

Barriers / challenges for dads 'parenting out loud'

This is a really great subject. I notice this when my wife and I attend parents evenings for our 4 children and find the teachers tend to focus on speaking to my wife, leaving me feeling somewhat invisible.

My experience as the dad in a straight relationship is that I am expected to go out to work, earn all the money for our household, share housework/chores and also be a completely equal parent. Luckily my company are understanding and give a lot flexibility, but it is exhausting when my wife now has an expectation that we have to be equal parents

Yes! I've noticed the teacher only making eye contact with me as the mum too, even though dad is sitting there. It makes me feel uncomfortable.

That's a really good shout about senior men amplifying their parental voice to normalise working patterns shifting

I have always had an active role so to speak for all 3 of my sons and I have to be honest I have never looked at it any other way as it is what is expected as a dad and tbh I haven't seen any issues so this has shocked me that this has been an issue

Very true, a lot of senior people, although they have children, actually never really did much parenting

I mean senior in terms of hierarchy (not age)

Normalising dads as active and equal parents helps both men AND women. Men gain so much by being more involved in caring for their children. And when working men are vocal about their caring responsibilities, it normalises it in the workplace, and helps working women too!

I think the system surrounding separation definitely holds Fathers back in terms of the Primary carer role.

My experience is that schools are particularly bad. Not only do they call mum, they email mum, send mums the apps required and expect mum to organise it all. But there's more men can do to get themselves involved as well (I admit thought there's more I can do certainly) and make sure they're equally part of the conversation

Exactly! My firstborn was the first baby my husband or myself ever "handled" - and we had to learn together and grow into it! Both of us to the same Degree :D

Our school are very good at treating all parents/guardians equally. They call the first number that WE gave them on the form when we initially registered our kids.

I work for a great company that accept that fathers have parenting responsibilities too, regardless of relationship types. We have the option to work from home, which does also help. I have however worked for a company that looked at employees with children as a possible inconvenience!

My husband was better at changing nappies / looking after our daughter when we first brought her home than I was - because he had a much younger brother. But having had to go back to work 2 working days after we came home from hospital I quickly learnt more

My sister who works in a preschool noticed the same thing (always calling mum first) and in an effort to involve the fathers more, the school ran a project where they started calling the dads first. They had to stop this after about a month however since about 80% of the time, the fathers would answer the phone and say "I don't know, call their mother"

I definitely took that 'parenting out loud' approach when I returned to work after my first son was born. I was working for a private sector consulting company where the norm was male consultants travelling the country consulting all week while their partner was at home doing all the parenting. I was the first person in the company to take SPL and definitely got lots of puzzled comments from male colleagues about why I would 'want' to take time off work to be with my children!! My approach was to be more overt and open about being a Dad than I might otherwise, as much to rail against that culture and try to be a better role model. It was certainly tough at times and for example when I negotiated a flexible working pattern (a nine day fortnight) I had to keep it secret from my colleagues as otherwise "everyone would want to work flexibly"

I am a man in a heterosexual relationship, we have 3 kids, ages 7,5 & 2. We both work full-time jobs and I have made it my mission to split parenting responsibilities down the middle. As a result despite my wife taking 3 years out for mat leaves, she has been able to progress her career and mine has not been negatively impacted either. The key turning point was me being brave to be open about when I can and can't attend meetings, need to leave early, taking temporary change in contractual hours. I have experienced judgement and some negativity, but also been well supported. Line managers have a big part to play in this. I think us Men need to be courageous not to worry what others at work think of us. I can tell you, it has changed the way I work for the better.

My husband was the stay at home parent and when we were at school parent evenings as other have said the teachers (who knew this) still asked me questions.

What can individuals do to challenge gender stereotypes and societal expectations?

If HR policy allows equal parenting and your manager is not adhering to that policy, you need to escalate to your manager's manager and HR to get it addressed

Statutory maternity/paternity leave also supports the perception that Mums are the primary carer in heterosexual relationships - I don't think shared parental leave has significantly helped to change this perception

In my experiences (and it differs of course in partnerships) but predominantly in mine, both partners work full time but the expectation still is that as the female, i will do more in the home, the chores, the children. Rightly or wrongly, i accept this. It is good to see things are changing and that's visible. I just haven't experienced it.

I do believe our older generations did not help our current stigma. I know from experience, I was there to help raise my baby sister but my brothers were "working men" and therefore "it's the woman's role to look after the children"! Thank goodness for changing times.

