

MEN  
DO IT!  
STORIES of FATHERS  
on PARENTAL LEAVE



CENTER FOR EQUALITY ADVANCEMENT

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# Denmark

*In 2002 Denmark got a new law on parental leave that entitles parents to one year of parental leave. This was a doubling of the length of leave at that time. Simultaneously fathers got the possibility to take some of the last 32 weeks of leave, whereas the weeks that had formerly been reserved men in connection with birth was reduced from 4 to 2 weeks.*

*Today most fathers take these 2 weeks, while only a few make use of their right to take leave further on. This, we think, needs to change. We would prefer for part of the leave to be reserved for the fathers, for instance three months, as in Iceland. But there is no political will to do so in Denmark. Instead we must do everything possible to prepare the way for and inspire fathers to take leave, and mothers to give up*

*some of the leave that many consider to be theirs.*

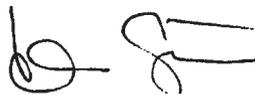
*Here, together with partners from Iceland, Lithuania and Malta in a EU gender equality project, we have taken initiatives to inspire men. Thus, we present a number of good examples from the involved countries on fathers from real life, who have chosen to take leave and are pleased they did.*

*The examples testify that fathers actually find it quite natural to spend time at home with a child, but also that the surroundings do not find it as natural and sometimes see the leave as a kind of relaxing vacation for the men.*

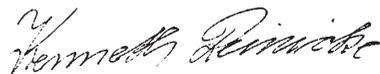
*The men are very excited about following the development of a small child and participating*

*in the little episodes of everyday life, just as they tell about how their leave has affected the relationship to their partner and family life in a positive way. The examples also testify that many fathers are actually unaware of their rights; that the fathers often get lost in the legal provisions and agreements between unions and employers that offer many tortuous nooks and corners.*

*But first of all the stories tell their own tale of fathers about to explore a new world formerly reserved for mothers. It creates a better balance and sense of community and enables fathers to become primary parents on an equal footing with mothers.*



KAREN SJØRUP,  
*Head of the Danish Research Centre on  
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Gender Equality*



PHOTO MIKKEL HERIBA



# Manu Sareen

38 years.

Working as an integration consultant in the Municipality of Copenhagen and is elected to the City Council in Copenhagen.

Has three children, one girl and two boys.

## MANU SAREEN

### *“Extraordinary changes”*

Following my son’s development during my paternity leave was extraordinary. If you can imagine him lying there. Suddenly he lifts his arm and touches me. At the same time he’s watching his own hand and I can see how he closely follows its movement. In that moment, it becomes clear to me that a serious learning process is happening. It’s fascinating. For the first time, he begins to comprehend between the movement of his arm and the feeling of touch. He’s examining the world and it is extraordinary to be part of that process!

My wife laughed at me and said: *“Listen. The other two also did that. You just weren’t there.”* And that wasn’t cool at all. I mean, at that point you’re reminded about what you’ve missed. I can just regret all that I will miss and also all

that I’ve already missed. Nevertheless it’s been cool to be at home with him. I really have to admit that! No doubt I’m much closer to him even though he’s just a little turd. It’s been cool.

The biggest challenge in taking paternity leave has been the economy. Nobody knows what they’re talking about when you ask them and that’s really annoying. Those paternity leave forms that continuously come through the letter box. It’s completely insane. When you’ve received 4 copies of the same document you ask yourself: *“Do you have any clue as to what you’re doing? Come on, get a grip!”*

You also need clear answers. It can be a smaller challenge to pick up the phone and place a call when you’re in the midst of a children’s universe. Especially when you have to wait 5 minutes to be number 10 in line. It almost becomes too much. I know it may sound stupid, but you need to be able to move between the different contexts without being in danger of losing your mind. It’s also been frustrating as a politician. Except that in my party, *“Det Radikale Venstre”* (Social liberals, red.) it’s been cool that there’s been a total support. Maybe exactly because we put so much emphasis on gender equality.

Nevertheless, I would recommend fathers to take paternity leave any time! It’s a really cool experience and it’s also good for the family unity. In the long-term I also believe that it’s a

way to prevent divorce further on in life. Having a child is really tough.

Many of my friends are divorced. I can see that it's typically around the time of having the first child. Being at home with the family, taking care of your child also changes your perspective on the world somewhat. Before you get children, you easily become totally self centered, everything is just about running things smoothly, everything being cool. And you can easily disappear in the belief that you're living a really cool life. I mean, without children, you can get a lot done and you have to learn to adjust yourself to some other conditions of life.

Those of my fellow party members who doesn't have children can more or less freely chose to work 20 hours straight. That kind of liberty I could envy. Same goes when my friends tell me how they spontaneously catch a movie and have a night out in town. Then I can't help but think: "*I wish it was me!*" At that point you can't help feeling low. You really do. In those moments.

And yes, it is cool to go out, and it is cool to disappear into your work, but it doesn't measure up with your kids. When they come running, saying: "*Dad! We knew it was you!*" In that moment you just forget all the other things. Then all the workaholics can laugh if they want to. I couldn't care less! But it's an upheaval. It was for me anyway, a huge one.

Your entire view on emotions and community also change quite a bit. I think people have a tendency to quit too soon. In regard to the consequences on children. I actually do know about this as I've worked with children and still have children in focus of my political endeavours. For example, it's me who listens to them, when they're crying their eyes out. The tale that: "*Ah but that was a happy divorce*" and "*Just look at how Bastian's handling it!*" – come on, I mean, honestly! It has consequences when parents divorce. Of course you shouldn't stick together when love has gone, it's not that I'm talking about. I'm talking about a completely different thing. I'm talking about the times where life with children and all that follows goes sour, but it certainly doesn't justify throwing up your hands in the air!



# Trevor Turner

Jamaican, 44 years.  
Postal employee.  
Has three children.

## 10 TREVOR TURNER

*"I never imagined having a wife and three kids!"*

I find more and more that, what really matters to me, more than anything else, is the kids. Not the career. Seriously - it's all that matters.

I left home when I was seventeen. I was on the road for more than 20 years. I was traveling a lot. Living here and there. I lived in Sweden, Switzerland, Germany and I also lived in America for many years.

