

# I've got you, babe

A GUIDE TO SUPPORTING  
PREGNANCY AND MATERNITY  
IN THE WORKPLACE



GUIDE

2

ELIZABETH CASSON TRUST



# WELCOME

Welcome to our new series of pocket guides, created to support the wellbeing of occupational therapists. Each guide channels the spirit of our founder, Dr Elizabeth Casson, who devoted her life to improving her practice, with ceaseless enthusiasm, innovation and grit.

Our pocket guides, which have been hugely popular around the world, are used by many professions beyond our own. Building on this interest in engaging and accessible tools, our new guides have been created to:

- Empower you with practical strategies
- Highlight best practice
- Increase your own and others' sense of belonging

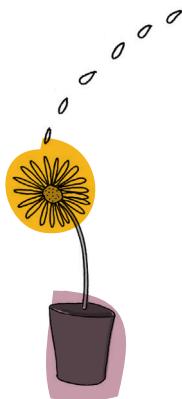
There is no *correct* way to read them. They are designed to be dipped into - on a break, on the train, on your phone. See these guides as a 'friend in your pocket' supporting your CPD.

These bite-sized guides were created in response to a professional briefing document by Caroline Waters OBE and Helen Chipchase. It is part of our *Focus on Fairness* initiative, in which OTs, HR advisors and leaders worked together to create an environment where everyone is valued and has a sense of purpose.

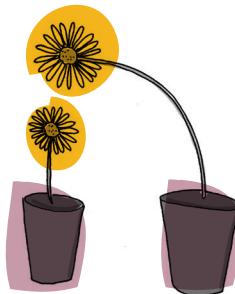
*"If my mind can conceive it, and my heart can believe it,  
I know I can achieve it"*

Jesse Jackson

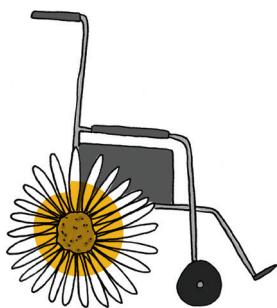
Our pocket guides highlight four key areas, where getting it right will make a tangible difference to an OT's sense of belonging:



**Be the Change**



**I've got you, Babe**



**DisABILITY and  
NeuroDIVERSITY**



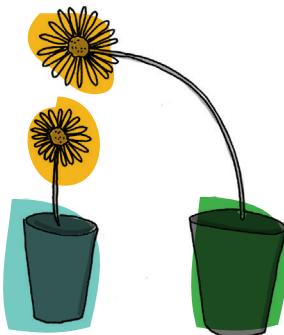
**Take Care**

**We hope that you enjoy them.  
If so, please let us know.**

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# WHY PREGNANCY AND MATERNITY?



*“The present is pregnant with the future”*

Voltaire

In this guide, we highlight top tips to support quality conversations at four key stages of pregnancy and maternity. These are:

- 1. When you learn that your employee is pregnant**
- 2. Managing someone who is pregnant and preparing for maternity leave**
- 3. Keeping in touch during maternity leave**
- 4. Preparing for a successful return to work**

*A real conversation always contains an invitation. You are inviting another person to reveal themselves to you, to tell you who they are and what they want”*

David Whyte

This guide refers to pregnancy and maternity, but it is important to recognise that 1 in 4 pregnancies in the UK end in loss, during pregnancy or birth (1). When dealing with the physical and mental wellbeing impacts of loss and grief, employer support is absolutely critical. Together, we must create a culture of belonging so that employees feel able to return to work after such a significant loss.

Sadly, 1 in 5 (21%) employees who had experienced a miscarriage told CIPD that they did not receive any support from their employer (2). Almost a quarter (24%) reported considering leaving their job because of their experience. However, among employees who received support regarding their loss, 60% said it had a positive impact on their mental wellbeing, and 55% reported a positive impact on their work. You can find sources of further support at the end of this guide.

