

‘Those three months gave me confidence to care for my son’

Matt took a month’s leave after his son was born, and 13 weeks when his wife returned to work



Matt Broad, age 30, lives in Stourbridge with his wife and one-year-old son. His company was completely on board when he told them he wanted to take two weeks paternity leave and two weeks of annual leave when his first baby was born. The four weeks were fully paid. He also planned to take 13 weeks of shared parental leave when his wife finished her maternity leave. Again, his company was fully supportive and gave him

full pay for the entire 13 weeks. He says this time with his son has made him more confident as a co-parent.

When my wife found out she was pregnant, I started digging into the details about what my company offered for paternity leave. From what I had heard from friends who had children before me, I was expecting the standard two weeks of paternity leave. But as I looked over the policy documents, I realised I would be entitled to not only two weeks of fully paid paternity leave, but also fully paid shared parental leave within the first year of my son's life.

The process for applying for all the leave was pretty straightforward. It started with a conversation with my line manager. I told her what the company offered and said I wanted to take everything that was offered to me – the paternity and shared parental leave. There was absolutely no push back. I then went to the Human Resources team to get the paperwork sorted – there was nothing complicated about it. No one discouraged me or tried to dissuade me from taking the time off.

I ended up getting signed off for two weeks of paternity leave, followed by two weeks of annual leave, right after my son, Alfie, was born. Then when my wife went back to work when our son was about eight and a half months old, I stayed home to take care of our son for 13 weeks. It made financial sense. Why would we pay for childcare when I could stay home, fully paid, to care for him?

I can't imagine what it would have been like had I not had those first four weeks with my family. None of us were near ready for me to return to work. We were in the middle of learning to adapt to a baby on virtually no sleep. Our body clocks were all over the place.

But I also wouldn't have wanted to miss some of the first moments of my baby's life. In the mornings, I would lie Alfie on my legs and take a photo of him every day to show how much he changed every day during his first month of life. If I had been focusing on work, I would have missed that. We all spent so much time in bed as a family, just enjoying each other's company and napping when the baby napped. My wife and I tag-teamed, one of us taking Alfie downstairs if the other needed an uninterrupted sleep. Instead of leaving the baby and the house to my wife to sort, I played a proactive role in our family, learning to spin all the plates involved in raising a family.

Like my wife, I knew what Alfie needed – when he was hungry, needed to be changed, or wanted a sleep. It made me confident to take care of such a vulnerable little life.

If those four weeks hadn't been paid, there is no way I would have financially been able to take off that length of time.

The first day of my shared parental leave, when Alfie was just over eight months old, I remember sitting in the kitchen with him, writing down his routine and our plan for the day. As the weeks went on, I didn't need to write anything down – it became second nature taking care of him.

Those 13 weeks were incredibly precious. He was beginning to take his first steps and had become quite responsive and gained more personality. I kept an Instagram account of our daily adventures so I could clearly see how much he changed during those months. We both grew to know and love each other so much during that time.

I remember my wife saying that the time changed me. She could see I had become more proactive in my care for Alfie and the chores in the house. I wasn't just a helper or assistant; I was a co parent who understood and threw myself into everything that goes on in the running of a household.

Looking back, I can see those three months of being home with Alfie gave me confidence to take care of my son as he ages. It isn't just his mum that knows him best, we both do. I really think he knows just how loved he is by both of his parents. And that then is giving, and will continue to give, confidence in himself as he grows.

I am incredibly grateful for all the time I had off with my son, but my case shouldn't be unusual. If we want dads to play a bigger part in parenting, then we've got to give them the means, especially during the early years.