I don't know why it changed, why I stopped moving around. I met Margrethe in Thailand 9 years ago. I met her in June and in the beginning of September she was going back to school in Denmark. I couldn't stand the thought of not seeing her again so I came to visit her. And four days after I landed in Copenhagen, we were lying in her bed doing

the wild thing, and she said: "*Let's make a baby*", and I can't believe it myself; I actually said: "*Okay. Why not?*"

When our first child Olivia was three months old I took some weeks off to go to New York and show my family my daughter. Then I started working again, and I never knew about paternity leave. It's not something you focus on, when you don't have kids. After Olivia was six months old, Margrethe told me: "*You can stay home with her that is possible in Denmark*". I was complaining about not seeing her enough, I asked Margrethe: "*Do you think she remembers me?*" So I did it - I stayed home six months with Olivia.

It may sound funny but I realized that the baby makes you sort of rediscover your woman again. You are less likely to give up the marriage because she gave you this beautiful kid. So she becomes even greater. You must remember we had only been together ten weeks before she got pregnant. We became a mother and a father almost at once. So, having this change, this period to bond with your kid, just one on one, being at home with your kid, changing diapers, feeding them - I mean, it's a great period!

I have a friend at work, and in the back of his mind I think that he didn't approve. To be honest! He is really nice, but all the jokes and the "*He, he, he*". He doesn't believe that a man should go on paternity leave. Also, there are

these jokes and a lot of hints. And I am the only man at my post office who has taken paternity leave for 6 months.

In some way it reminds me of my father in law. I remember when I was on leave with Olivia I was like, “*Wow man! This is great!*” We were talking about this experience. I guess I was getting a bit naïve. One of the guys working for him had a kid, and I said to Margrethe: “*This guy is probably going to stay home now.*” But Margrethe looked at me like: “*Are you crazy? My father would never allow that. If that employee wants to go on paternity leave then he must find another job.*” I was blown away – there is no way I would allow that if I were the employer.

Until my wife told me this morning, I had no idea how much I earned. And I had no idea of how much she earned. When I first went to the post office to work - it was my first job in Denmark - then they asked me this: “*What is your bank account number?*” and I said: “*Actually I don't have an account, I just moved there.*” Margrethe helped out and said: “*Oh, well, this is the account number, and they put my salary in her account.*” And they have done that ever since.

It has become an internal joke at work, when my colleagues say that they will call Margrethe. If there is an issue: “*Ah, you must go talk to Margrethe.*” I'm serious; I have never paid one bill since I moved here - she takes care of all

that. Every month she gives me 2000 Kr. If I must go with the kids, I have this money for that. If I need more money, I say, “*Listen I need bum-bum-bum*”, she says: “*Okay, here.*” And it suits me fine. It is a great privilege for me! But when my friends hear about this arrangement they laugh! And Margrethe's dad was shocked. He didn't believe it. He would never have that for himself. At home he controls the economy. He controls everything.

To be a good father I think that bonding is very important. It's like the classic: a father takes his son fishing. You have to do things with your kids. You have to be there with your baby. Change diapers and stuff - that's what being a father is all about! A good father spends time with his kids. You do things with them. You love them. You take care of them. You teach them values and you try to be a good husband. Spend as much time as you can with your kids!



# Morten Lintrup

32 years.  
Senior consultant.  
Has one child.

## MORTEN LINTRUP

*“My boss repeatedly said that he was convinced I would get bored”*

It has been very important for me to take paternity leave, but I had to fight hard for it, as it is not commonly done at my work place. It's about standing by the choices you make. I know it's hard to get paternity leave and job to add up unless you're at a work place where all men take paternity leave. In my case it has been really important for me to say: *“This is what I want, it's a choice I made because now I am a father.”*

I spent quite a few months negotiating my paternity leave. My boss repeatedly said that he was convinced that I would get bored. I think my boss had a hard time understanding the actual reason why I wanted the paternity leave.

I ended up with 8 weeks of paternity leave. I wanted more, my boss wanted less. I had to work one day a week but that had been the plan all along. Because there are clients with whom I have a very close contact. It would just be too much work to change that because of my two months of paternity leave.

I feel that it's about whether you want to be a part of your son's life and get close. I mean, I was ready to put my job at stake for my right to paternity leave! I would have done that if it were necessary. So I was quite clear about that. And I am convinced that my employer also knew that I was serious. He knew that is was not a question of *whether* I should take paternity leave, but for how long it should be.

My colleagues responded differently to my choice of paternity leave. My boss pointed out that I was indispensable and that it was almost unthinkable that my clients could make it without my presence. At first I wanted three months. And it was completely unrealistic, it really couldn't be done. And almost all my colleagues were like: *“But of course you should get paternity leave!”* and *“Really cool and great. Well done!”* The fathers who hadn't taken paternity leave were kind of more wondering: *“You want to do that?”* As my boss did, they sort of asked whether I wouldn't get bored and I answered: *“No, I actually don't think I will.”*

Those who have been the least understanding have actually been a couple of women who

are a bit older. That's really very strange! You can get a little put out by that and think: "*What the hell are you driving at?*" To put it roughly it seems that the group of women who are in their 40's think that it is odd. They are the most prejudiced. In their mind it is really girlish. They are also the ones who say: "*Have a nice vacation*" about the paternity leave. And I think to myself: "*You sure as hell know better than me that paternity leave is not a vacation.*"

Generally I have tried to hit back on the negative remarks from the beginning. In a nice way I've said that this is not how things are. Not being the most sullen in the world, just saying that I don't think it's all right. It's important to prevent a slide. So when the same stupid remarks crops up several times I think we need to get it stopped. So that's what I've done.

After having been on paternity leave, I feel that I've become more focused on getting things done and leaving on time. Before I could run a bit more around because I enjoy working. But I don't enjoy it so much that I would rather spend time with work, than with my family. So I think that what the employer gains from employees talking parental leave is a more focused work effort.

When you've been on paternity leave you also get a more healthy relation to your work. You think: "*It's a work place, it's not more than that.*" Of course I'm loyal, but only to a certain

degree. Some priorities change, which I also think makes quite a good sense. I can almost feel bad when thinking how they didn't change *before*. Apparently it takes a child before you say: "*God, maybe you should bet more on your family than on your work!*"

20 January 2005



# Jakob Alsbirk

28 years.  
University student.  
Has one child.

## 16 JAKOB ALSBIRK

*"It's just incredibly, fantastically cool!"*

For us it's been a good thing to take parental leave together because then we could relieve each other. That's what we think anyway.

There are so many things you need to consider. When there are two of you, one of you has to compromise and say, *"So today I'm the one who will do the extra turn."*

When you're on leave, it's not cool all the time but in general it is really fantastic. I feel it's been a huge privilege and I've been on paternity leave for almost a year now.