*“A woman who has lost her baby through miscarriage may feel a very deep loss which few others seem to understand”.*

Elaine Storkey

# DISCRIMINATION

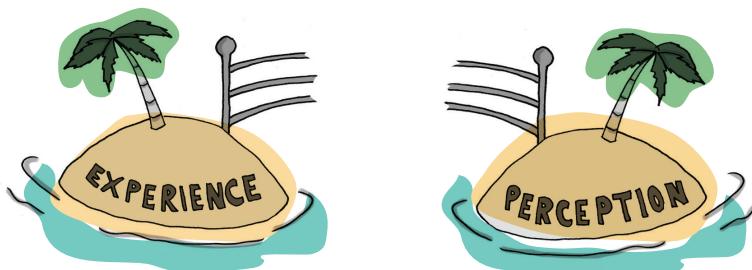
Pregnancy and maternity discrimination affects around 390,000 pregnant women and new mothers every year (3).

Research commissioned by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) showed that, while most employers (84%) recognised that it was in their interest to support pregnant employees and employees on maternity leave, the reality fell short (4). 77 per cent of mothers reported having at least one negative or possibly discriminatory experience at work.

In September 2016, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) launched its *Working Forward* initiative (5). It aimed to help employers support women at this key stage in their lives. Its goal is to bridge the gap between employees' experiences of pregnancy and maternity leave and employers' perception and understanding.

*Working Forward* identified four key areas where we can take action to ensure that we are providing appropriate support. These are:

- 1. Leadership from the top down**
- 2. Ensuring confident employees**
- 3. Training and Supporting line managers**
- 4. Flexible working practices**



## LEADERSHIP FROM THE TOP DOWN

Strong leadership, from the top down, is key to building the right foundation. It ensures that everyone in the organisation is aware of their policies and commitments and is on board with organisational aims, so that supporting pregnant women and new mothers becomes part of an inclusive culture and fosters a sense of belonging. To achieve this, you should consider:

- Nominating a representative at board or managerial level to focus on pregnancy, maternity and return to work practice. Make sure this information is shared.
- Communicate your commitment to this issue to your employees, customers and suppliers.
- Know the percentage of women who return to work following maternity leave, the factors that affect their choice and the actions you can take to remove or reduce barriers.
- Collect data to understand and address those barriers.

# CREATING EMPLOYEE CONFIDENCE

It is important that employees feel able to initiate an open, two-way conversation with their line manager. If they feel supported, it can lead to higher levels of employee satisfaction and increased staff retention. EHRC research highlights the importance of this. When mothers felt unsupported, they were less likely to return:

*"Almost 2 in 5 women did not feel able to request the flexible working options they would have wanted, and half of these mothers report this was because they worried their request would be viewed negatively"<sup>(6)</sup>*

To create employee confidence, consider:

- 1. Communicating your policies, initiatives, and health and safety risk assessments in a way that employees can access and understand.**
- 2. Set up a support network for working parents.**
- 3. Offer one-to-one peer support and mentoring.**
- 4. Introduce keep-in-touch days and return-to-work plans (see below).**
- 5. Provide employees with a maternity checklist, ensuring they are aware of the support available and facilitating early and ongoing conversations with their line managers.**

# TRAINING AND SUPPORTING LINE MANAGERS

Line managers are the first point of contact for pregnant employees and mothers returning to the workplace. It is crucial that they have early, good-quality conversations with those team members. However, EHRC research found that 55% of employers provided no guidelines, training, or support for managing maternity (6). To achieve this, consider:

- 1. Encouraging all line managers to complete the ACAS maternity/pregnancy training course.**
- 2. Offer advice to line managers on how to identify and tackle health and safety risks for both pregnancy and breastfeeding (see below).**

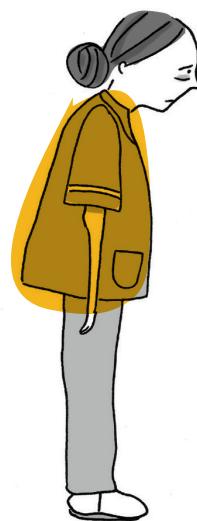
## FLEXIBLE WORKING PRACTICES

In 2023, the median pay gap for female employees was estimated at 14.3%. This means that, for every £1 a man earns, a woman, on average, earns 86p (7). Women are significantly more likely to work part-time due to caring responsibilities. In 2022, 36% of women worked part-time, compared to only 14% of men. This impacts career progression and lifetime earnings (8).