Agree as well - we need more independent paid leave for men

great point about being able to 'let go' and allow the other parent to do it in their own way

Increasing paternity time at established companies is definitely helping to balance the narrative. I was fortunate enough to have 4 months with our first son

Fun fact: Maternal gatekeeping doesn't exist. The idea that women deliberately make themselves invaluable to have the child(ren) "to themselves" is a myth. Actual research has been done on this and two main findings were that 1. The women accused of maternal gatekeeping have repeatedly requested/encouraged their male partner to be more involved. And 2: In the cases where women were

giving overly thorough instructions and thus accused of maternal gatekeeping, the reality was the men were ACTUALLY inept (put the nappy on backwards or strapped the child into the car seat in an unsafe way, etc), so the "nagging" instructions from the mother were actually justified. The writer Zawn Villines has written about this, so find the sources through her.

My children's dad was unwilling to get involved as he saw us in those traditionally roles but I worked also. It seemed typical of his parents dynamic therefore he parented the way he had been parented himself. We are no longer together but it's so encouraging to see so many men are of a new era and see it as an equal job.

great point. my wife struggles with letting go and it's caused a real breakdown in her relationship with her mother as she wants to be involved but my wife won't let her do things her way

I am very guilty of doing this. Its intended to make it easier for the other half but in reality I'm not giving him the same opportunity to learn by mistakes like I did

This is such an insightful meeting.

What is the one big shift that an employer / business could make that would help drive an authentic shift in attitude and mindset?

My husband really struggled when our twins were born as he had practically no male role models in the firm (as a partner). We were based in the USA at the time. He didn't really have anyone to talk to who was (or had) taken parental leave, even though lots of his peers were in their late 30s and 40s. We both work full time; we don't 'share' responsibilities 50/50 exactly as that doesn't work for us from a career and schedule perspective but he has specific school run days he does and other school responsibilities. But there's nothing he can't do and he has really made it his mission to talk about this with his team, male and female, so they don't find themselves feeling how he did. Just creating safe spaces for all parents that life has changed a bit and it's ok to have different routines and responsibilities. Normalize it! it makes such a difference

Great point on allowing people to be themselves as a parent - it benefits the child and parents.

Mine genuinely comes from a place of wanting to make it easier for my hubby... but it is sometimes perceived as wanting to be "in control" or "lack of confidence". Which is categorically the opposite effect!!

Equal parenting could be improved if companies set better HR Mat/Pat leaves, more equally and allowing dads to be together, specially in those first months of a newborn. After that period the role that line Managers play in enabling equal parenting is crucial within the team. As a dad of a 2 years old, I have had the great opportunity of being supported by an excellent Line Manager to let me have flexibility to combine childcare and workload

When you both want children and work together it is natural and as a Man you can be very active. The problem is when you divorce and it becomes a battle and the equality is taken away

Division of labour in the home

I was in a heterosexual marriage, and despite both of us worked full time, I like many others, was expected to take care of the children, do the housework, cook and shop, all around the children. My children to this day, say they don't recall their dad really doing anything with them. I find myself defending him as being self employed needed to work and not always free. In reality, he was happy to sit back and accept "his" well behaved children receive praise. It is a 2 way street.

It would be interesting to know if anyone on the call knows of any dads who have gone part time at work in order to look after children. I have only met two.

Both my husband and I work 4 day weeks, I have Mondays off he has Fridays off. We love it. It does still seem rare.

A few of the dads in our NCT group went down from 5 to 4 days a week to provide care to their kids 1 day a week

My husband took a year off after I went back to work after my mat leave, then worked part time until our son went to primary school.

I have quite a few male colleagues in the civil service who are in job share roles so they can work part time and share parental responsibilities with their partners equally. It's becoming more and more common which is great to see.

I (dad/husband) offered to either go part-time or quit work, but my wife said "no" as it made her feel that she was inadequate as a parent

Our children are now 5 and 6 and both at school and we've kept our days off so that they have short / normal school days twice a week rather than being at school 8am-5.30pm as they are TWT

I returned from 3 months of shared parental leave. It was the second time (we have 2 daughters 3 & 1). It was the best time, getting that time alone while my wife went back to work, I now feel even closer to my daughters.

From the NCT group we were in from the 8 families it was only myself that took the time off. I just felt sad for the other Dad's as I loved it and you cannot get that time back.

I've been fortunate with taking a lot of parental leave for both my kids (both under 3). The firm has really moved the dial on this in the last year. It's been challenging and interesting to see how we've managed the changes/phases with the kids but also with our respective jobs/careers.

It feels like the social concept of a 'primary caregiver' needs some reframing/ dismantling, as it adds pressure on households to pick someone to assume that role and allows workplaces to abide by that expectation as well. It's not always an appropriate concept in a household where parenting (and career) focus is split equally. For us, it's all a juggle but one or other of us can always put our son first at any given time! I wouldn't say either of us is the primary caregiver, or we both are - better to see parenting as a team exercise, with no judgment call as to who does more when both are doing all they can from time to time?