So far I think that my paternity leave has taught me to be more tolerant. I mean, there are some periods when the pressure is really on. Some times you don't sleep for 4 days and during times like these you can easily lose your

temper. You could say things you wouldn't have said otherwise. That's when you learn to say to yourself: *"Easy now..."* So you become more tolerant. Not that I've been particularly bad about this in the past, but being on paternity leave has made me even better at everything in perspective. You learn a lot about yourself and about your limits. You also learn to put your own needs aside in a different way than. To be blunt, it's tough, but also very educational!

When it comes to planning, I've learned that it's all about setting realistic goals. We often sit at night and ask ourselves what we would like to get done tomorrow. You have to take it one day at a time. I mean it's unrealistic, for example, to think that tomorrow I'm going to manage to wash all the floors in the apartment, do the vacuuming and buy the groceries, and then go practice with my band in the evening. In my case there has been a lot of acknowledging that I have limits and that I can't do everything. You just have to keep in mind that it can still be a good day!

I don't feel that my choice to take paternity leave triggered that too much surprise within our circle of friends. I think it's about who you are. For example, if I had chosen to prioritise my work instead of my child then my friends certainly would have been surprised. I think they would have wondered been surprised I had chosen not to take paternity leave. The most frequent word I had in reaction to my

communicating my decision to take paternity leave was “cool”. Some even said that they thought that it was great or exclaimed: “*Damn, you’re lucky!*” All in all, it’s been nice and positive!

It’s “masculine” to have children, in a way. It’s like, “*Hey! Just see what I can do!*” Staying at home for a year and going completely soft, that’s another thing, but it had to happen with me.

Many probably see it as a bit trendy to take paternity leave ‘in my part of the town’. Whichever way you see it, being a father on paternity leave has become symbolic. You can’t deny that.

It might sound banal but the coolest thing about becoming a father and taking paternity leave is to be able to see your child develop. It’s just incredibly fantastically cool because I feel that I really know her. Like when she learned to crawl and we could follow the whole process. I was lying completely exhausted, playing with her on the floor on Christmas morning because she had just woken up. And then she suddenly just crawled and it was amazing to witness! Imagine, she could have been at the day care centre that day, or you could have been at work and then came home to hear someone say, “*Eh... she crawled yesterday.*” I guess all children are happier when they’re with their parents but it’s really damned nice that they actually are.

I wouldn’t miss it for the world - getting to know her. And money doesn’t matter. I couldn’t care less. But maybe I’m more like, “*Things will work out.*” Anyway, watching her develop is the greatest thing. No matter how insanely tired you are, no matter how cranky you’ve been the night before because she wouldn’t do this or that, no matter how much you’ve cursed because she wouldn’t fall asleep and no matter how much you feel like throwing her out of the window, it’s not long before it’s all forgotten. After a hard night, when she wakes up and starts crawling again in really cheerfully and bites your nose, your heart just warms up. At times like that it can be hard not to shed a tear.

For example, when she hears the doorbell she thinks it’s so exiting. I can see she thinks it’s really fun because then something new happens. When we’re going out I dress her in her boiler suit and she quivers all over with excitement. All these little rituals are just really nice. It’s so cool to get to know her, and it’s really cool to have these experiences with her, knowing she’s having happy experiences throughout the day. It’s very enriching to feel that you have the ability to make her so happy.



# Lasse Borg

40 years.  
Pedagogue.  
Has one child.

## LASSE BORG

*“No one would ask questions if I was at work”*

Even before my wife got pregnant I knew I would take the paternity leave. I had always wanted to do so in the event of having a child. The decision on how to share the unpaid leave period between me and my wife depended on financial considerations. In a way, she had a right of first choice. I mean, she was the one who decided how long her leave period would be.

My wife was granted six months with full pay but after that she extended it by two more months because she felt that it wasn't enough. She had some vacation she could use so it wasn't too costly money-wise. Then, almost by chance, we discovered that I could have 2½ months with full pay. Actually, it was someone from the payment office at my wife's

workplace who brought it to our attention. That meant that I could now stay with the child while still having the income.

As I was the first male at my workplace (a residence for the mentally disordered) who applied for paternity leave, there was some confusion as to whether it was possible at all for men to take paternity leave.

I was met with quite a lot of resistance and a lot of time was spent checking that I was in fact entitled to take more than 14 days leave. That was really disappointing! It was as if the attitude was that a man applying for paternity leave was not acceptable. Then, when they confirmed that I was entitled to full pay for 12 weeks they almost became angry. I mean, it was like they thought I was using time which rightfully belonged to them. That was how bad it was. It was actually a rather bad experience and of course it had some bearing on my resigning from the company because I thought that it was a bad staff policy.

In order to find out what I was entitled to I browsed the Internet and asked the union for help. But there was also somebody from the Municipality who said: *“You know what? Don't worry about it any longer. Just ask them to call here”*. And suddenly it was over. Just like that. And there were no more problems. My work place actually respected the municipality more than the union or even its own employees!

I think one should remember that one does not only have a career but also a family life. The job will always be there anyway.

I know I'm privileged because it's easy to get a job in my line of work. Of course it depends in which field you work in, but still, you should remember that there's more to life than the work. I've also noticed that it became almost meaningless to me to care for other people the way I did at work when I could be taking care of those who were most important in my life and making sure that they were happy.

I actually think that I'm more busy now that I'm on paternity leave than I used to be when I was working. I don't mean to say that that's negative by any means. I think it's very cool and I really like it! I feel very privileged to have the opportunity to be with my daughter. I find it very eventful! I really enjoy just looking at her and seeing her interact with other people and children.

When my wife Rikke was at home and Filippa was distressed she would look for her mother. When Rikke returned to work that changed. Now I think it's getting to be more evenly balanced.

I've definitely discovered that taking paternity leave as a man is a totally different experience. I also think that there must be a lack of understanding about what it is seeing that so few men take it. It's very important and I

believe that apart from being important for the father, it's also important for the child to experience being with the father too...

I would like to say that I don't care about the fact that taking care of children is traditionally a woman's job but in reality I do. Rationally I can see that it's crap and that it's a culturally-determined thing. In our case it was just a smarter move for me to take care of our daughter. And I actually like it! But still I kind of need to believe that I'm a pioneer.

I guess it has something to do with knowing that I'm not the one who brings in all the money, who's away from home and comes back with the stuff. But actually I also think that other people's reaction is influencing my attitude. I mean, nobody would ask questions if I was at work, would they?

