not only pink and blue

BALANCING CHILDCARE AND CAREERS

How businesses can support parents in the workplace

2024

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INTRODUCTION & FOREWORD

INTRODUCTION

Who are we?

At **not only pink and blue**, we exist to grow generations of equals. We want children to grow up free from the gender stereotypes that hinder their worldview and limit their future aspirations, because otherwise, we won't be able to create gender equality for them when they are adults. They should be able to wear what they like, play with whatever toys they like, and see themselves represented in the books they read and the media they consume, regardless of gender. These stereotypes are learnt from a young age and have lifetime impact. One of the ways we are changing this is by focusing on parenting and work culture as these are the areas where we can have a significant impact. To find out what workplace culture is really like and hear from working parents themselves, we put out a survey.

The survey

The aims of the survey were to examine the changing relationship between work and home when becoming a parent, to uncover what changes parents want to see when it comes to parental leave and workplace culture, and to expose the areas in which employers are either excelling or falling short.

When conducting this survey, it was important for us to get a wide range of responses from parents of all genders, sexualities and backgrounds. We also particularly wanted responses from Dads as their perspective was often lacking in other research that we had read. To this end, we targeted Dads through social media, Dad's communities, and in Dad groups. Despite this, of the 686 responses, only 10% came from Dads. This reinforced what we already knew: that the gendered division of parental responsibilities is rarely equal and that as soon as parenting is mentioned it is Mums who usually respond.

Furthermore, only 3% of respondents were in same-sex relationships and just 0.4% of respondents were non-binary. For these groups, being a working

parent often poses more challenges than it does for those who are cisgendered and/or in heterosexual relationships due to the gendered terminology used in parental leave policies. Moreover, only 6% of responses came from people of colour, some of which said they were not treated with the same dignity as their white colleagues when going on maternity leave.

Due to the small sample size, no conclusions about same-sex couples, non-binary parents or parents of colour could be drawn from this survey, nonetheless we urge companies to be aware of how their policies might affect these groups and to adapt their company culture to be more inclusive. What we were able to conclude is that today's working parents are struggling to balance work and care effectively and that companies can and must do more to support their parent workforce.

The New Parent Programme

From looking at existing research, we know that when fathers take more parental leave, children grow up to exhibit more egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles[1]. We also know that when mothers receive better support when they return to work, it helps close the gender pay gap[2] which almost doubles between the 30s and 40s when many people start their families[3]. This not only creates a more equal society for future generations, but also enables parents of all genders to model both caring and working to their children, which exposes them to fewer gender stereotypes in the home. Through our own research we found that workplace culture and the myth that mothers simply 'know what they are doing' are key factors for fathers not taking parental leave. It is these insights that form the basis of our New Parent Programme.

With support from the data collected in this survey, the New Parent Programme helps drive a parent-friendly workplace culture and gives all parents, regardless of gender, knowledge in those early months. This will have a positive knock on effect as it will help to dispel gender stereotypes at home as well as in the workplace, allowing children to grow up free from the limitations of gender stereotypes. More details are at the end of the report.

MESSAGE FROM CLARE WILLETTS

When I set up not only pink and blue I initially focused on the products we buy children in the early weeks, months, and years. Stereotypes seemed to be everywhere so challenging buying behaviour and the girl/boy divide seemed to be a good focus for change. However, the more I looked, the more prevalent these stereotypes were and the more convinced I was that there was still so much for us to do. As my business expanded into delivering talks, developing courses for parents, and doing workshops with parent networks in workplaces, I realised that the inequity in parenting and the socialisation of so many stereotypes starts from the very beginning. Even in the most equal of relationships children seemed to significantly change the roles in the household.

The current maternity and paternity leave policies in the UK reinforce traditional gender stereotypes where the mother is expected to adopt a homemaking role while the father returns to work. These stereotypes have been introduced to us from a young age - they follow us from childhood to adulthood, impacting career aspirations, parental leave structures, the gender pay gap, and the mental load.

We know that women make up just 4% of CEOs[4] and are paid 15.9% less than their male counterparts[5], and that the gender pay gap almost doubles between the 30s and 40s when many people start their families[3].

What we have found in our report is upsetting and shocking, although somewhat unsurprising. Many of the experiences of parents help us understand why we still have such a huge gender gap at work and at home. One thing that we saw was

that even though our survey was explicitly a 'parent' survey, 90% of respondents were Mums. We even went out specifically to men's groups and Dads' communities. As Lee Chambers writes, he has also seen that the word 'parent' tends to create the image of a Mum in most people's lives.

We know that by impacting businesses and creating parent-friendly cultures we can really drive change for all parents and specifically impact the opportunities for Dads to have a greater part in parenting and Mums to have more opportunities to continue and grow their careers. And in turn this will have a positive effect on our future generations, challenging some of the most deep-seated stereotypes that they are taught from birth.

As always for us this is about choice - regardless of gender. Choice to parent how you would like, the choice to work, and the choice to raise your children without the compromise of having to pretend that you don't have children.

But for businesses it is also about the bottom line. With 50% of those leaving their jobs to find a more parent friendly culture, not supporting parents is an expensive business.

Read the report, think about what you've read in the context of your business or workplace, and let me know how you are going to drive change. Ask yourself if you can really afford to ignore parents – who are the vast majority of the workforce.

Clare

Sources:
1. Changing Gender Norms across Generations: Evidence from a Paternity Leave Reform (BSE, 2021)
2. A Fresh Look at Paternity Leave: why the benefits extend beyond the personal (McKinsey & Co, 2021)
3. Gender Pay Gap 2021 revised dataset, Age Group Table 6.12 (ONS, 2021)
4. Careers After Babies report (That Works For Me, 2023)
5. CEO pay report (Trades Union Congress, 2021)

FOREWORD BY LEE CHAMBERS

Despite some positive progress and signs of equitable change on the horizon, this research only solidifies the current challenges we face in terms of the value we attach to caregiving as a society. While the pandemic showed how quickly we could transform how we work, the power of gender norms and legacy mindsets still influences how families operate and how employees are treated in the workplace.

As a man who has spent 3 years as a primary caregiver, I still see the same barriers that impacted me playing out for fathers today, even with the increase in shared parental leave and paternity policies. Cultures where men are seen as "less than" and "not committed" still exist today, and with only 14% of participants advising their paternity leave is enhanced, the message is embedded that women are expected to be primary caregivers.

For many mothers and fathers, the workplace still often takes an all-or-nothing approach, rarely looking at the benefits of having caregivers in the workplace who have purpose and refined skills from their responsibilities outside of work. In fact, the survey highlights how wide ranging this issue is, leaving employees to fabricate non-child related reasons for being out of the office.