It is widely recognised that a key component in the progression and retention of women in work —and indeed everyone—is the provision of flexible working. This is particularly important for parents. That is why flexible working is an essential component of a truly inclusive culture.



**GROWING**



**TIRED**

## TOOL: pregnancy and maternity conversation guide / checklist

### PART 1) WHEN YOU LEARN THAT YOUR EMPLOYEE IS PREGNANT

Top tips for a productive conversation: Listen.

*"Good listeners have a huge advantage. For one, when they engage in conversation, they make people 'feel' heard. They 'feel' that someone really understands their wants, needs, and desires. And for good reason; a good listener does care to understand"*

Simon Sinek

- Make it a natural experience. It doesn't have to be a formal meeting. It could take place over a coffee, if that works for you.
- It's best to be open and honest. Encourage the person to be frank about their concerns so they can receive the support they need. They may hold many of the answers and should feel comfortable making recommendations about how best to manage things.
- Let them know what help is available. Share your company policies and highlight any information that might be useful, such as time off for antenatal care. Be aware that you must allow pregnant employees to take reasonable paid time off for appointments.
- Refer to the Maternity Date Planner on the Equality and Human Rights website to understand what you may need to consider in the future.
- It's a good idea to put any discussion points and agreements in writing; this helps avoid any confusion down the line.
- If this is your first time supporting a pregnant colleague, take advantage of any available support and do this proactively. For example, if there isn't a buddy system in place for pregnant employees, think about starting one.

## Conversation Checklist

Congratulations Early LEAVE Policy Rights Health and Safety Notice

- Say congratulations!
- Talk as early as possible, ideally face-to-face.
- Discuss their rights, your health and safety risk assessment, when to tell their colleagues and any concerns they may have.
- Do some fact-finding about your organisation's pregnancy and maternity policies and any statutory entitlements. Let your colleague know where they can find this information.
- Discuss time off for antenatal care. Let them know about your internal policies and how they could help.
- Talk about health, safety and risk. The individual should feel comfortable enough to reveal any specific risks they or their doctor have identified.
- Encourage them to plan when to take annual leave. For example, explain that some people organise their maternity leave to phase their return to work.
- When to give notice. Your employee must tell you when they want to start their maternity leave by the 15th week before the baby is due (approximately when they are six months pregnant)

*"There are disparities in accessing quality maternity health care in most every country, and most all health systems could and must be improved upon if we want to create healthy families who will thrive."*

Christy Turlington

## PART 2) MANAGING SOMEONE WHO IS PREGNANT AND PREPARING FOR MATERNITY LEAVE

### Top tips for productive conversations

- Keep a diary. To help both of you keep on top of any antenatal appointments, you could suggest they add these to your schedule.
- Encourage a conversation about the support needed as early as possible. Organise a handover period and think ahead of anything that either of you will need to do immediately on their return to work, such as mandatory training.
- Discuss Annual Leave and how this affects you, them and the team.
- Schedule regular catchups.
- Agree on how you'll stay in touch while they're away.
- Organise a more formal meeting before they go on leave.

### Conversation Checklist

You may want to refer to these discussion points throughout their pregnancy to ensure that key issues are covered and at the right time. You should catch up regularly to discuss:

- Any new Health and Safety risks identified by your employee or their doctor.
- Any changes to their work patterns, support they may need or ideas they may have on how best to cover their role.
- A handover that works for both of you.
- How long they think they will be on maternity leave (making it clear that they can change their mind and can take a full 52 weeks).
- Confirmation of payment of Statutory Maternity pay and/or contractual maternity pay.
- How and when to keep in touch - and what about (in addition to legally required communication, e.g., reorganisations and promotion opportunities).
- Plans for return to work, e.g., if they request flexible working.