The reactions I've met have been quite different. There's a group of people who think it's strange for me to take paternity leave: "*Why does he have to do that?*" They almost think it's wrong. And then there's a group of people who think: "*That's fine. If that's what he wants to do*". But you can tell that they still don't quite get it. And finally there's a group of people who think that it's quite alright and even think that they might do it too. That's what they say, anyway.

There's probably more people who think it's cool. But there are also quite a few who don't

understand it, and that can get to you. In a way I was also a little embarrassed that such things could affect me but I've also realised how widespread these attitudes are. Seen in this light, maybe it is not surprising that they did affect me.

From my point of view it's a too enriching experience to give up on it. My daughter is my first priority and that's nice. It's calming in a way. But she is definitely my priority.

# Iceland

*The reconciliation of family and work, increased participation of men in the caring for young children, and the equal status for women and men in the labour market are the main objectives of the Act on parental leave, which took effect in Iceland on January 1st, 2001. It is safe to say that this Act is a radical approach to achieving gender equality in Iceland and the greatest advance for many years. And it has been a successful approach – about 90 per cent of men take advantage of their right to paternity leave. This means that men are more active participants in the caretaking and rearing of their children, which gives them an opportunity to develop a close relationship with their children from birth.*

*As can be seen in the interviews in this book men regard this as a great opportunity and treasure the time that they have spent with their young children. But the paternity leave also contributes to gender equality in the labour market. When the father is more present in the home, as he can be while on paternity leave, women have an easier time re-entering the labour market after giving birth. It can therefore be said that the paternity leave contributes to a balance “inside”, in the home, as well as “outside”, in the labour market.*

*I also believe that the paternity leave is an important factor for the fertility rate in Iceland in the future and thus a sound economy in the future.*

*I am convinced that the money spent on maternity and paternity leave has been well spent. Certainly, large sums are involved, but I see this as an investment, rather than an expense, and one of the best investments in the future of the nation, from both a social and an economic point of view.*



ÁRNI MAGNÚSSON,  
*Minister of Social Affairs in Iceland*





# Dagur B. Eggertsson

32 years.  
Doctor and member  
of the Reykjavík City Council.

**DAGUR B. EGGERTSSON**

*“Our view of what is considered ‘normal’ changes incredibly quickly”*

I am thoroughly enjoying my parental leave. I think it is an extremely good idea. Even if I had not had the option of taking the parental leave, I would still have made sure that I spent some time with my daughter. It would have been during summer vacation or during a day off now and again during the week with some help from her grandparents, but I’m sure I would have made time to be with her.

Nowadays it seems incredible that parents used to manage with only six months of parental leave. We tend take these six (not to mention the nine) months of parental leave for granted!

It was never really an option for me not to take the parental leave. It wasn’t even a

decision but rather something I knew I would do all along. The real decision was whether my partner, Arna, and I would spend some time on leave together at home, or whether we would be taking time off separately to be with the baby. We ended up taking time off separately. The reason for this was mainly that my daughter was born in May and I knew I wouldn’t have had much time to be with her over the summer months. Besides, the first months undeniably revolve around the mother and the child. My partner was breast feeding my daughter at the time so it was all about them – with me doing a kind of sideshow!

For these reasons we decided that I would go on parental leave when Arna returned to work so we wouldn’t have had to solve the problem of daycare during this time.

It would be very difficult at this stage for you to convince me to give up my parental leave period. It is a privilege - an amazing opportunity which has opened up so many possibilities. It is also good for the father’s relationship with the mother. Mothers seem to turn into know-it-alls with kids. Like how they think they should be the boss in the kitchen even if their partner is just as good as a cook as they are! So personally I think it’s important that we are on an equal footing when it comes to caring for the baby. I think it’s good that the father can spend some time alone with the child. That way he can have a say in how the child is brought up. I feel that Arna and I are

on an equal footing now and that I can voice my opinion on how she does things for our daughter just like she can. To me, it is absolutely necessary that I care for my daughter my way and make it work.

What changed during the parental leave period was that we moved our daughter's bed next to ours and my partner and I changed sides so that I would be next to my daughter. I used to take care of the baby at night as Arna had started working again and wasn't breastfeeding her anymore by this time.

I was surprised to find that I lost interest in certain things which I would normally keep track of – like politics. Sometimes I forget to read the papers, and I don't even notice! I had expected to stay on top of things like work during the leave period - thinking about work the way you usually do when you're away for a while. But it was quite the opposite. I lost touch even though things weren't as hectic at home as they would normally be at work.

The 75% leave options has its advantages and disadvantages. It's good to keep contact with the outside world and not isolate yourself but what happens is that people take advantage of you and will contact you to ask for your advice on things. They will send you emails with requests without any respect for the fact that you're not actually at the office. Unfortunately, it's taken me a month to sort this situation out. You understand the problem as, where I work,

every day can cost up to a million or two but you really have to stick to your principles and not give way. Although I have to admit that I have sometimes had people come over here for coffee and a chat.

I think this experience makes you become a better father. However, I can also imagine that in some circumstances it could be hard for some people to take parental leave. There are good fathers who would like to take parental leave but cannot. It's not simple or easy but I do think that taking parental leave to be with your child makes everyone a better person. I also don't think that there are any traditional male stereotypes which keep men from doing this. In today's society, our views on what is considered 'normal' change incredibly quickly. Nowadays, it's more likely to be considered a bit 'abnormal' if you *do not* take paternity leave!

*27 January 2005*



# Gudmundur Steingrímsson

32 years.  
Musician, writer  
and TV show host.

## 28 GUDMUNDUR STEINGRÍMSSON

*"It's important that you shoulder the responsibility"*

The mother of my child and I parted ways after the baby was born. We had agreed that I would go on parental leave right after her maternity leave period had ended and she had to go back to school. So for the time being I take care of the baby every weekday, during daytime, and that's how it will be until spring.

I live very close to where the baby's mother lives and our arrangement is that I wake up at around 7.30 am, go over to my ex-partner's house and take the baby or she brings it to me. Yesterday my daughter was sick so I just spent the day at their home, feeding her, playing with her, letting her take her nap and hanging out until 6pm when the mother got home from school. Then I started doing things for my freelance work. I try to work as much as I can in the evening.

Under normal circumstances, that is, when she's not sick, I just take her places and take her on errands with me, to the bank and so on. She really enjoys going to visit my mother in the mornings. There's another baby of her age there and they enjoy playing together. Sometimes my friends and I, who have children of a similar age, meet and hang around with the baby carriages downtown and at the café.

We have a joint custody, the mother and I. We will find a different arrangement when she gets elder and starts day care. After that, I will not have her in the daytime. She'll be in day care and we'll find another way to share the time with our daughter.

