



# MATERNITY LEAVE TRANSITION TOOLKIT FOR EMPLOYEES



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## MATERNITY LEAVE TRANSITION TOOLKIT FOR EMPLOYEES

**Maternity leave is a significant life transition, filled with a mix of emotions—excitement and joy, but also uncertainty and a sense of the unknown. Stepping away from work can feel like leaving one "baby"—your career—in someone else's hands, while you embark on the journey of motherhood, whether for the first time or while managing the needs of multiple children.**

Returning to work can be just as daunting. Many new parents experience feelings of being out of touch, self-doubt, and anxiety about getting back up to speed while balancing professional responsibilities and childcare.

It's also a time when many people will offer advice—sometimes overwhelming or conflicting. While

the instinct to do things your way is completely valid, being open-minded and accepting that a new normal will emerge—both at home and in your career—can be key to a smoother transition.

Depending on where you live, maternity leave policies and entitlements will vary. While this toolkit is primarily tailored for the UK, much of the guidance is relevant to parents worldwide.

This toolkit is designed to support you at every stage, providing practical guidance and expert advice to help you transition with confidence. Whether you're preparing for maternity leave, navigating time away, or planning your return, you'll find the resources you need to feel informed, empowered, and in control.

# PLANNING FOR MATERNITY LEAVE

## 1. UNDERSTANDING YOUR RIGHTS AND OPTIONS

**Before you start planning, make sure you understand your maternity leave, pay, and job protection. Check your company's maternity leave policy and any additional support available to you.**

- **Inform your employer:** Legally, you must notify your employer at least 15 weeks before your due date. Many people prefer to wait until after their first trimester, but notifying your employer as early as possible can help with planning. This doesn't mean you need to tell everyone straight away, but having an early discussion can be beneficial for both sides.
- **Choose your leave start date:** You can take maternity leave from the 11th week before your due date, but consider how long you want to work up to and what dates work best for you and your business.
- **Consider flexible working options:** If you're thinking about part-time hours or remote working upon your return, discuss these options before your leave starts.

### Maternity Leave Entitlements

**You are entitled to up to 52 weeks of maternity leave, made up of:**

- Ordinary Maternity Leave (OML) – first 26 weeks
- Additional Maternity Leave (AML) – following 26 weeks
- You must take at least two weeks off after giving birth (this is compulsory leave).

### Maternity Pay

- If eligible, Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) provides:
- **First six weeks:** 90% of your average weekly earnings.
- **Up to 33 additional weeks:** A fixed rate or 90% of your earnings, whichever is lower.
- Some employers offer enhanced maternity pay, so check your company policy.

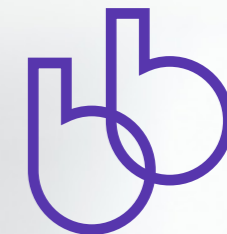
### Job Protection & Returning to Work

- If you take 26 weeks or less, you have the right to return to the same job.
- If you take more than 26 weeks, you have the right to return to the same or a similar role if your original role is no longer available.

### Additional Considerations

- **Antenatal Appointments:** You are entitled to paid time off for medical appointments and antenatal classes.
- **Shared Parental Leave:** If eligible, you and your partner can share leave and pay, allowing more flexibility.
- **Annual Leave:** You continue to accrue holiday while on maternity leave, which can be used before or after your leave period.

Being informed about your rights and planning ahead will help you manage your maternity leave and return to work with confidence.



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# PLANNING FOR MATERNITY LEAVE

## 2. PREPARING FOR YOUR LEAVE

A smooth transition requires planning and communication. Use this checklist to prepare:

- **Prepare a handover document:** List your current responsibilities, key projects, and essential contacts. If you manage a team, gather their previous appraisals, goals, and objectives. This process takes time, so start early.
- **Communicate with your team:** Inform colleagues of your leave dates and discuss any responsibilities that need to be reassigned. Your team may feel both excited for you and nervous about your departure. Reassuring them and ensuring they know they will be supported in their roles will help them stay focused and engaged.
- **Plan your return:** It can be difficult to decide when to return, but thinking realistically about how much time you need will help with planning and securing the right cover. Discuss your return-to-work plan with your employer, including potential flexible arrangements.
- **Pace yourself:** In the last few weeks or months, consider whether you need to attend every networking event or meeting. This is a great time to empower your team to step up while you provide guidance before you leave.

## 3. GETTING MATERNITY OR PATERNITY COVER

Before hiring maternity or paternity cover, consider the type of agreement that best suits your team's needs. The main options include:

- **Freelancers:** Offer flexibility and expertise in specific areas, often working remotely and independently. This option is ideal if you need someone to step in quickly for project-based work without extensive onboarding.
- **Contract employees:** Typically hired for a set period, ensuring stability over the leave duration. They're well-suited for roles that require deeper involvement and collaboration with the team.
- **Temporary employees:** Usually hired through agencies, providing a cost-effective option for covering roles that require continuity in day-to-day tasks.