- Notice periods required for early return, shared parental leave, pay, and if they decide to extend their maternity leave.

*"Maternity leave and parental leave are absolutely vital for strengthening families. It's an issue for men and women".*

Quentin Bryce

### PART 3) KEEPING IN TOUCH DURING MATERNITY LEAVE

Different people keep in touch in different ways. Some prefer email, others like text or a more formal structure. Whatever platform you prefer, you should both agree on it in advance. You also need to be aware of their anticipated return date.

Let your team member know your organisational policy on Keeping In Touch (KIT) days. These are up to ten working days during maternity leave that your team member can use without affecting their entitlement to Statutory Maternity Pay.

It is important to plan KIT days to ensure mutual benefit for both parties involved. Team members on maternity leave should be offered the chance to re-engage with colleagues and actively catch up with business developments. Some companies offer employees the opportunity to undertake training during this time to upskill or refresh existing skills.

#### Top tips for productive conversations:

- Keep them up to date with company developments.
- They may want to change their working pattern. Encourage them to share their thoughts and to request flexible working.
- Discuss whether they would like a phased return to work, and if so, how you could both make that work. For example, you could suggest that they use some of their annual leave to stagger their return.

## Conversation checklist

You must communicate the following:

- Any promotions or job opportunities that they might like to apply for
- A redundancy situation
- A reorganisation that would impact their job
- The possibility of a pay rise

You may want to refer to these discussion points during this period to ensure that key issues are covered at the right time. We also recommend that you discuss the following:

- If your team member intends to take the full 52 weeks off work.
- If they want to return earlier, in which case, they will need to give you eight weeks' notice before the date they plan to return.
- If they choose to end maternity leave and take Shared Parental Leave instead.
- Keeping In Touch days and Shared Parental Leave.

*“When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen”*

Ernest Hemmingway

## PART 4) PREPARING FOR A SUCCESSFUL RETURN TO WORK

Your team member has completed their maternity leave and is preparing to return to work. At this stage, it's best to have conversations before and immediately upon their return to work. It would be a good idea to encourage them to be open and clear about how they would like to make the transition. This helps ensure things are as smooth as possible.

Take a moment to remind yourself of your company's policies beforehand and encourage them to do the same.

They might also require some practical support. For instance, if they are breastfeeding and want to express milk, then they will need access to a fridge to store it.

The first few weeks back at work can be the most challenging for a new mother, so be mindful of any difficulties your team member may be experiencing during this time. Remain in regular contact with them throughout this period to discuss any challenges they are facing and how you could address them together.

Postnatal depression affects more than 1 in 10 women within a year of giving birth (9). Your company should provide guidelines on how to approach the issue with your employees. The NHS also provides information on the symptoms and the support that may be available.

### Top tips for productive conversations:

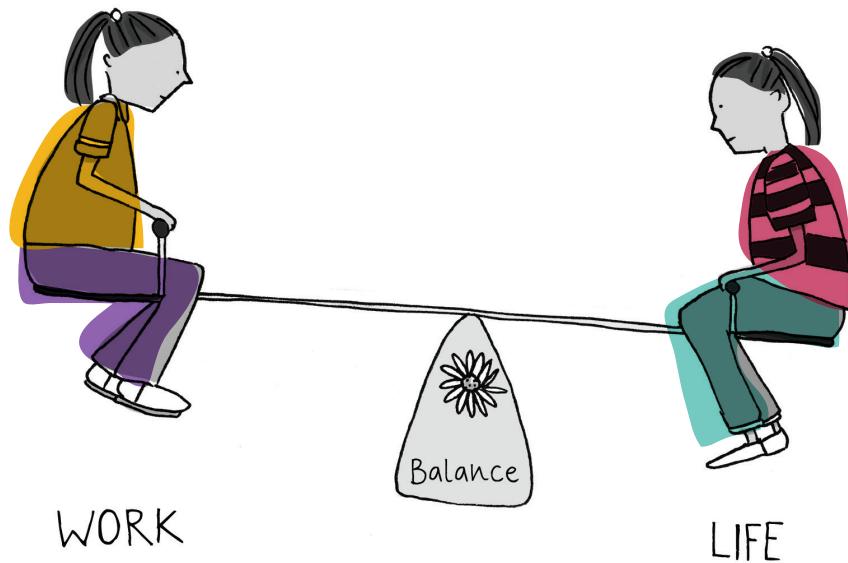
- As soon as they return to work, chat about it. Discuss any updates, suggestions and concerns that either of you has.
- Encourage your team member to build their own professional network to settle back in and reconnect.
- Don't be afraid to check in along the way, ask how they're feeling or if they need any help.