Neither is it a surprise to see the balance of life administration that still falls on the shoulders of women, and this is amplified by the same expectations of women doing "work housework" for their organisations, which is both tiring and inequitable.

Becoming a parent is a significant transition point in life, and workplaces should look to support their employees through the experience, which increases both staff retention and workplace performance in the longer term.

Ultimately, language matters, and we all have a role in moving away from parental assumptions and actively creating a world where anyone can become a primary caregiver without guilt. From my experience, I've found the majority of employees and employers still default to mothers when we talk about parenting, and those that talk about family get higher engagement from men and a more inclusive view of the different types of family, in addition to more consideration for caring for other family members.

Parenthood is undoubtedly one of the most challenging and meaningful experiences of human existence, and with employees actively seeking family-friendly working cultures, can you afford not to be actively creating the flexible, equitable workplace of the future?

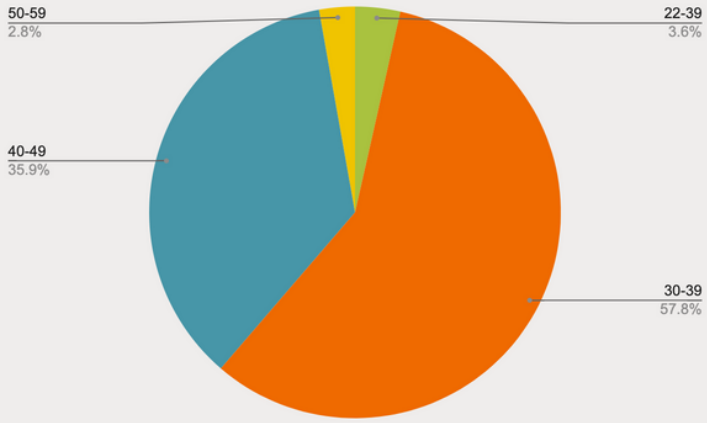
Lee Chambers is the Chief Psychologist and Director at Essentialise Workplace Wellbeing and Male Allies UK.

He is a global speaker on male allyship and has been recognised for his work by the UN. In 2020 he launched Essentialise with a desire to bring a focus on inclusive and accessible wellbeing. He is on the board of CMI Women and Age Concern CL and was inducted into the Black Cultural Archives Future 40 in 2022.