I love being on paternity leave. I think it's primarily about spending good time with the baby, as much time as possible with the baby, which I find invaluable. I also think that it will be important for my daughter as time goes by to have strong emotional ties with both her father and mother. It's also about shouldering the responsibility. It was important to me that people knew that I wasn't going to be one of those fathers who shirk responsibility even though the situation with my partner was the way it was. Besides, I find the time that I spend with my daughter so rewarding and relaxing that I couldn't do without it.

We enjoy each other's company and I find it easy to feed her and put her to bed. I can take her out too. These are very good

moments. I often just think about things when I'm with her and, since I write for a living, I am often thinking about that while I take care of the baby. This really isn't that complicated as long as everything is fine and the child is healthy. A child needs to sleep. She poops and needs to be fed. It's a great fun reacting to such simple messages - doing what needs to be done and fulfilling her needs. It's great to feel useful and these tasks are more simple and clear than many others in life.

I think it's important to develop a trusting relationship with the baby from the beginning. I've always made sure I was there. When she was breastfeeding, I would sometimes take my daughter away for a couple of hours. I always felt that it was important that she has complete trust in me too and that once I moved out, which had been already decided upon, that this trust wouldn't be severed in any way. I continue to build this relationship by meeting her everyday and spending time with her.

People sometimes stress how difficult it is to take care of children and I know what they mean. Children can be difficult and try your patience. But I don't think it is so difficult. I think it is more fun than difficult and to tell the truth, I sometimes think that it is much more difficult to deal with grown-ups than children. If I have to mention something that might be regarded as somewhat difficult then it's maybe this attitude that other people have towards men with babies. It's like people think that men can be little more than babysitters,

minding the child for a few moments while the mother is away.

I get asked questions like: "How does it work when the mother's not there?" And sometimes people add a sorrow face like they think that having to have the baby with me must be some incredible burden or like I must have more important things to do and I must be really generous to keep the baby during the day. Another reaction I get is that it must be really difficult for me because I am a man and therefore hardly capable of handling the child in the same way as the mother. But these are just old-fashioned attitudes and this is really minimal. It's still there though, this attitude towards fathers. They shove up in minor details in everyday interaction with people. But I've been rather determined from the very beginning to build trust between me and the baby and to take care of her all by myself and do all the little things like putting her to bed, changing her, feeding her and all that. So I have really ignored these voices, as one should.

Of course I've learned a lot from becoming a father. Existential things. Things about life and living. It's good to have something to focus your attention on and not be the centre of your own universe the way many people say we men are. There comes that moment in every man's life when he has to realise that the world does not just revolve around him.

*8 February 2005*



# Gudni Indriðason

40 years.  
Executive director.

## GUÐNI INDRÍÐASON

*“My daughter likes to be with me and actually seeks me out”*

A regular day for me while on parental leave revolved mainly around tending to the baby and doing chores around the house. My wife was working 50% of the time, and of course the dishes have to be done, the food has to be cooked and many other things involved in running a home have to be taken care of. The rest of the time I would spend with the baby – playing or just spending time with her.

I didn't run into any problems. The chores are neither complex nor difficult. If something was beyond me, I'd just ask my wife. She was very much in favour of me doing this. She was determined to have me participate in the child's upbringing and to have me get to know and understand her. Spending time on parental leave

did help me get to know our daughter. Usually I understand what she's upset or complaining about. Of course, she can't communicate but I can still sense what's going on with her.

I never considered *not* taking parental leave. My wife and I decided that she would take her three months and the three months we could share, and then I'd take my three months. We wanted to stretch the time out as much as possible, for the baby's sake. We did discuss the possibility that I take some of the shared time, but in the end we decided that my wife takes it as I make more money than her.

I'm not sure I have learned something new: that I've learned something that I can use elsewhere in life. What is left after this experience is a stronger bond between me and my daughter, and that is what is so rewarding. Actually, when the parental leave was over, I wished I could have had a little more time. It passed very quickly - incredibly quickly!

I wouldn't hesitate to encourage all fathers to take parental leave. I recommend that they take some time to stay at home with the baby and get to know each other. Ultimately, it's beneficial for the whole family. I think it's especially important that the father spends some time alone with the baby. It's different if the mother is at home with them. She will end up doing more for the baby. It's just a human nature. It happens. But if the father is alone with the baby, then the mother can't

help out and he just has to take care of things himself!

Overall, I think people thought that it was a perfectly obvious and normal thing for me to take parental leave. People overall just think it's natural that men use this option. There was no negativity - at my workplace or elsewhere. In general, there were no problems related to the leave. The only exception was when my wife went back to work and I stopped. At that time our income went down by about half of what it used to be. But, things worked out in the end. Money is not important. You prioritise and figure out the money part later on. In the end, it wasn't really a problem. We had enough to get by. It wasn't that hard.

I think the only thing that would have prevented me from taking parental leave would have been the loss of my income. Then I probably wouldn't have done it. I wouldn't have done it if the income was significantly less either. A 20% decrease isn't such a big deal but it can start to matter if it's any more than that.

What I did notice sometimes, was that people were envious that I was taking the three months' paid leave. You could see that they would have liked to have the option to go away for three months and think about something other than work. But there's a very high awareness of parental leave options. Now it's so common that people don't have time to

raise their children that finding time to stay home and get paid to do it is just fantastic!

My wife and I have clearly grown closer through this experience. It had a positive impact on our relationship. My daughter likes to be with me and actually seeks me out. I don't think she differentiates between her mother and myself when we go over to pick her up if she's crying. I don't think she has a preference. If I've been at work all day, she's happy to see me. If her mother's been at work all day, she'll run to her when she sees her. It's a lovely feeling that finally you're home.

It would be a great idea to extend the parental leave period to one year and keep the same three divisions; that is, three periods of four months. Nine months are too short a time. At least, for me they went by really quickly. Incredibly quickly. Ultimately, it's a matter of opinion. My wife and I want to raise the baby ourselves. We haven't even started looking into daycare or anything like that. We want to keep it this way for the time being. My wife is working half-time and I'm working full time. So she works when I'm at home. It's worked so far and hopefully it will continue to work for a while yet.

*18 April 2005*



# Kristján Kristjánsson

43 years.  
Reporter.