- You may also want to ask them about any practical needs, such as where to store expressed milk.
- You might want to encourage them to take some time to review their professional development plans and ambitions.

## Conversation checklist

You may want to refer to these discussion points during this period to ensure that key issues are covered at the right time. It is advisable to include the following:

- Changes to the workplace or team, since your team member left.
- If / how to phase their return.
- Understanding their immediate and long-term career plans will help you assign tasks in line with their ambition.



## REFERENCES

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# SOURCES OF FURTHER SUPPORT

## Core Guidance & Legal Rights

- **Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC):** The UK's independent statutory body responsible for promoting and enforcing equality and human rights legislation.
  - Pregnancy and maternity: Pregnancy
  - Pregnancy and maternity discrimination
- **ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service):** An independent, publicly-funded UK body that provides free, impartial advice on employment rights, workplace rules, and best practices for both employers and employees.
  - Maternity Leave and Pay: Checking your rights
  - CAS: Flexible Working

## Support for Managers

- **Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD):** Is the professional body for Human Resources (HR) and Learning and Development (L&D) professionals. It sets professional standards, offers qualifications at different levels, and provides resources to professionals in the people profession.
  - Pregnancy and maternity discrimination: UK employment law
  - CIPD: Flexible Working Practices

## Support for Parents & Specific Issues

- **Pregnant Then Screwed:** A UK-based charity that advocates for and supports pregnant women and mothers facing discrimination and disadvantages in the workplace.
  - Homepage
- **Maternity Action:** a UK-based charity that provides free advice, support, and information to pregnant women, new mothers, and their families.
  - Advice A-Z

- **NHS – Best Start in Life:** Provides official NHS advice on pregnancy, childbirth, and early parenthood.
  - Pregnancy

## Support for Pregnancy & Baby Loss

- **Tommy's:** A UK charity that funds research to stop miscarriage, stillbirth, and premature birth and supports families who have experienced baby loss.
  - Baby loss information and support
  - How to support a colleague or employee after a stillbirth
- **The Miscarriage Association:** A national charity in the UK that provides support and information to anyone affected by pregnancy loss, such as miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, or molar pregnancy.
  - Miscarriage and the workplace
  - Supporting an employee before, during and after a loss
- **Sands (Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Charity):** A UK-based charity that supports anyone affected by the death of a baby before, during, or shortly after birth.
  - Information for Employers

## Support for Mental Health

- **Mind:** A mental health charity in England and Wales that aims to create a mentally healthy society by providing information, services, and campaigns to tackle stigma and ensure people get the support they need. Offers specific guidance on perinatal mental health.
  - Postnatal depression and perinatal mental health
- **Maternal Mental Health Alliance:** A UK-based charity and coalition of over 130 organisations dedicated to ensuring all women and families have access to high-quality, compassionate mental health care during pregnancy and after birth.
  - Resource Hub

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We hope that you have enjoyed this guide and have found it useful. If so, please let us know.

Why not take a look at the other pocket guides in this series:

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**DisABILITY NeuroDIVERSITY**

**Take Care**

This guide was adapted by Rob Young with support from Laura Rossiter and Dr Kate Turner. Eliza Flicker provided illustrations, and A Stone's Throw produced the guides.

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The Trust encourages diverse voices, promoting wide-ranging and independent conversations about issues affecting our profession. Why? Because this is not just our profession, it is yours.

