

## Managing parental leave

Employers have a number of responsibilities detailed in the Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act 1987 including:

- informing their employee of their paid parental leave entitlements
- considering, then approving or declining the request for parental leave
- confirming the accuracy of the employment and income details on the employee's application for the parental leave payment

### **Before they go on parental leave**

When you know a staff member is expecting a child, talk with them about leave options, their rights under the Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act (1987) and their preferences. Ensure they are familiar with their parental leave rights and responsibilities. Make sure they know how much paid and unpaid parental leave they are entitled to.

At this stage other considerations include:

- whether the work they do, or the environment they work in, presents any hazards to their, or their unborn child's, health or safety. Work with them to find ways to remove or reduce these hazards
- whether it is possible to make a car-park available so they can attend medical appointments easily.
- Whether their job and relevant systems and processes are well documented and up to date, so that others can step in and take over easily when needed.

### **Covering the absence**

When you have a reasonably firm indication of how much leave they are intending to take, start to think through the options for managing during their absence. Obviously the more notice you have the better, but be wary about pushing people into making premature decisions and having them change their mind at a later date. Employers can work with the employee going on parental leave, and others in the team, to explore the following questions.

- What work has to be done during their absence?
- Does their position need to be filled? Where work is project based, it can be easier to reschedule projects for their return. If there are plenty of other people available to fill shifts and rosters, you may not need to employ an additional person. If work loads are light, you may be able to redistribute the work.
- Does all their work need to be covered or just specific parts?
- How might this work be undertaken? Does it need to be covered by one person, or could it be shared among several?

- Does the work need to be done by people who already know your business or your customers, or could it be done by someone new?
- Does it need to be undertaken by an employee working regular hours, or could it be covered by getting casual or temporary staff in periodically when the demand builds?
- Who might do the job? Is there someone else in your business who would like the opportunity to take on the role as part of their career development?
- Could the key elements of the job be redistributed amongst others already in the organisation, with additional support being brought in to reduce their workload e.g. additional administrative support?
- Are there employees who would like to increase their hours during this period?
- Are there any ex-employees who might be interested in coming back during this period on either a full-time or part-time basis?
- Are there any contractors or consultants that you already work with who might be interested in coming in during this time?
- Are there people in allied organisations who might be interested in coming across for a fixed period of time?
- Do you need to recruit externally?
- If appointing a person to fill the role, be clear that it is for a fixed term to cover someone on parental leave, and will end when the person on parental leave comes back to work. Specify this in their employment agreement.

If possible, make arrangements in time for the person going on parental leave to participate in the handover of the work.

### **While they are on parental leave**

Keep in contact. You want them to continue to feel part of your company.

Contact them regularly, particularly if your organisation is undergoing significant changes. Make sure they are included in briefings or sent all the information that people at work are given. Another way of keeping in touch is to invite them to morning tea or work social functions such as a welcomes or farewell for other staff.

Keep them up to date by:

- making sure they stay on e-mail and mailing lists for information coming into or being sent out, by your business
- inviting them to relevant in-house training sessions
- keeping them involved



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- inviting their participation if you are consulting other employees about changes or developments.
- checking whether they are interested in working on a casual basis while they are on unpaid parental leave, either by undertaking an occasional shift, or carrying out a relevant project from home. Make sure they have applied for and finished taking their paid parental leave before doing any work for you.

## **Making it easy to return**

As soon as you know when they will return, or some weeks before their parental leave ends, talk with them about how they would like to return. Be flexible about how they may return. Be prepared to consider part-time work or a staggered return to full-time work.

Think about how you might make it easy for them to continue breastfeeding if that is relevant.

- Is there a suitable clean, private space available she can use? This may be on your own premises, or a space that you organise jointly with other small businesses in the immediate area.
- Would it be possible to adjust the length and/or timing of breaks, so she can feed her baby? This may include a longer lunch hour so she can go to her baby rather than have the baby brought to her.
- What rosters and shifts would work best with breastfeeding routines?

## ***For further information:***

### **Department of Labour**

<http://www.ers.govt.nz/parentalleave>

<http://www.ers.govt.nz/publications/index.html#publications>

The parental leave website provides an overview of employer's rights and responsibilities regarding parental leave, a useful summary of employees paid and unpaid leave entitlements and the publication link to a Best Practices breastfeeding guide

### **EEO Trust**

[www.eostrust.org.nz/toolkits/breastfeeding.cfm?cache=455701](http://www.eostrust.org.nz/toolkits/breastfeeding.cfm?cache=455701)

Practical information and links to other information sources on breastfeeding at work.