## 34 KRISTJÁN KRISTJÁNSSON

*“Our roles in taking care of the baby change depending on who is spending more time with him”*

My days on parental leave are all very similar. You could say my son and I just hang out! He falls asleep between 10 and 11 in the morning - depending on what time he woke up earlier. Then he sleeps for two to three hours while I try to do something useful with my time. After a couple of hours or so he wakes up and from then on I just spend time with him. I hold him and carry him on my shoulder. My wife is great at multitasking and doing other things while she's taking care of our son but I can't do that. I find it uncomfortable to do other things while I'm tending to him. That's our time together and that's how I want it to be.

Housework, by definition, is never done. It's always the same cycle, over and over again.

You're never finished. When you clean up, you're just moving stuff from one place to another. And it's all a bit like that. It's no fun, and obviously a lot more work than your paid job – no question about that! It takes time to get used to. At least it took me some time as it's so different to what I usually do. I suppose if my job was a bit more relaxed, then this might be less of a change.

I wouldn't call any aspect of what I'm doing “trouble.” It's more a matter of “tuning” or “switching gears”. In some ways, we've always practiced a traditional division of labour at home, with my wife playing the role of the supervisor. But there's nothing that I'm not allowed to do at home, or things which I won't do when they need to be done. Like not being allowed to touch the laundry. It's not like that in our home.

What we certainly noticed was the lower income – the 20% (and more in my wife's case) that we lost. But we made it work. We just made sure we planned and prioritised what we needed.

It's not like this is my first child. It's the fourth so I'm not going through this for the first time. Nothing is new and it's not at all like the way it was with the first child. For instance, you don't worry as much as you used to. Of course you always learn something – even if it's just how severely you've underestimated the work that goes into it! I guess that's what

I've learnt by staying at home seeing that this is the first time I took parental leave to stay with one of my children.

Of course I would emphasize that the parental leave option gives you the opportunity to be much more involved in your baby's, and your family's, daily routine. This is very different from being in contact mainly by telephone – which is what tends to happen. The main opportunity parental leave offers is that you can get to know your child, spend time with him and understand his needs.

Of course, when my wife was breastfeeding him, my son preferred his mother, especially in instances when he was particularly upset. But now that situation has been reversed. Now I'm the one he wants to be with most of the time. When he wakes up at night, I'm the one who picks him up. This is partly because he's being weaned off breast milk, and partly because this is what he seems to want right now. So this is the way the roles are at the moment, but I'm sure they will change several times depending on who is spending more time with him at any point in time.

I'm not particularly affected by the idea that child rearing is primarily a woman's job. It did not discourage me from taking the paternity leave at all. You tend to miss out on many things in life if you hang on to old prejudices and ideas. In my experience everybody was receptive to my decision. There were no

problems with my colleagues or supervisors and I didn't get frowned upon. Why should I be? What's abnormal about a father taking care of his child?

*11 April 2005*



# Pórhallur Áрни Ingason

40 years.  
Designer.

## PÓRHALLUR ÁRNI INGASON

*“The baby is always trying to tell you something”*

What is different about an adopted child is that you need to work at building a bond with her. It doesn't come naturally the way it does with a natural newborn child. You have to put an effort into bonding with her. She came to Iceland on October 21 at twenty months of age.

So far, it's been going really well. She really enjoys hugging, which I gather is not common. We had prepared for every possibility. She's started talking quite a bit. We've spent a lot of time with her, taking time to look at books, to build vocabulary and to bond. It's been very rewarding for me. I've always enjoyed children

and I've been waiting a long time for this, so possibly I enjoy it even more than other fathers do.

It's also different when you take paternity leave to spend with a newborn. It's probably not as busy for fathers of newborns as it is for me. She's making so much progress every day that you really have to notice it. If the baby is very young when you're on your three months paternity leave, you'll maybe see her start to hold her head up or something like that. Then you have to go back to work and you don't get to see her when she's making really big progress. We feel we're very lucky to be able to spend time with her at this stage. We're getting to spend time with her and possibly even help her through some very important developmental stages - possibly more so than we would have if we'd gotten her in a different way.

The paternity leave option is fantastic, of course. It's so rewarding, especially since, like I said, she's just developing so quickly. You see things change from day to day, like how she pronounces her words more clearly. We had decided a long time ago that I would take paternity leave because we were told we'd need to be on vacation to establish a certain level of communication and to be

able to bond with the child. We even kept the extended family away for the first few weeks. Not that they weren't allowed to visit - just not a whole lot.

The only thing about being on paternity leave is that you lose 20% of your salary, and that really hurts. We're losing good money at the moment. It's probably the most difficult part of it all and people probably don't realize this before they actually have to face it. I doubt most people have figured out what paternity leave costs the family. Everybody is buying a house - like we are - and it was really expensive to bring our daughter home. However, everything else about the paternity leave has been really good.

As I said, with an adopted child, you really have to work at the bonding. But, once again, our situation is a bit different because our child is older. If you've been around the baby since she was born, it might happen automatically. In our case you have to work at it by holding her, touching her and looking out for her. Actually, she's really good in that she's been sleeping well so we don't have to worry about that. She has a certain amount of freedom in the home which is good because she's really active and a very cheerful child who doesn't like to be restrained too much. But now she really

enjoys being held and cuddled. I think it's this feeling that she loves me that has given me the greatest satisfaction.

My paternity leave has also strengthened my relationship with my wife. Of course, the fact that we're so happy to have our daughter and that she's doing so well strengthens our relationship. We had prepared for everything, because it's so difficult to adopt a child and it can go either way but in our case we got a very healthy and active little girl who seems to be developing well. It's been a lot easier than we expected. No worries in that regard.

Ever since we got her, she's had a mischievous look on her face. Sometimes she just plain teases us! I think her sleeping pattern shows how close we've gotten to each other. In the beginning, she used to comfort herself before falling asleep by sucking her hand instead of a pacifier and rubbing her eyebrows, but before too long, she had transferred this to us. This showed us that she had started to trust us and I think that her being so active shows that she trusts her environment. We play together a lot.

When you've been waiting 10 or 15 years to become a dad, the feeling when it happens is incredible. It's indescribable. A good dad has

to make sure that his baby is comfortable.  
He also needs to listen to to his child. You  
always have to listen to your baby, no matter  
how young. She's always trying to tell you  
something. You have to be able to sense if  
something is not okay. I think that is the  
most important thing.