Interim cover is often the preferred route as it provides stability to the team and peace of mind to the person going on maternity or parental leave. Interim professionals are accustomed to short-term projects, getting up to speed quickly, and integrating into teams seamlessly.



### Steps to Hiring the Right Person

- **Develop a job specification:** Define key responsibilities, required skills, and the personality that will best fit the team. Consider whether your team is going through a period of change—do you need someone with different skills from your own?
- **Finding the right candidate:** You can search yourself via LinkedIn, your network, or job adverts, but this can be time-consuming and understanding the interim market is important to get the right person. If you have a good HR team, they may assist. However, using an interim recruitment specialist will help you find the best person for the job quickly and efficiently. Interim talent have different skill sets and mindsets – it's important to work with someone who get this and has the network and insight to know if they are good or not! This will really help you with the handover and peace of mind while you are off. Speak to your company about securing a budget for this.
- **What to look for:** Avoid hiring someone just because they are available or likeable. Be objective—can they do the job? Will they fit with the team? Unless you're looking for a transformation project, opt for someone with a similar working style to your team rather than a disruptive personality. Assess industry experience and transferable skills—do they need time to learn a whole new sector?
- **Timeline:** Start this process around four months before your leave begins to allow time for a proper handover. While some hires can be made quickly, realistically, it can take 4–6 weeks, especially if the candidate is finishing a prior contract. However its important to emphasise - don't get stuck in the weeds of protracted interview processes, when you find the right contractor, move swiftly and don't dally on making a coherent, competitive offer. Contractors' commitments can move as quickly as the markets in which they operate and good pros aren't usually available for long.

# DURING MATERNITY LEAVE

## 1. MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL PREPARATION

- **Acknowledge your emotions:** Excitement, anxiety, and uncertainty are all normal. Give yourself grace as you adjust to this new chapter.
- **Set boundaries:** Decide in advance how often, if at all, you'd like to check in with work during your leave.
- **Prioritise your well-being:** Focus on rest, recovery, and bonding with your baby without work-related stress.

## 2. STAYING CONNECTED (IF DESIRED)

Some employees prefer to stay informed about work, while others choose to fully disconnect. Consider:

- **Setting expectations with your employer:** If you'd like occasional updates, agree on how and when they'll be shared.
- **Utilising 'Keeping in Touch' (KIT) days:** If applicable, you can work a limited number of days without ending your maternity leave. Many find that KIT days toward the end of maternity leave are particularly useful in helping ease back into work.



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# RETURNING TO WORK

## 1. EASING BACK INTO WORK

**Returning to work can feel overwhelming, but a structured approach can make the transition smoother.**

- **Start catching up on industry news:** Read publications like PR Week and stay updated on LinkedIn to familiarise yourself with industry trends before returning.
- **Review handover notes:** Catch up on any changes and key developments while you were away.
- **Consider a phased return:** If possible, discuss a gradual return to work, such as part-time hours initially.
- **Communicate with your team:** Let your employer and colleagues know how you're feeling and any adjustments you may need.

## 2. SEEKING SUPPORT

- **Utilise employee assistance programs (EAPs):** Many employers offer coaching, mental health support, or resources for returning parents.
- **Plan childcare early:** Good childcare providers often have long waiting lists, so start exploring options as soon as possible. Finding a nurturing and reliable provider will help you feel at ease when returning to work.
- **Consider flexible working arrangements:** With childcare in place, assess whether adjusted hours or remote work would be beneficial.
- **Share responsibilities with your partner:** If applicable, discuss how to fairly balance parenting and work responsibilities to avoid unnecessary strain.



# COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

## BEFORE MATERNITY LEAVE

- **Not planning early enough:** Leaving things to the last minute can create unnecessary stress.
- **Overloading yourself:** Trying to finish everything before leave can lead to burnout—delegate where possible.
- **Failing to set boundaries:** Clearly communicate how much contact (if any) you want with work during your leave.

## DURING MATERNITY LEAVE

- **Feeling guilty for disconnecting:** This time is for you and your baby—trust your cover to handle your work.
- **Not asking for help:** Whether from your employer, colleagues, or personal network, support is available.
- **Failing to plan your return:** Start considering your return strategy early to avoid last-minute stress.





## RESOURCES

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- **Know your rights:** Research government maternity policies and workplace protections.
- **Parental support networks:** Join online or in-person groups for working parents.
- **Flexible work discussions:** Speak to HR about options for phased returns, remote working, or flexible hours.

**Maternity leave is a significant milestone, and planning ahead can help you feel more prepared and in control. Enjoy this special time, and trust that your career will be waiting for you when you're ready to return!**

**Need Support with Maternity and Paternity Cover?**  
At The Work Crowd, we understand how important it is to have the right cover in place while you take time away to focus on your family. Our specialist interim team in PR and Communications recruitment has spent over a decade building an exceptional network of interim professionals, helping hundreds of people and businesses seamlessly manage maternity and paternity leave transitions.

Get in touch today at [hello@theworkcrowd.com](mailto:hello@theworkcrowd.com) to find the perfect cover, so you can step away with peace of mind.



### WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU

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