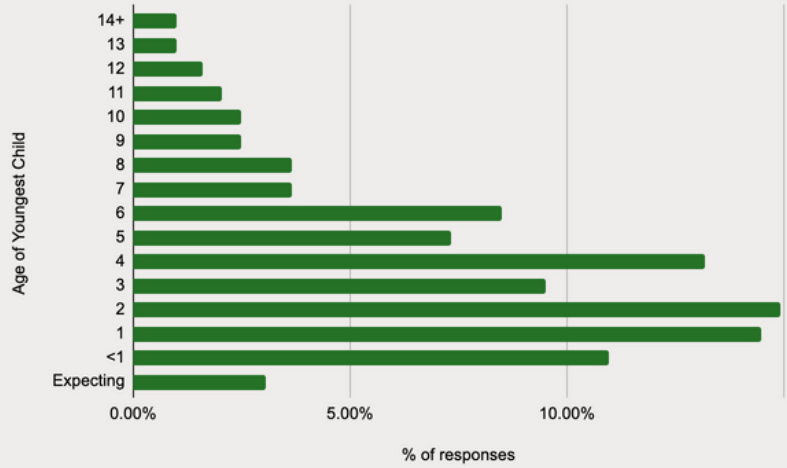
THE REPORT

KEY DEMOGRAPHICS

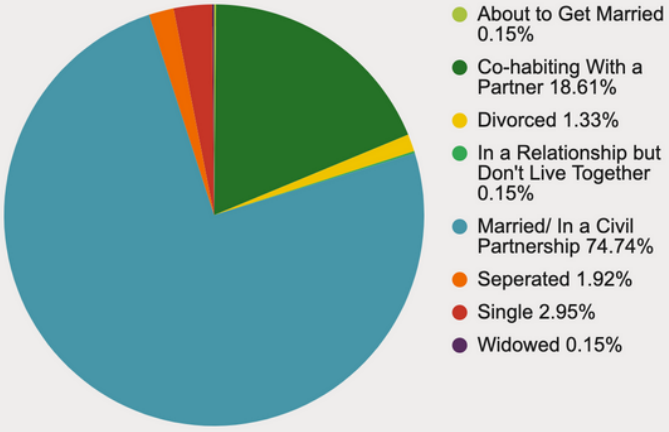
Age



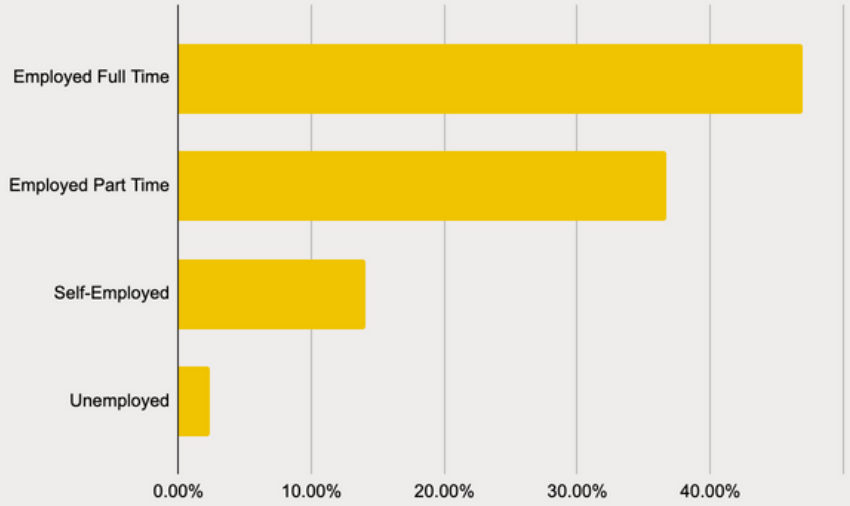
Age of youngest child



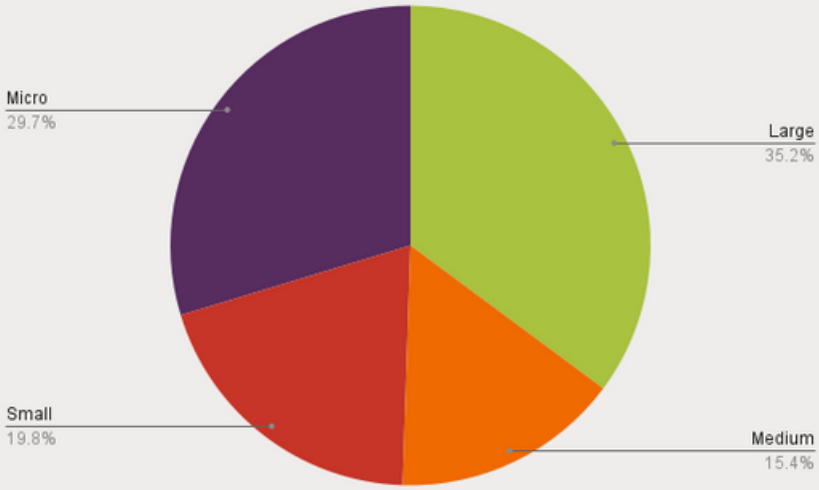
Relationship Status



Employment Status



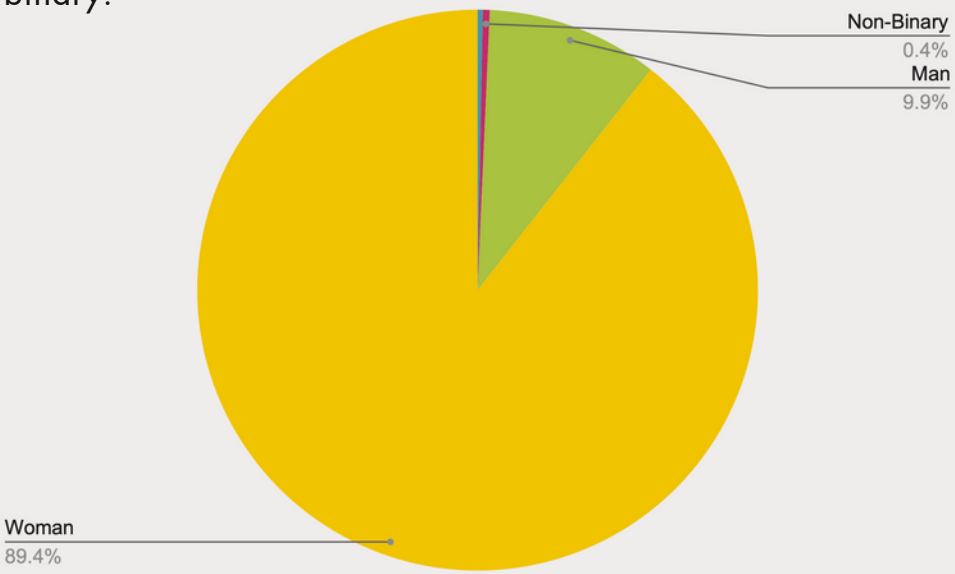
Size of Company



Large - 1000+ employees
Medium - 250-1000 employees
Small - 50-250 employees
Micro - less than 50 employees

Gender

When conducting this survey, it was important for us to get responses from parents of all genders and sexualities and we targeted Dads in particular as the parenting field is often dominated by Mums. Despite this, only 10% of respondents were men and just 0.4% were non-binary.



Ethnicity

Ethnicity	%
Asian/ British Asian	1.77%
Black, African, Caribbean or Black British	0.30%
East Asian	0.15%
Mixed/ Multiple Ethnic Groups	3.7%
Other	0.15%
White	93.95%

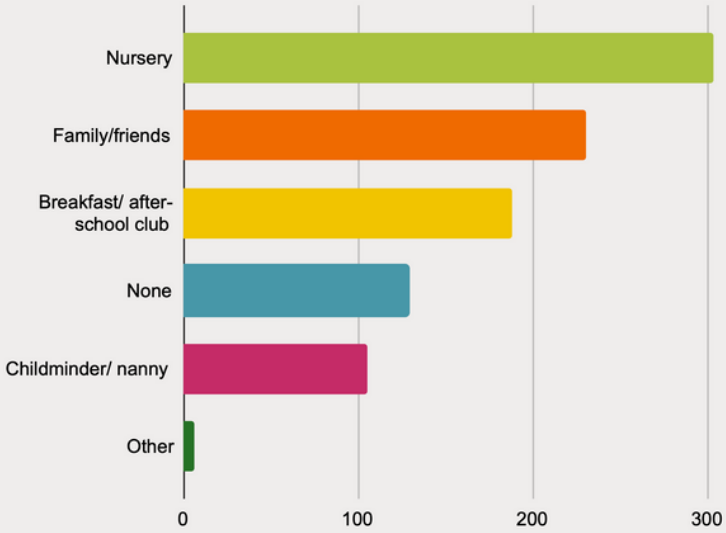
Furthermore, only 6% of respondents were people of colour

Due to the small sample sizes, no conclusions about same-sex couples, non-binary parents or parents of colour could be drawn from this survey, nonetheless we urge companies to be aware of how their policies might affect these groups and to adapt their company culture to be more inclusive.

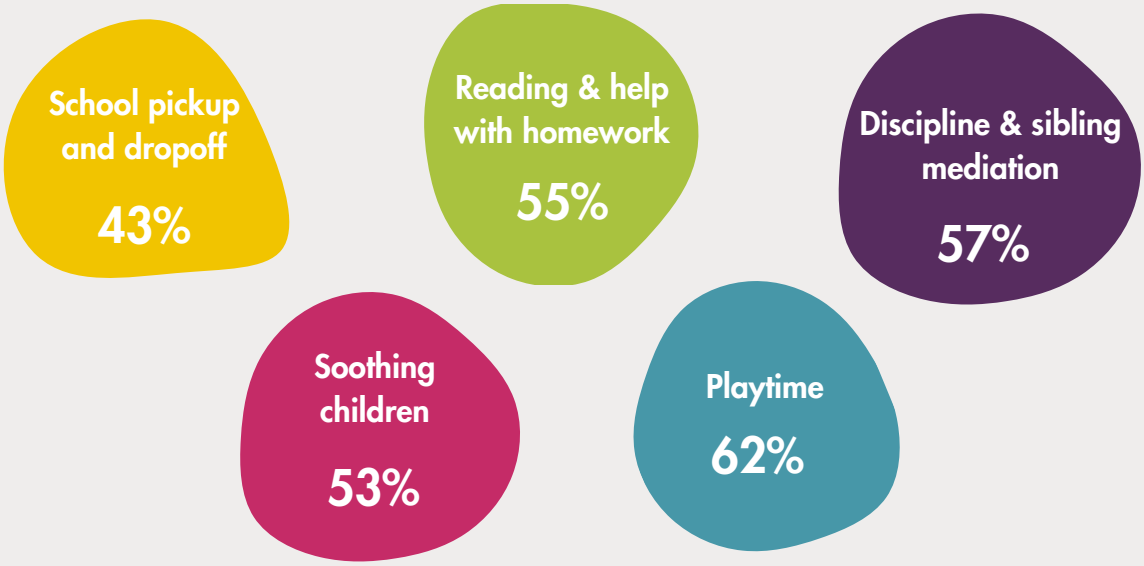
IN THE HOME & ATTITUDES TO PARENTING

DIVISION OF LABOUR

Our survey showed that most parents are not going it alone. 81% of respondents told us that they benefit from additional regular childcare in some form or another.

