leave and shared parental pay given to the employee

When the employer receives notice of entitlement for shared parental leave, they should:

- tell the employee they have received the notice
- take the notice of entitlement as suitable proof

Step 3: Taking the leave

When arranging shared parental leave, the employee must:

- give their employer 8 weeks' notice each time they want to take leave
- take their shared parental leave in blocks of weeks, but it can start on any day, for example if the first day of a week's leave is Tuesday, the last day of leave would be the next Monday
- include the start and end dates of any blocks of leave in the notice

By law, each eligible employee has up to 3 notices they can give their employer to:

- take continuous leave – a full block of time off work
- take discontinuous leave – where blocks of time off work are mixed with time back at work
- change the dates of any booked leave

Employers can agree to more notices if they want to.

Continuous leave

Employees can use up to 3 notices to take continuous leave, depending on how they want to use it.

They do not have to give separate notices, but it can help avoid confusing continuous and discontinuous leave.

Employers cannot refuse notice to take continuous leave.

Example of taking continuous leave

Alex and their partner Jo decide to take 20 weeks of shared parental leave each.

Jo gives their employer 1 notice to take all 20 weeks of their leave in 1 block.

Alex wants to take 3 blocks of certain dates off work over the year. To make sure they get the dates they want, they give their employer 3 continuous leave notices.

They give 1 notice to take 10 weeks of leave from 1 January to 11 March. And then a second notice to take 5 weeks from 1 May to 4 June. They give their third notice to take 5 weeks from 1 August to 4 September.

This makes clear to the employer that Alex's notices are for continuous leave and cannot be refused.

Discontinuous leave

Discontinuous leave can be useful for employees who do not want to take too much time off work in one go.

Employers can refuse notice to take discontinuous leave, for example if it's not suitable for the workplace. They could suggest a different arrangement that's more suitable.

Before deciding on this type of leave, the employee and employer should talk about it first and make sure it will work for both.

Example of discontinuous leave

Bo has 20 weeks of shared parental leave. They have some important projects coming up at work so they agree with their partner to take discontinuous leave.

They give their employer 1 notice to take discontinuous leave. They request to alternate taking 2 weeks off, 2 weeks at work until they've used the 20 weeks' entitlement.

The employer agrees to this arrangement as it keeps Bo up to date with the projects.

If an employer and employee do not agree on discontinuous leave dates

The employer and employee should come to an agreement within 14 calendar days of the employee's notice to take leave.

If they do not reach an agreement, the employee can either:

- withdraw their notice
- take continuous leave instead

If an employee withdraws their notice on or before the 15th calendar day after they originally gave it, it does not count as 1 of their 3 notices to take or vary leave.

If an employee withdraws their notice 15 calendar days after they originally gave it, it counts as a notice to vary leave. This means they'll have used 1 notice to take leave and 1 to vary it, so they have 1 notice left to take leave.

If an employee chooses not to withdraw their notice, it will become a block of continuous leave. The leave can start on either:

- the original leave date they gave (this is what it will default to)

- a new date they give their employer within 19 days of the original leave date – the new date must be at least 8 weeks after the original leave date

The employee should put the option they choose in writing to their employer.

Booking leave before the baby is born

As it's not possible to know the exact date a baby will be born, a parent might want to book shared parental leave based on a number of weeks after the baby is born.

For example, they could tell their employer they want to take 4 weeks of shared parental leave after their maternity leave ends. That way, their employer will be aware the dates could move depending on when the baby is born.

Holiday entitlement

Holiday entitlement builds up as normal during shared parental leave.

Some employees might want to take their holiday between blocks of shared parental leave, so they can take more paid time off.

The employee should try to take their holiday entitlement within the workplace's [holiday year](#) wherever possible. If it's not possible, the employer might allow some holiday to be carried over.

It's a good idea for the employer and employee to talk as early as possible to agree holiday plans.

Step 4: Changing the leave

It's important to remember that each eligible parent has up to 3 times to either:

- change the dates of booked shared parental leave ('notice to vary leave')
- book a block of shared parental leave ('notice to take leave')

Each time the employee cancels or changes booked shared parental leave, it counts as a notice to vary leave, unless the employer agrees otherwise.

To change ('vary') or cancel the dates of any shared parental leave booked, the employee must give their employer:

- 8 weeks' notice
- a 'notice to vary leave'

The employer can ask the employee to change dates of booked shared parental leave. If the employee agrees, this would not count as a notice to vary leave. The employee does not have to agree and must not be treated unfairly if they do not.

If the baby is born early or prematurely

If the baby is born more than 8 weeks early, the parent does not need to give the usual 8 weeks' notice to book or change leave dates.

The parent should give the necessary notices to their employer as soon as they can.

If they're changing shared parental leave dates already booked, it will not count as one of the employee's 3 notices to vary shared parental leave.

If the baby needs neonatal care

If the baby needs neonatal care, employees might be eligible for neonatal care leave and pay. This is in addition to maternity, paternity and shared parental leave.

[Find out more about neonatal care leave and pay](#)

Changing the amount each parent takes

Parents who are both entitled to shared parental leave can change the amount of leave each of them will take.

They must both agree and sign each other's notices of entitlement with the updated amount of shared parental leave they're each entitled to.

They should tell their employers as soon as possible.

If the child dies

If the child dies, the parents can still take the shared parental leave they've booked.

They can also either:

- decide to take less shared parental leave
- change discontinuous leave into one block of continuous leave

The employer might ask for 8 weeks' notice before the employee returns to work.

The employee cannot book any new blocks of shared parental leave.

Parents cannot apply for shared parental leave after the death of a child. The birth parent can still get [maternity leave](#) or [adoption leave](#). The partner could still be eligible for statutory [paternity leave](#).

If a parent dies

If a parent is eligible for shared parental leave and the other parent dies, they can:

- still take shared parental leave as planned
- transfer and use any shared parental leave due to be taken by the parent who died

If they want to book another block of shared parental leave or to change dates of booked leave, they do not need to give 8 weeks' notice but should tell the employer as soon as they can.

Even if they've already made 3 notices to book or change shared parental leave, they can make one more.