*9 May 2005*

# Lithuania

*Making it possible to reconcile family and work life is one of the main preconditions for the success of gender equality policies. It is not only women who face the problem of allocating enough time for both the family and the career. In the society, where men are expected to be the main breadwinners in the family, children get little of fathers time.*

*A child needs the attention of both parents in the early childhood already: some things are learnt from a father, some things are learnt from a mother. Despite the fact that Lithuanian laws guarantee fathers the right to paid paternity leave until the child is one year old, only 1,2 % of them utilize this possibility. The research commissioned in EU reveals that the majority of fathers do not*

*take the paternity leave due to the negative impact on family's financial situation or their career. The others fear "to get stuck" at home and limit their social life. Quite frequently fathers say they never knew they had a right for leave.*

*Despite the latter reasoning the biggest obstacles in this regard are to be drawn from gender stereotypes. A lot of men regard childcare as an exceptionally „feminine business“. We need to mention as well that a number of women share these attitudes, feeling that they ought to be the main bearers of the household. We have to acknowledge though that the ever changing economic life, competition in the labour market, challenges*

*of IT society require inevitable changes in social roles of women and men.*

*The most important thing today is to get rid of our fears. The fears to be unmasculine or unfeminine. There is no doubt that women can be great professionals in their work. It is now the time for men to prove that they are great fathers and family people. This project and the research done leave no space for doubt: it is natural for men to be good fathers! Having read the stories of fathers who have been on paternity leave, you will easily get convinced of that yourselves.*



AUŠRINĖ BURNEIKIENĖ,  
*Lygių galimybių kontrolierė*





# Darius Paipolas

30 years.

Manager.

Has three kids – Erika, Edmundas, Darija.

## DARIUS PAIPOLAS

*“What can I say? It’s great!”*

This is the way my daughter and I spend our day together. She usually wakes up between 11 and noon. She likes to have her breakfast first and then play around with her diapers off for about half an hour. She likes to do her little exercises without the diapers on. She is just as happy doing her exercises on her own! Once that is done, we go out. We’ll generally stay outside for not more than three hours then we’ll go home and play together. She likes to roll around and play with her legs. It’s a good game for her.

If my daughter wakes up later than noon she’s usually feeling great and is in a very good mood. She is generally not hungry and wants nothing more than for me to spend some time with her. She’s now reacting when I speak to

her. She especially likes words like “elephant” (*“dramblis”* in Lithuanian) and “monkey” (*“beždžionė”*) – generally words which have the letters “r” or “ž” in them. When she falls asleep I’ll do some cleaning although I do not like to leave her on her own – especially after she has eaten. I’d say we generally have a very good time together!

Mother comes home in the afternoon. She’ll take over and give me some time to do my own stuff telling me: *“Go and have some rest.”* So that’s when I go to the garage and do some pottering around. I am the kind of person who does not like being still. I’m always on the go. I’ve recently begun building the family albums. (My wife is a photographer.) It relaxes me to do things like this and my wife makes sure I get a break from taking care of our daughter and get some time to relax. What can I say? It’s great!

My wife has commented that I’m calmer now than I used to be when I was juggling more than one job at a time. Before, if I had problems at work, I wouldn’t sleep so well so I was constantly tired. Now my wife and I sleep with our daughter and our relationship is so much better. Our baby has been a very good thing for us. Life goes on and it’s great!

I would say that since our daughter was born, we grew closer. At first the older kids were a bit jealous but now we all get together to chat in the evenings. No-one can imagine life

without our little Darytė. Every person in the family makes sure they spend some time with her and play with her everyday.

As for the housework: I get up in the morning. (I'm not a big sleeper.) I make breakfast for the kids and do the laundry if there is any. When I need to relax a bit, I'll go to my garage, but I'll never let my wife do the chores on her own. If I have some spare time I'll wash the windows or the floor. As far as the traditional division of labour goes, my wife won't hammer nails but she does sharpen the kitchen knives if she needs to!

It was my idea to take paternity leave. The senior management was cutting our salaries and my wife and I thought that it would be better if I was the one who went on paternity leave. The idea was that I spent some time with my child and worked in my free time. (I offer housing renovation services.) It is not a burden for me to stay with the baby. I used to work a lot. I used to have two jobs and used to come home late at night. I was not getting to see my children grow up at all.

Now I'm involved in my family's life. My wife asks me how this or that should be done. She consults me. I have no problems doing most of the chores and taking care of the baby. I believe both the mother and the father should look after the baby. They should share the responsibility 50:50. Both the mother and the father should love their

children and make time to be with them. In our case that's exactly the way it is. I stay with the baby for one week and my wife will stay with her the following week.

If need be, I will take paternity leave again. I would recommend it to other men but I would also recommend that they have some hobby that they enjoy so that they can get to relax during this period.

I miss the people I worked with. We used to get along really well. When I asked for paternity leave, I felt that there was a negative reaction from the administration. Some managers asked me why I was leaving and I simply said that we needed someone to stay with the baby and as my wife earns more money, we had decided that I would do it. The director general approved my leave application but maybe he was worried that there was no-one to take my place for a while.

Other people, especially the mothers of my friends really supported me. They seem to think that if a father stays with his child, he knows what it means to give birth. Some of my friends have now gotten used to the fact that I stay at home with my baby. I think one of my friends is even considering taking the paternity leave himself as his wife will give birth in March.

I came across some other negative reactions from other people too. I know that some say

that I am controlled by my wife but we pay no attention to such comments. We just get along very well. Some of my friends now get angry with me because I'm spending too little time with them. I don't go fishing with them and don't make big plans like I used to. Some people think that friends should be your first priority – ahead of the family – but I disagree.

What is a good father? I don't know much about how other fathers are. Maybe a good father is one who gives his family everything and does his best to make his family happy. He does his best to make sure that his children are fed and dressed. What else can I say? I think my father was like that. I had three brothers and sisters but my father would treat us all equally. For example, when one of us had their birthday he would always buy presents for all of us but pay more attention to the birthday child.

I do not know what other fathers in my situation think but for me it is a pleasure to be with my child. If my daughter wakes up earlier, we'll go to the market, look around and maybe buy some crawlers. I sometimes find that some of the older people will stare at us. Maybe it is because it is still uncommon to see a father looking after his children. Sometimes I'll walk past the police station with the baby and they'll sit on the steps, smoking and giving me strange looks. Sometimes we'll visit my wife at work and her clients will say something to the effect that it

must be a big sacrifice to take care of the baby or, alternatively, that I am there because I want to brag about it. I guess it is a strange concept for some people.

(Cradles the baby making a baby voice):

“Everybody loves me. Grandmothers, grandfathers, all show how much they love me because I am the smallest now...”

*7 February 2005*



# Edvinas Dubinskas

29 years.  
Engineer.  
Has one child - Justinas.

