

Fathers' Day: Fathers should get 'use it or lose it' parental leave ^[1]

Author: Peacock, Louisa

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EXCERPTS:

Currently UK fathers are able to take two weeks of paid leave after the birth of a child. But the Institute for Public Policy Research said just half of fathers who take paternity leave take the full two weeks entitled to them.

Poor take-up is usually linked to many fathers being the breadwinner of the family, and although they would like to take more time off, they simply cannot afford to. Experts also say there is still a 'stigma' attached to men taking time off to care for their own children.

Working fathers in Britain are allowed two weeks paternity leave at present, paid at a maximum of £136.78 per week, unless their employers offer them more - although this is still rare in many businesses.

Ahead of Father's Day this Sunday, the IPPR hazards a guess that what dads would really like is generous paid entitlement for leave on a 'use it or lose it' basis, which would help tempt them into taking time off. The think tank would like to see a system of parental leave based on a set block for the mother, a set block for the father, and the remainder to be shared amongst the couple as they see fit.

From 2015, the Government will allow mothers and fathers to share their parental leave. Under the plans, mothers will automatically receive 18 weeks' leave and fathers will get an extra four weeks paid paternity leave, making six weeks available specifically for fathers in total.

But the IPPR said unless it is given on a 'use it or lose it' basis, or the weekly statutory rate is topped up by employers, fathers won't be tempted to take it.

Dalia Ben-Galim, associate director at IPPR, said: "There is definitely a need to encourage UK dads to use their entitlements but there is also a strong argument for boosting their entitlement. Families would be better supported to make choices that work for them by a more progressive parental leave system. This would not only provide the mother with a leave entitlement sufficient to protect her health and that of her baby, but also support a similar paid entitlement for fathers on a 'use it or lose it' basis. A third bloc of shared parental leave, also paid, could be split by parents in a way that works for them and their family.

"A specific 'daddy quota' of leave for dads to use on a 'use it or lose it' basis paid at a generous rate can potentially offer benefits for families. It is already common in Scandinavian countries and many companies are increasingly seeing the benefits of offering paid parental leave for both the men and women in their organisation."

She added: "Father's Day is a special day and becoming a dad is a special moment. While advertisers are ramping up their campaigns for golf clubs, sheds and razors, spare a thought for those men about to become fathers for the first time. The joy and euphoria of having a baby is often accompanied by a life-changing shock that means nothing else is ever the same again."

Ms Ben-Galim cited Norway, where there is a 12 week paid 'daddy quota' with generous wage replacement rates, claiming that the effect of this leave has been "dramatic".

"Before its existence four per cent of fathers took some parental leave, but more recently it's been almost 90 per cent. In Iceland, where there is currently 3 months reserved for the mother, 3 months for the father and 3 months for them to decide, fathers took on average 103 days leave compared to 178 for mothers."

Iceland is preparing to go even further. The Icelandic government recently passed legislation for a system of five months maternity leave, five months paternity leave and two months parental leave for parents to decide how to use it by 2016. This will all be paid at relatively high wage rates.

"The evidence all points to this being beneficial for families. Dads taking time off work after the birth of their child increases their involvement in childcare and has a positive impact on their child's development. There is also evidence to support that dads who take time off do more housework," she said.

"At the moment it is working mums who bear the financial brunt of these in lost earnings and a lack of career progression."

-reprinted from the Telegraph

Region: Europe ^[2]

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