Instead of directing the comms to dads, could you direct the comms to birth partners?

Thanks everyone, it is good to hear about dads working part time. As some earlier comments said, this needs to become as common as it is for women for the other career impacts for women working part time to be addressed.

the biggest barrier to extended leaves is the pay however. often shared parental leave is not enhanced - do you think employers could do more to change this?

We have twins so in practical terms my husband was hands on from day 1 and he loved it, he changed nappies before I did as I had a c-section. He had 1 week of paternity only then some leave and works in an organisation with a boss who doesn't understand being family friendly. He is still very much hands on where possible but now our children are at school when one of them was sick and needed to be collected he mentioned this to his boss who's response was "can't your wife do it?" He did put his foot down and say no she can't but this is the battle often in some work places / people where this stigma of mums being primary carers exists

reflecting on the point at the start of the chat on how things go within healthcare... in my experience, the physical responsibility for mum (childbirth, feeding ect.) is prioritized and rightly so. but the emotional impact (and trauma) is not just that of a parent, but also that of a partner/husband etc. TW: loss. When we lost a baby, it was like I wasn't in the room at the hospital. rightly so, the physical attention was with my wife. but nobody even looked at me, never mind spoke to me on how to support her recovery, what to expect, what does it mean etc. my wife's employer was awesome, whereas mine gave me 2 days bereavement leave. like, what?!!

very sorry for your loss and for that experience; it should not be that way, at all. I hope that you were able to find some additional support beyond the experience in the hospital

When we were completing the share leave forms my company supported it and had no issues, however my wife who is a teacher, ran into the bone headed excuses of "SPL is not done here". We managed to get it through anyway, but my wife was not paid correctly at all, luckily she decided to take another teaching role at another school whilst she was off which resulted in her being over paid, but if she had gone back we would have had a horrendous uphill battle to prove she had been paid incorrectly

one of my best experiences of me and my parents was going on a weekend with them separately with cubs amazing times

Between my 9 year old and 6 year old I saw big changes in playgroups - for my 9 year old it was all Mums, when my 6 year old was going there were quite a few dads

After our first child started nursery, I carried on working full time while my wife worked part-time three days a week as part of a job share - since our second child we both work four days a week and each have a day a week at home with our youngest child - I wouldn't pretend that we have everything right in terms of balance but that one change has made it so much better in terms of feeling more balanced than it did before

There's a mental load self-test which I think is brilliant:

<https://equalcareday.de/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/mental-load-home-en.pdf>

I worked in a preschool when my children were young and one of the parents was a single dad. I have to say that he was an incredible dad with a delightful son. He would stay and chat with the other mums and would join in with the "mum activities".

we should remember for most of us, childcare fees will only be very high for 2.5 years! think long term as a career break is not judged well in this society

Totally agree with this point on becoming a better person / employee once you're a parent

More focus, more empathy, better time management, mgt of difficult stakeholders!

It's very much an ongoing discussion for us-I complained about the mental load about a year ago and my husband really stepped up-but to the extent, as he rightly pointed out recently, that he now feels stressed and I've stepped back from a lot of family admin (fadmin?!), so it's time to redress the balance again!

It's also really easy to think that we can do things better than our partners so it's faster/more efficient to do things ourselves. However, this firstly disempowers them and can make them not be as assertive (because what's the point!) so I find it really helpful to let both me and my wife genuinely and fully own tasks. eg: food shopping would be about writing the list and doing the buying.

just normalize trusting adults to get their work done. There's no 9-5 anymore. I trust you to complete your work, whether that's 9-5 or a bit in the evening or the morning, whatever works around the schedule

Equitable praise for people doing things that society doesn't expect them to do is a positive. In the long term, that won't be necessary. However, for now it probably is. I'm not sure how popular that approach is, though. We have equitable approaches at work, so I do think that it's the right approach at home too.

It is good to hear that things are changing. My husband was often the only dad a "mother and toddler" groups (not parent and toddler) 21 years ago. Many mums were aggressive and unwelcoming though he meet a few wonderful women who helped him (he is quite shy) to keep going to these types of activities.

I was a great husband and Father (still am), very active and more caring and empathetic in many ways. Does your book address the challenges/issues around equal parenting after divorce? This is more of a challenge than changing nappies and packing the kit bag when your children are taken away from you.

totally agree older children with additional needs still require time off work to help them

Narrowing the gender pay gap will make it easier for men to take SPL as any financial sacrifices are likely to be less disproportionate to women taking the leave

both of my children are grown adults in their 30's, but there are still times i need to be there for them. My work allows me the flexibility to work around it to make up the time.