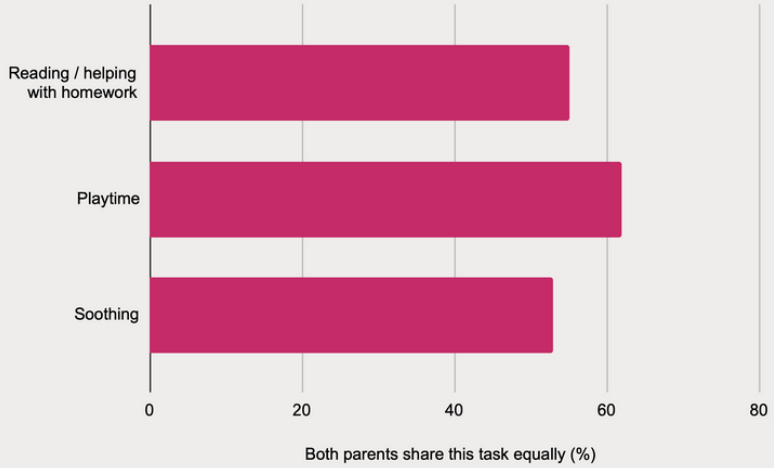


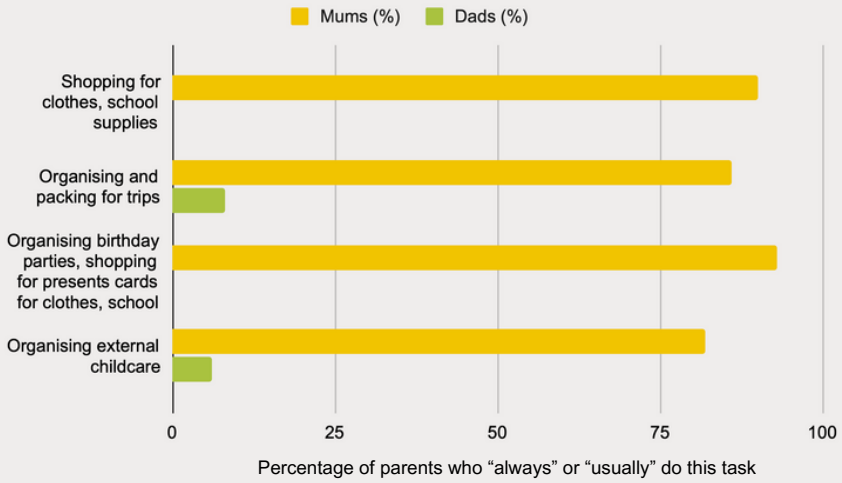
We also asked parents how they split various household tasks between them and their partner. Tasks that came out on top as being split 50/50 included:



When asking parents about their own role within the household, we found that **women, in particular, were undertaking greater child-caring responsibilities**, with 62% shouldering a substantial portion of the responsibilities compared to just 15% of men.

The tasks that do not add so much to the **mental load** and might be considered more **fun** or as **quality time** were more often shared equally between parents, whereas the tasks that usually fall to Mums were more administrative and organisational.





This disparity in the split of administrative tasks further perpetuates gender stereotypes at home.

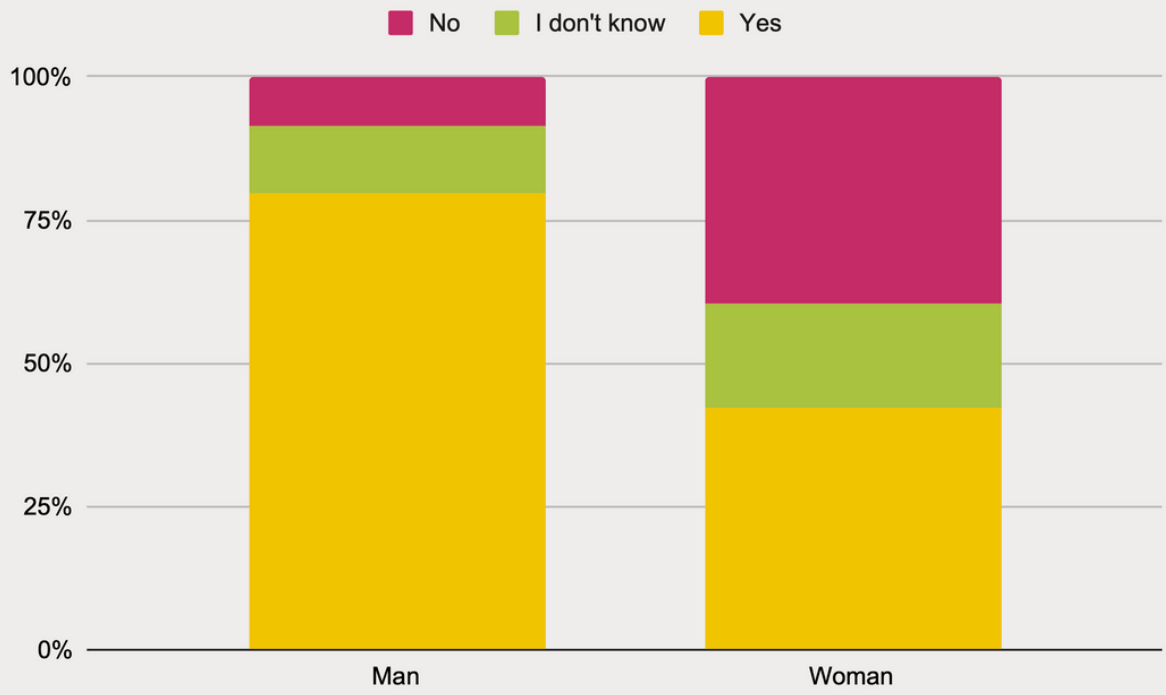
The patriarchy has a lot to answer for! My partner is always afraid of being at odds with his friends/family and how they would judge him for doing ‘women’s work’

He often says he can do xyz, I just need to tell him what to do, but this only adds to what I need to think about, so I don't.

