

Just Daddy and me: A paternity leave primer



By Helen Burnett-
Nichols



An increasing number of Canadian men are taking “man-ternity” leave. Three fathers who have been there share their tips for making it work.

While many new mothers look forward to the chance to spend a year with their babies away from the demands of the working world, work or financial obligations may not allow Mom to take a full 12 months off after baby arrives.

Enter Dad.

Although the concept of fathers taking parental leave may not be that common — Statistics Canada’s [Leave practices of parents after the birth or adoption of young children](#) (from the 2010 Survey of Young Canadians) reports that while 83% of mothers outside of Quebec take paid leave, only 13% of dads do — many fathers are taking advantage of their legal right to spend time with their new babies.

The basics

In Canada (outside of Quebec, where the [rules](#) are different), a maximum of [35 weeks of parental benefits](#) (available after the initial 17-week maternity leave) can be used by one or either parent and, as Service Canada explains, there are many ways parents of a newborn

can decide to use parental leave. A father who wants to take parental leave is required to give his employer at least four weeks' advance notice.

But what does leave look like for a dad? Fathers who have made the choice to take some "man-ternity" leave weigh in with tips for those considering taking time off with baby:

The advantages

After seeing friends take parental leave, Adnan Moeed, a business analyst with TD in Toronto says the decision to take six weeks off with his 11-month-old son after his wife returned to work was easy. The leave itself, he says, was both rewarding and eye-opening.

"It's a completely different routine than what I'm used to, where you focus on what you have at hand, for yourself," he says. "But now it's more like you have to really watch out for this other human being, every moment of the day."

Still, Moeed says taking care of his son full-time was incredible, as it gave him the opportunity to see his baby achieve milestones such as standing up, trying to walk and making connections.

Similarly, Paul Nichols, a Hamilton, Ontario-based urban and environmental planner currently on parental leave with his six-month-old son, says the obvious advantage is the fun you get to have every day with your child. Taking parental leave can also eliminate the need for third-party childcare during the baby's first year.

The disadvantages

For some dads, parental leave will mean a reduced income. "Unless your employer has a top-up program, you need to prepare for the difference between what you normally earn and what you'll make on leave," says Nichols.

Moeed also explains that parental leave can create a disconnect from aspects of your career or job that you might otherwise need to focus on. Some dads may start to feel out of the loop.

Advice for dads

Do your research and prepare. Before deciding to take parental leave, Nichols recommends knowing both the federal rules around leave as well as your employer's policies. Also consider giving your employer as much notice as possible of your intent to take parental leave.

Ammar Khan, social media lead with Ford Canada in Oakville, took 10 weeks of parental leave with his first daughter last summer and is preparing for a five-month parental leave with his second child this year. He recommends working out a transition plan with your employer ahead of time. "If you can actually get your replacement in for a couple of weeks to integrate with you and work with you, it makes it much easier for the company, because then the role continues seamlessly," he says.

Build your own network. Other than city- or provincially run programs and centres, Nichols found that there don't seem to be as many organized father-baby activities as there are for new mothers. "It's really up to you to find other dads taking time off with their newborns as well and build your own network," he says. Moeed says dads on leave also shouldn't be afraid to leverage friends and family to help out. "You can't do everything yourself; it's just guys are a little more hesitant to ask for additional help," he says.

Enjoy it. Khan encourages dads to take a look at their financial situation and take off as much time as is financially feasible for their family.

"No one really looks back on their life wishing that they had spent more time working, but a lot of people do wish that they had spent more time with their family and I think parental leave in Canada is just a great benefit that allows us to do that," he says.