I often hear men using the fact that they earn more than their partners as a reason for why they shouldn't do much at home. So while both parents might both work full time, she is expected to do far more of the work at home, because her full time work pays less. How do you navigate that?

SPL policies need to match maternity leave policies - bizarrely this isn't always the case, so the parent with the better policy terms ends up having to take the full leave for financial reasons. Paternity leave policies should also match maternity leave policies.

I love the challenge to say "what would we do if we were two dads / both men?" and from a workplace view - would I have the same response if the person asking for flex / leaving early / was a man vs woman (or vice versa)

I've known people be questioned by their managers: "are you sure you want to take all that time off"?

I found the best thing was to simply not be there. Go out with my friends/stay overnight at my mum's. I was very deliberate about not wanting to encourage my child to be clingy - not wanting to sound morbid, any of us may be here tomorrow and it is not fair on a child for them not to have a range of adults they want to be with should the worst happen.

recognizing the topics of this session but when considering flexibility within teams, also being mindful that other people will need flexibility too. They may be carers, they might not be parents or might not be able to have children. Being inclusive and role modelling. There's also the other side to this where there can be an interpretation that some people aren't entitled to as much flexibility if they don't have parents.

Shared parental leave doesn't work partly because it's too restrictive and full of weird details (like you can't take it if mother changes employer) and also not paid for most people beyond statutory

There are still some biases in the system? After a break up, if you have a child in nursery, the person with the child living with them has the burden of the child care costs to maintain their job/career and still work. I remember paying £750 a month on child care alone and receiving £200 in maintenance from the other partner and really struggling.

My firm is now offering the chance to split maternity leave over more time than just the first year

In Spain it has been recently approved by law an upgrade on the parental leave, increased to up to 4 months (16 weeks), when 10 weeks of them can be fully flexible

great point about being flexible about other demands on those at work including other caring responsibilities and creating a generally supportive and flexible culture to help everyone to feel valued and be at their best.

With birth rates in many western countries plateauing, is it likely to affect progress for greater equality and empathy for parents?

I didn't get the chance to opt for split for my 3. but was off longer with my third as he was just before covid I was off as business was closed and he has bigger bonds with me because of it. my wife can't get him to bed!!!

Questions

Does equal parenting mean dads are eligible for equal maternity/paternity leave?

I am separated from my children's mother and have my girls 50% on a full week on and off basis. I feel I received a lot of prejudice to presume that as a father I simply wasn't as capable and needed to fight very hard in court to have the time with and be as present for my children as I wanted to be and as they deserve. This is despite having been entirely present, doing night feeds, fully hands on etc from birth. I know it's not directly relevant to the topic of equal parenting as I now assume full responsibility and do everything required to make sure my children are cared for, loved and doing everything they need and want to do when they are with me and whilst working a full time job. I just wanted to mention this as it is very nice to hear the message that Dad's need to be respected and valued as a parent and for their role in a child's life.

How to navigate a boss who has no children and is therefore has less empathy when you have to take days off, leave early, etc without feeling guilty or that your job is under threat or you're going to get left behind in terms of development?

Any suggestions on how as a working dad you can influence management/leadership who are working mums to understand different approaches to leadership? how can you influence people to understand what worked for them is different to what works for you?

Based on your interactions and experience, how have you found equal parenting being more 'implemented' widely across the financial services industry or other industries?

How can we include mental difficulties in parental leaves or as a separate item? it is not clear if parental leaves are only for providing care for babies

How do you make your hubby (dad) feel that they are doing a phenomenal job. They need to know how amazing they are, and they are rather focussing on the negative things they are doing... they share everything, they are amazing with their daughter and the list goes on. But your reinforcement of how great they are, isn't working.

My husband feels guilty taking time for himself, because he always wants to share the load... how do you suggest they do that without them feeling guilty...

Top point there. The fact I'm 'hands on' seems a surprise to people when to me it's what I should do as a father.

Feedback / reflections

Thank you so much both. FANTASTIC session. Always get so much out of them, but really loved this discussion.

I will take away so much from this meeting, so many good points raised so I'm sorry but I can't choose just one stand out thing. Thank you so much Paul and Rachel.

This has been such a positive and helpful session, thanks very much!! Fully intending to be a very hands-on dad when my baby comes and it's great to see this much support and tips from everybody on how go about it.

Rachel and Paul, thank you for voicing what many of us believe. This session has been great to listen to. It has also made me realise my company are fair and helpful to equal parenting.

Thank you so much - wonderful discussion, and I will share with our workplace Families Network.

Thank you both - informative and supportive

This has been great, thanks so much.

for me I'm going to 'let go' more and trust my husband

Take away- Need to decide if we actually BOTH want to be equal at home