Admin is always my job and this is encouraged (assumed) by school and social groups. Always assumed that women will email school, respond to invitations, complete forms, etc

Do you feel comfortable with this division?

Interestingly, whilst 46% stated they were comfortable with the division of labour, a split of the data found that whilst the majority of Dads were more comfortable (80%), less that half of Mum's were comfortable with the division (42%).



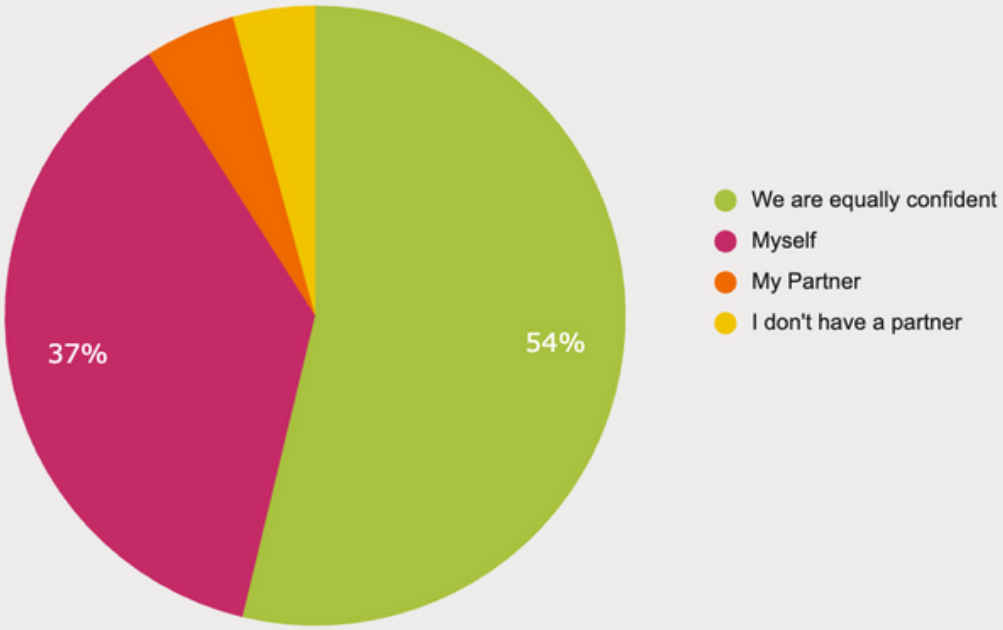
Our study found that this division of labour can often be a source of tension within couples.

70% of respondents said division of labour is a source of tension

By being more parent-friendly and allowing for more flexible working, workplaces enable mums to work more and dads to spend more time at home which will lead to a more equal division of labour in the home and have a wider social impact contributing to gender equality on a larger scale.

CONFIDENCE IN PARENTING

Another key at home attitude was confidence, with 54% of respondents saying themselves and their partner were equally confident which was positive to see.



However, a significant percentage of parents, 70%, still felt that equipping themselves with parenting knowledge would have increased their confidence in the early stages of their child's life. This could have the additional effect of alleviating pressures. The key topics that respondents believed would have been helpful to learn about include:

WORKPLACE MEASURES THAT WOULD HAVE INCREASED CONFIDENCE:

1) Flexible working
2) Less social stigma
3) Information on childcare options
4) Leave provisions for mental health
5) Access to mental health resources

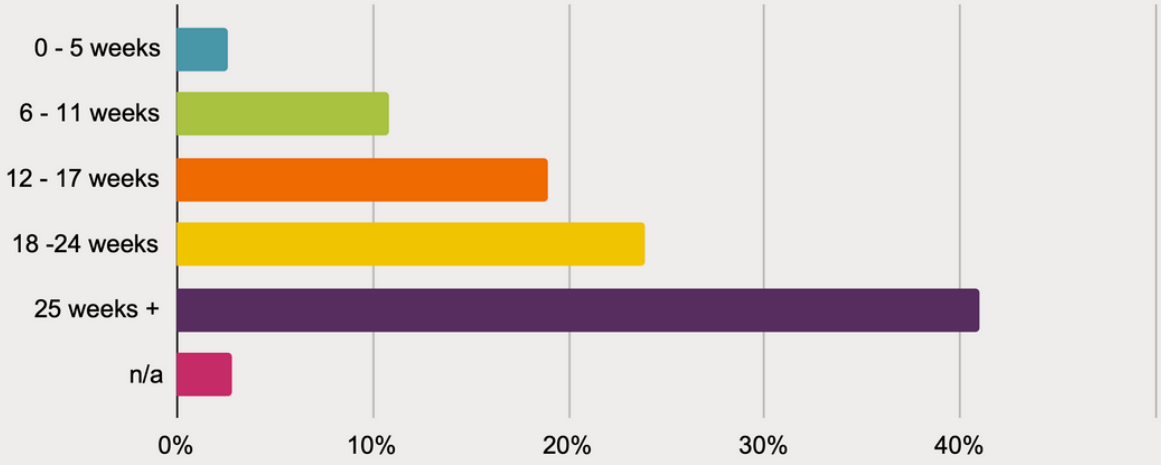
70%

felt increased knowledge prior to parenting would have increased their confidence

COMPANY POLICIES & EXPERIENCE

WORKPLACE RESPONSES TO NEW PARENTS

This section delves into the company policies and the experiences of employees when informing their employers about their impending parenthood. Our survey highlighted areas that companies should target in order to give their employees a more positive experience of becoming a parent. We looked at how many weeks before the arrival of their baby or adopted child that parents informed their companies and why:



