

'I wanted to be a modern father but felt like I couldn't be'

Tom had two weeks' leave at full pay, but after returning to work he struggled emotionally and felt like he didn't bond with his son



Tom Foreman is a 33-year-old first-time dad in Sussex whose son was born in September 2023. He was given two weeks of full pay paternity leave, and at the time, thought it was a good deal. On reflection, he said he needed more time to bond with his son and support his partner.

When my partner and I found out we were expecting our first child, I knew that the large sales company I worked for offered two weeks of fully paid paternity leave. Being the first of my friends to have kids, I thought this was a good deal.

Leading up to my son's birth, I thought a lot about the kind of dad I wanted to be. I don't have much of a relationship with my dad, and from what I understand from my grandmother, my grandfather wasn't a very involved dad either. She once told me how he dropped her off at home after giving birth while he went straight to the pub. I knew I wanted to break this generational pattern and be present for my son and partner.

My paternity leave started when my partner went into labour. After three days of labouring, she had to have an emergency c-section, and was then in the hospital for another week.

For 75 percent of my paternity leave, I was back and forth between home and hospital. I was making sure my partner was okay, my son was okay, and that the dogs at home were taken care of. It was exhausting. When my partner and son could finally come home, I only had three days with them before I had to head back to work.

Financially, there was no way I could take unpaid leave to stay home for longer. Our mortgage was getting ready to go up by £700 a month and we needed every pound we could get to prepare for the jump. I took a few days of annual leave here and there, but the care of our son was primarily left to his mum.

Working in sales is all-consuming and involves a lot of hustling, so I had to give it all my attention when I returned.

I really struggled with my mental and emotional wellbeing those first months after returning to work. I wanted to be a modern father, but felt like I couldn't be. I was also totally exhausted as I'd work all day and then in an attempt to support my partner, would stay awake with our seemingly sleepless son a few nights a week.

I didn't feel I had been able to bond with our son, because I just wasn't around as much as I would have liked. I was totally drained.

Fortunately, my partner was so capable and empathic, even though she had just been through a major surgery and was learning herself to be a parent. She encouraged me to see a therapist to help me process everything that I was thinking, which really helped.

Looking back, it would have been incredibly helpful if the company I had been working for had very clearly sat down to inform me about the

paternity rights I was entitled to. None of the dads I know have had this happen either.

If I had been allowed more paid time off to start, I definitely would have taken it. I could have bonded with my son and been the dad I had always wanted to be, and supported my partner post-surgery.

I also would have loved it if I could have had some paid time off to take care of my son on my own later on in the first year of his life, allowing my partner to return to work a little earlier. It would have given me so much more confidence as a dad and allowed for that bonding I have always craved. We would have gone to the beach and done so many activities we both enjoyed.