

Barriers to Equal Parenting Webinar



Date of event – 16th October 2025

Speakers

We were delighted to be joined by:

- **Elliott Rae**, Working Families ambassador and Founder of Parenting out Loud – Moderator
- **Alex Lloyd Hunter**, Co-founder, The Dad Shift
- **Squadron Leader Jenny Munro**, RAF (Winner, Best for Fathers Award 2025)
- **Nick Jones**, Group Strategy Director, Wates Group
- **Dr Jeremy Davies**, Deputy CEO & Head of Impact and Communications, Fatherhood Institute
- **Dr Rebecca Jones**, Head of Research, Working Families

Our Top Takeaways:

Stigma and structure holding back men and women

- Current systems do nothing to change gender equality. Instead, they nurture it, setting fathers up to be assistants rather than equal carers from the time a baby is born.
- Work culture is shaped by policy, resulting in the fatherhood forfeit, where men suffer judgement and mistrust for taking on caring duties, which reinforces women as the default carer.

The imbalance of caring responsibilities has real world implications

- In the status quo, dads may not take the career hit, but they pay a penalty in the time spent with their child which can lead to disconnection, impacting family life and partner relationships.

- The gender pay gap stands at 13%, of which up to 80% can be attributed to the motherhood penalty. Fathers are feeling the realities of the gender pay gap in the pressure to be the main breadwinner.
- A combination of financial pressure, guilt and stress all add up to a mental health pressure cooker which leads to fathers struggling with depression or other health challenges.

There is an appetite for change

- There is widespread support for equal parenting, especially amongst younger generations who are taking on a more active role, highlighting that attitudes have shifted but policies lag behind.
- The research highlights the direct difference flexible working makes to the fatherhood experience, as well as resulting in better support for their partner.
- Not all fathers, or mothers, want the same parental or work involvement. The broad range of solutions supported by fathers reflects the diversity of experiences and approaches needed.

Employers are proving what's possible

- Embracing flex in all its forms, from staggered starts to compressed hours or temporary part-time working, can meet the needs of a range of roles, even those that are site-based.
- Providing flexibility in how dads use enhanced leave, for example at any time within the first two years, can help them manage the transition to fatherhood and provide support where needed to their partner, as well as being able to better manage their work commitments.
- Getting it right means continuing to evolve, so don't expect perfection. Being willing to try and test approaches and being open to challenge is the best way to create policies that are robust and can meet the needs of employees in a meaningful way.

Prioritise communication

- Support managers and employees to be able to have constructive conversations that are framed as working together to reach a solution that works for both the business and the individual.
- Starting a dialogue early in the parenting journey allows employers to plan ahead, although there should always be an element of fluidity in any plans to allow for change.

- Parent networks can provide a valuable source of communication that enables dads to share concerns and can act as an intermediary to push for policy change that's rooted in lived experience.

Small changes, big difference

- Achieving cultural change requires lots of smaller changes throughout the business. Seek out insights from employees and use these to shape understanding of what change is needed, provide training at all levels, especially line managers, and make sure all staff are aware of policies and support on offer.
- Support for dads doesn't need to end with enhanced leave or flexible working. Think about layers of support that can be accessed at different stages of parenting, such as relationship counselling, childcare support, and activities that facilitate dads being the main carer.

Don't wait for change

- With the worst paternity leave in Europe, a gender equal future must include statutory change, but employers are in a position to do things differently now.
- Design policies that avoid presuming women are the default carer, using feedback to shape and develop policies.
- Levelling the parental leave playing field will make those who wish to take leave feel less exposed and reduce concerns about career progression.