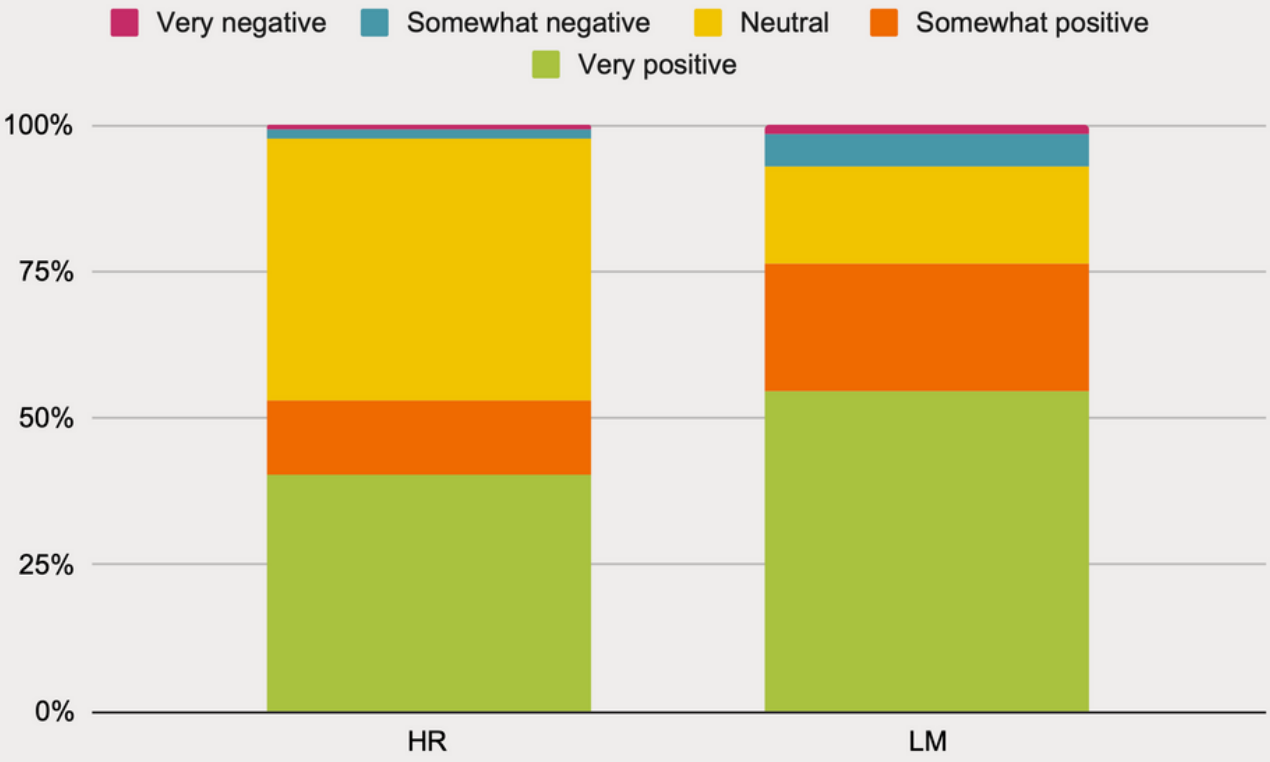
Whilst 41% of respondents informed their employers that they were becoming parents in good time, the majority gave less than 25 weeks' notice. This was because they worried about their careers and how they would be perceived at work. Of those who did give plenty of notice, many only did so out of necessity, for example because they fell ill due to pregnancy or due to safety concerns at work.

I didn't feel comfortable sharing personal info with my manager.

I could not hide it - I was extremely sick from week one. I was then bullied to leave.

There was a restructure happening at work with a really nasty man in charge - I felt like I would lose my job if I told them during the restructure.

When employees revealed their pregnancies or plans for parenthood, they received varying responses from the HR department and their line managers (LM). And while 75% of respondents had a positive or somewhat positive response from their line managers, the response from HR leaves much to be desired.



Almost half of all respondents receveived either a neutral or negative response from HR when revealing their plans for parenthood!

Double standards are apparent, as well as the fact that people often are made to feel like they have to choose between their career or being a parent. Creating pressure in this way is not healthy for expecting parents or the culture as a whole; and parents should not be made to feel like this.

WORK REACTIONS

My line manager swore and left the meeting. He came back after 15 mins and terminated the meeting. Then didn't speak to me for about a week.

My line manager told me that he thought the gap between my 2 children was quite small. I asked him what gap he had between his own (older children), it was very similar to mine!

"You have worked so hard to become a director, why have you gone and got pregnant?!"

HR made all the formalities very difficult and comments suggested maternity leave was a lesser priority than other company issues.

Lack of awareness of impact of office seating on pregnant person - had trouble sitting at desk with bump so HR suggested I try something not involving sitting down!

Line manager (male, also a parent) before I went on mat leave told me he "didn't expect much" from me when I got back to work because "you'll just want to come to work, do the minimum and go home to be a mum"

POLICIES & ENHANCEMENTS

One striking observation from the study was the lack of awareness regarding parental policies among employees.

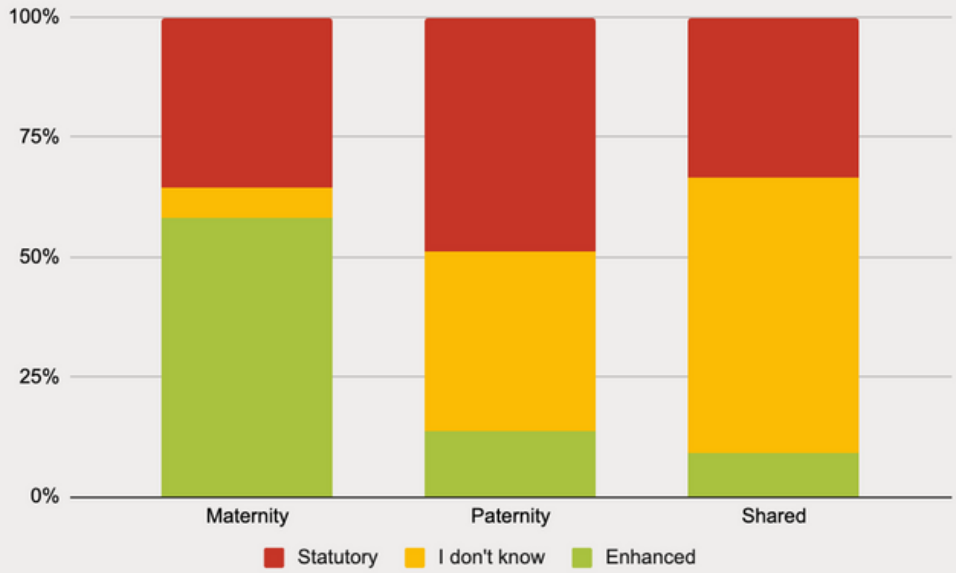
57% didn't know what their company's Shared Parental Leave Policy was

45% said details of their company's family policy was not readily available

This lack of clarity could potentially lead to confusion and frustration for employees who are expecting or planning to expand their families. It is essential for organisations to improve communication and transparency surrounding their parental leave policies to ensure that employees are well-informed.

