

Navigating the route to parenthood webinar

Questions

Thank you for your questions posed during our virtual event. Due to time pressure and the excellence of the speakers, we decided to cover the questions posed after the event. Please find following responses to the questions, including where more than one contributor provided a response:

When your headspace ends up getting preoccupied by trying to conceive/IVF/anything else in your personal life related to trying to become a parent - and it is still quite an unspoken about subject. How/who do you talk about it to and how do you suggest you find the balance and support at work needed to go through that journey?

1. Through internal advocacy work (Employee Resource Groups), one person in a senior management position became someone that I grew to trust and build a strong friendship with. He became my work confidant and was my go-to for advice on navigating work related family planning scenarios. He also checked in with me at really appropriately timed intervals (probably coincidence!) - given his internal position, it made me feel supported. He also identified as a member of the LGBTQ+ community and this made me feel even more supported.
2. I would talk to a close colleague who you trust, who you feel safe sharing your story or experience with and who will keep your confidentiality. Check to see what support is on offer at your company - there may be benefits that offer support during your journey, coaching or counselling or relaxation days for example. If you feel comfortable talking to your manager it's better to share your journey earlier than later so they can support you through the highs and lows and make the adjustments that could really help manage the challenges it brings. Plan ahead to any stressful meetings or events that could conflict with your treatment plan and ask for support from your manager during these periods.

What do you wish people had asked you/done when you were going through the worst of it?

1. A simple 'are you ok?' or 'how are you feeling?' always works best - keep it open ended. Saying things like "what's mean for you won't pass you" and similar sayings were never helpful, and in fact, made me feel even more upset at times, because I thought what was meant for me was happening, and then it didn't. Also, probing questions like 'any news?' or 'any update on a new match?' can be painful reminders. Keep it as broad as possible and allow the person to open up if they choose to do so.
2. I think it's worth mentioning here that it's hard for people to ask if they have not experienced this journey themselves. I remember one day a colleague had left a note for me on my desk saying 'I don't have the right words but I know things are hard for you at the moment and I'm thinking of you. I hope these croissants and coffee make it just a tiny bit better'. It was so thoughtful and caring. Sometimes just going for a walk, sharing a coffee or taking time out of the office with a caring colleague for those going through tough journeys can be a gesture that is so appreciated.

At what point should you share that you are on this journey with your management. In a traditional conception, you wouldn't really say anything until 12 weeks after pregnancy or whatever is comfortable. But if you are going through fertility treatments which may have an impact on your emotions and mood. I'm in a same sex relationship and this is known to management so not saying anything feels deceptive as it can't happen "accidentally" hope that makes sense

1. For adoption, you have to do a number of pre-adoption preparation courses and social worker meetings. Generally these happen during business hours and take up quite a lot of time. For this reason, I spoke with my line manager (& HR) at the very early stages. However, had I had the option, I probably wouldn't have spoken about it quite so early, as it can bring a lot of probing questions - which can sometimes be tiring.
2. This makes complete sense. I would encourage you to start a form of communication with your manager as early on as possible to help balance work and fertility treatments.(if you have a manager you feel comfortable with) - it's often better to explain to a manager what you're going through before you need to take time off for appointments etc than retrospectively. Having a supportive manager can take pressure off with events such as stressful meetings and be there to support if the outcome isn't the one hoped for.

What hurts my career less? Having two babies in close succession back to back or taking a couple of years before going on to have a second? I'm 38 so I don't feel I have time to wait.

1. There is sadly no hard and fast rule here and it's a shame that we are still asking these questions as it shows there is still much more work to be done by employers to reassure employees that they deserve to be able to have families without fear of negative work consequences. I think it's important to check your policies, support available and get as informed as possible about what your company offers.

Why might breastfeeding mother's need to be kept away from those undergoing fertility treatment? Do you mean to be sensitive to their journey?

1. Often those going through fertility treatment may find breastfeeding triggering especially if they have just experienced loss and grief. They may need to have some space away from baby reminders to process their difficult emotions (rather than breastfeeding mothers needing to be kept away).