Maternity leave was far more common to have enhancements with **only 14%** of paternity leave enhanced. While examining the most common enhancement in parental leave policies, it was found that practically every response discussed the aspect of pay. Common enhancements included:

- 90-100% of regular pay
- Enhanced pay for 8 weeks to 6 months
- A transition to statutory or half pay after this initial period



While these enhancements are a great first step, parents require more support from their employers and a more parent-friendly working environment to support them during the transition to parenthood and when it comes to paternity leave policies, they are often limited showing that an outdated system is still at play. Based on the assumption that fathers require less time at home with their children, these archaic policies not only exacerbate existing gender stereotypes, but they are also detrimental to fathers' mental health and are often a source of tension between parents.

"I'd like to be able to spend more time with my son, but work gets in the way. It certainly affects the bond with him, in that if he needs comforting it's usually his mum he wants as she spends the majority of time with him"

23% returned to work full time before they felt fully ready

19% felt pressured to minimise their time on parental leave

16% continued to work during parental leave

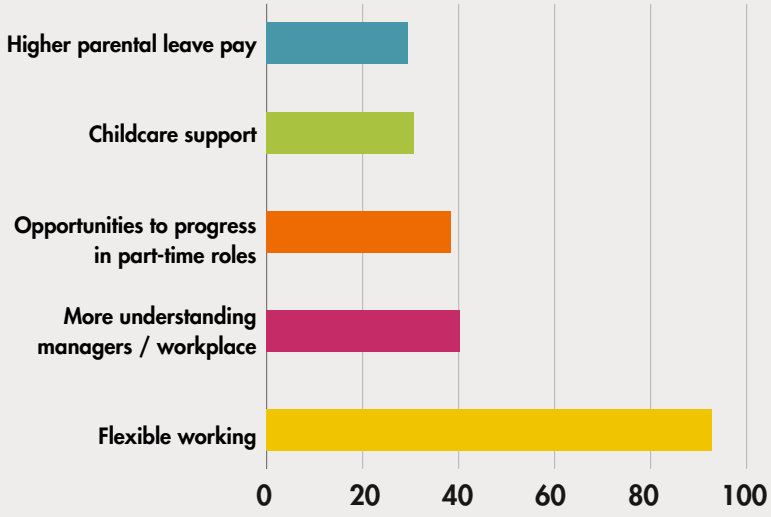
"I wish I had more time at home to spend raising our child and supporting my partner with parental responsibilities"

These statistics suggest that employees face challenges in maintaining a healthy work-life balance during and after parental leave. Understanding these challenges is vital for organisations aiming to foster a more supportive and balanced work environment for parents.

IMPACT OF COMPANY CULTURE

Our survey respondents work for a wide range of companies of varying sizes in different industries and with very different company cultures. From their responses we have been able to form a clear idea of what a parent-friendly culture looks like to today's working parents.

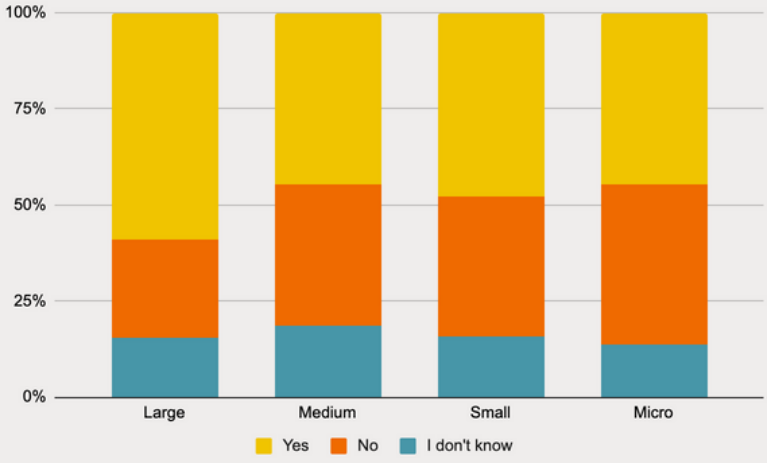
Key elements of parent-friendly work culture included:



91% *of parents said **flexible working** was most important for facilitating a parent-friendly working culture.*

Was your workplace equipped to support you as a working parent?

Company culture has a huge impact on working parents. Our survey found that parents who work for smaller companies were less likely to feel as though their workplace was well-equipped to support them. It also found that quite often parents feel the need to lie to their bosses or colleagues about child-related issues or even change jobs because they do not feel comfortable or are not receiving adequate support.

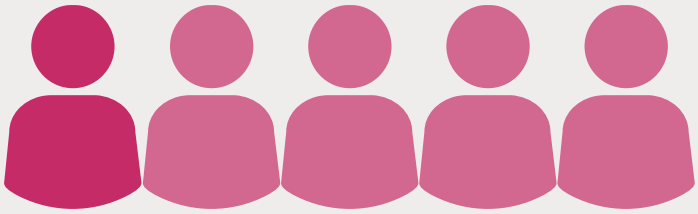


52% *have had to **lie or make up an excuse** for being late due to child illness, childcare, or other child related issues*

CHANGING WORKPLACES

It is important to note that **45%** of respondents are no longer at the same workplace as when they had their most recent child. Out of those who moved, **51%** did so because they wanted to find a more parent friendly workplace, showing that some companies are doing nowhere near enough to help new parents.

Furthermore, 20% of respondents became self-employed when they had children

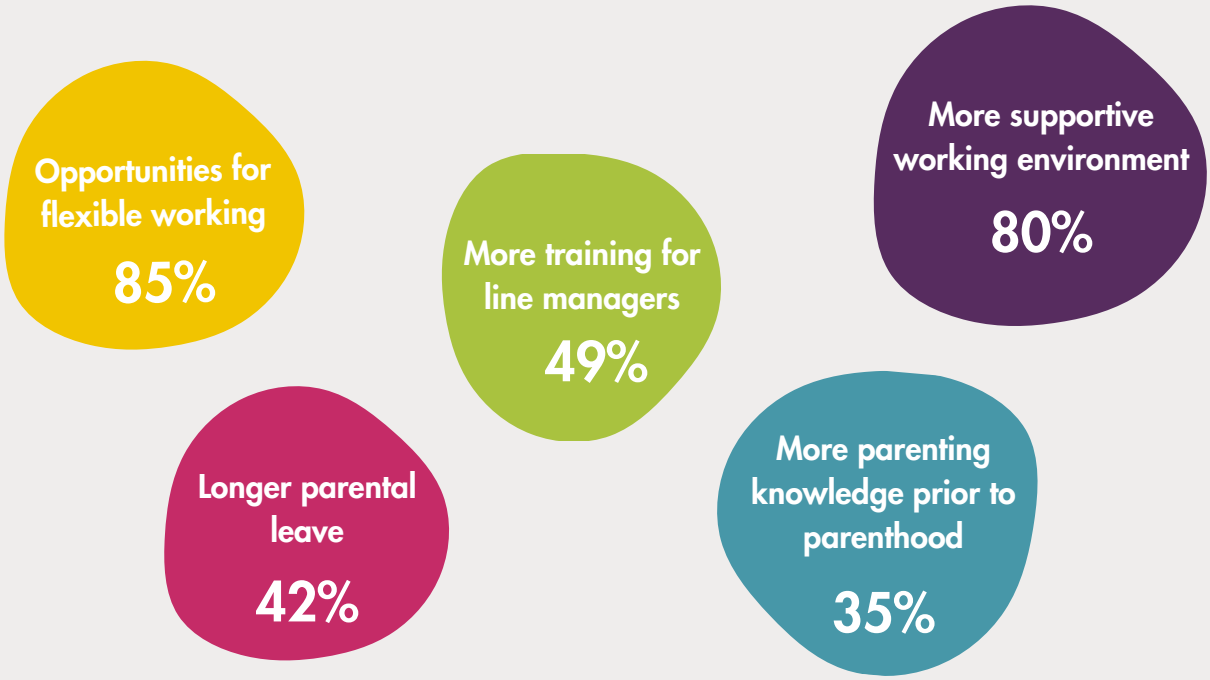


43% of those made this change because their office was not parent friendly enough.

From the dads who responded to this, 1 in 3 actually moved companies. This was due to the desire for a more supportive, and parent friendly workplace.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

According to our survey, these are the top five factors that would encourage parents to stay at their company for longer:



"You won't be coming back; you've been sucked into the family business now"

Said jokingly “you can’t keep having time off like this!”

I was asked to return to work during my paternity leave

"People have been having babies for millennia - I don't know why they need special treatment”

“She won’t be coming back. It’s best for her to stay home with the kids”

I was told that being pregnant would make me less productive than before so I should name a percentage of how less productive I thought I would be so they could lower my pay accordingly for the duration of my pregnancy.

It was inferred I got pregnant intentionally to trigger maternity pay

KEY TAKEAWAYS

KEY STATISTICS

45% of parents are no longer at the same workplace as when they had their most recent child

85% of parents said that opportunities for flexible working would have encouraged them to stay at their company for longer

47% of surveyed parents have received neutral or negative responses from HR when disclosing their pregnancy

52% of parents had to lie or make up an excuse about being late due to child illness, child care or child related issues

91% of parents said flexible working was the most important feature of a parent-friendly working culture

NEXT STEPS FOR COMPANIES

From a business perspective it's imperative that you support the parents in your workplace. Not only are they the majority of the workforce, but also improvements in employee retention, productivity and creativity will drive better business returns. Invest in employees and they will be invested in your business. And with such a high number of parents leaving to find more parent friendly cultures the expense of recruitment and training is a significant business cost. What can companies do to help parents? It often seems like an overwhelming task, but simple changes can make a huge difference to people and culture.

Here are a few ways you can help support parents:

1

Look after mental health

Respondents ranked "provisions for mental health" and "access to mental health resources" as two of the top 5 workplace measures that would have increased their confidence in the early stages of parenting. To make your workplace more parent friendly, let your parent workfoce know that you are there for them by giving them access to mental health resources or advising them on external facilities they can use.

2

Offer flexible working options

91% of surveyed parents ranked flexible working as most important for facilitating a parent-friendly working environment. Whether that's by offering flexible or compressed working hours or allowing employees to work from home or job share, offering flexible working options is a necessary improvement to any workplace wanting to become more parent-friendly.

3

Enhance your parental leave policies

For many working parents, statutory parental leave is not enough. Companies need to offer enhanced parental leave for parents regardless of gender, as well as opportunities for shared parental leave. Moreover, these policies need to be easy to understand, easy to find (without having to ask for them!) and fully accessible to all employees at every stage of employment. Transparency is key!

4

Train your HR team and line managers

47% of surveyed parents received either neutral or negative comments from HR in response to their pregnancy! When announcing a milestone like this, working parents should be met with nothing but support and kindness. Make sure your staff is well-trained to respond appropriately and your employees will feel more comfortable as they prepare to take navigate the world of work as new parents.

5

Help with childcare

Childcare can be a nightmare to navigate. Lighten the load on your employees by advising on different childcare options available to them, helping them to understand government subsidies or even offering bonuses to help with the cost.

JOIN OUR NEW PARENT PROGRAMME!

Our New Parent Programme helps parents to navigate early parenthood, employers to better support and retain the parents in their workforce, and children to grow up free from the limitations of gender stereotypes. With insights gained from our survey and support from experts in the fields of childcare, mental health, learning development and talent management, these modules tackle the issues discussed in this report and speak to the needs and concerns of today's working parents.

THANK YOU

Firstly, I'd like to thank those of you who filled out and shared the survey. I appreciate you taking the time to contribute your experiences, and to those who have had (and continue to have) terrible experiences; businesses and the Government need to do better.

This report would not have happened without some fantastic people who worked hard to take my thoughts and vision and turn it into a survey and report. Victoria Jackson and Rianna Mistry helped create the survey as part of their summer internship. Researching all aspects of parenting in the workplace, helping create and refine the questions, and putting the actual form together. Ila Shetty and Alexandra Quantick took the data and did the wonderful analysis that you see in the report during their placement at **not only pink and blue**. They patiently created charts and cut the data finding key insights forming the basis of the report you see today. Much of this was overseen by Isabel Farchy who brought a wealth of experience from her previous charity. Victoria then worked her magic, finalising the report and refining the content and design. Thank you to all of you.

To The University of Birmingham internship and placement teams who facilitated the recruitment of these wonderful human beings, it's been so lovely to work with students from my old University.

There are many others who helped, proof read, contributed, questioned, and supported me in the quest to deliver this report. Key thank yous go to Virginia Mendez, Dilip Shukla, Cat Wildman, and my husband Paul for their unwavering support. And finally thank you to Lee Chambers for writing the foreword; your insight and advocacy in this area is key to moving the dial.

I will forever drive for change in every way I can for our future generations.

Thank you

GET IN TOUCH!

WANT TO IMPROVE YOUR WORKPLACE CULTURE? WANT TO RETAIN STAFF, COMBAT STEREOTYPES, AND CREATE A MORE EQUAL SOCIETY?

TAKE THE FIRST STEPS TOWARDS CREATING A TRULY PARENT-FRIENDLY WORK ENVIRONMENT. GET IN TOUCH AND ENROL IN OUR NEW PARENT PROGRAMME TODAY!

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