## EDVINAS DUBINSKAS

*“He learns new things and does new things every day and I want to be a part of that”*

My paternity leave period will end when our child is one year old. It was my idea to take paternity leave as I know that my input is appreciated at work and that my job would not be in danger if I stayed away for a while. I know that they will look forward to my return. I still communicate with people at work and I have maintained some very good relationships with them.

Under our current legislation, a person can hold a couple of jobs or, if they have the opportunity to, they can work under contract. In our case, my wife and I take it in turns to stay with the baby. Usually I stay with him for half a day, but this can vary depending on how my wife’s working day is. Of course, there is a limit to how effectively I can substitute the

mother – especially during the first six months when she is breastfeeding.

My wife is a dentist. In our case I decided to take paternity leave because she cannot stay away from work for too long. She still spends quite a lot of time at home with our child. As I already mentioned, a child naturally needs her mother during the first few months. I think that in Lithuania, it is generally beneficial for a mother to take maternity leave because of her personal employability as well as because of her health.

My day with our baby must be very similar to that of others in the same circumstances. I feed him at certain times, keep him clean, change his diapers, etc. During the first six months we were doing very ordinary everyday things; namely, sleeping, eating, bathing, getting changed, etc. There are many more things you can do during the second six months. For instance, you can take him out during this time.

The most pleasant time is when the child has slept and eaten well. Then we can play, talk and I can show him things. When he is calm, fed and clean, he does not need anything except human contact. When you communicate with a child you should first of all introduce him to the environment. Show him what is around him, what is important and what we are doing there. You talk to him about what he touches

or puts in his mouth and you simply enjoy your time with him. You feel even happier when he does something. The best time is when you communicate with him.

I feel best when I do something on my own and have my wife come home and see that everything is taken care of and has been done well: like, for example, when I prepare the meals on my own. It is very fulfilling and I feel I am being independent. Of course, the worst thing is when I do something wrong and I know that my wife would have done it differently. This kind of thing makes it a disappointing day: not because of the child but because of my own poor performance.

Nowadays, if I do not spend the majority of the day with my son I feel as if I have missed out on something. He learns new things and does new things every day and I want to be a part of that. Not being with him is sure to be a loss in some way. I believe that whatever the situation, you should spend as much time as you possibly can with your child - even if you can't take paternity leave. It all depends on the family in question. The father does not necessarily have to take paternity leave. Sometimes he can still spend a lot of time with the child without doing this.

Each day I spend with my child is useful and I discover something new. I get to know my child better. I understand what his movements and expressions mean. I get to understand him

better and I believe that my presence gives a lot to him too. When I am with him I control my behaviour so that I can teach him better. In a way, the child sees my wife as a 'milk machine', so to speak. He's more likely to want her to go to him when he wants to cry or cuddle or when he is tired. When he wants to play, he comes to me.

I do not miss my work too much. The days spent with my child are more even and consistent whereas work puts me in a variety of stressful situations – situations where I need to take a quick decision or do something very quickly. There are no comparable situations when spending the day with my son and I certainly do not miss the stress. I feel better when the day is clear and consistent. Then you can work and rest and take pleasure in what you are doing.

When I applied for paternity leave I realised how much I am appreciated at my workplace. Nobody was hostile to me there even though I did not make it clear whether I would be going back or not. My colleagues were, and still are, friendly towards me. Other people, mainly women, who see me spend time with my baby every day seem to think that I am an excellent father.

From the family's point of view a good father should be more like the mother. I mean, he should have the same level of responsibility and give his child the same amount of

attention that his mother does. From a child's perspective, I suppose, a good father is one who allows him more and reprimands him less, even though he would only be doing this to educate him.

I do not believe that caring for my child is a challenge to my masculinity because a day spent with my baby is similar to a day spent at work. I still need to plan things and to do tasks to the best of my ability. It is only the environment and the end products that are different. But it does not make one less masculine. When you're taking care of your child you do not feel "masculine" or "feminine". You feel like a father. Usually, when you are on your own with a child and your wife is at work, you take care of the house and do the chores and time goes by so quickly, one could say there really is not much time left for anything else.

I do not think that I fit in with the traditional image of a man in Lithuania. I may fit into the norm in other countries but the social environment and financial situation in Lithuania is different to that in other countries. Employers generally adopt a different attitude with women. They constantly ask whether she is pregnant or intends to go on maternity leave. The woman is generally expected to take half a year parental leave but this is definitely not expected of the man.

The attitude of a father towards paternity leave is influenced by the needs of his wife or life partner. He will keep in mind how busy she is, how she feels and how tired she is. After that, it all becomes natural. It is not enough to wish to spend time with your child. You need to plan and co-ordinate with the mother and take into account whether she is busy or tired and whether she has the opportunity to take care of your child. On the other hand, sometimes the financial situation determines everything and does not leave the father a choice at all.

*10 February 2005*



# Erlandas Karlikauskas

35 years.  
Ship technician.  
Has two children.

## ERLANDAS KARLIKAUSKAS

*“My family is the most important to me”*

I decided to take the paternity leave for a two reasons. Firstly, it was better for me to stay at home as my salary is higher than that of my wife and the paternity allowance is calculated on the basis of your salary. My wife works for a state institution but she also has a business certificate and does manicures. It would have been difficult for her to stay at home for a whole year as she needs to retain her clients and she may have lost them if she was away for a year.

Secondly, when I went out on paternity leave in April, they were reorganising the company. I probably wouldn't have lost my job but my salary would have been reduced and it is expensive to bring up a child. You buy him fruit and want to pamper him a bit. I thought about it and suggested to my wife that I take

some paternity leave. We talked it through and agreed that it would be the best thing. At first it was so stressful! Some days when my daughter cried for no apparent reason, I just wouldn't know what to do. I would be holding her and she starts crying – sometimes for two hours for no particular reason! That was very stressful but gradually I got used to her and started to understand what she wanted. Now it is quite easy. Really easy. If I have to go somewhere and leave my daughter with my mother-in-law, I'll ask what time she ate and slept and I know how she'd been.

She is so interesting! Sometimes she stands by the mirror (we have a big one) for 15 minutes and hugs and kisses her own reflection. She also likes to take all her brother's pencils and put them back again. She can do that three or four times in a row. We also spend a lot of time outside. She is always near me if I'm doing some housework – repairing something or doing some chores. She practically sees everything I do. She walks around us in the walker. Now she is big and plays on her own.

We live together with my parents-in-law. Our entrances are separate but we live very close to each other. The house is old so whenever I need to repair the roof, or do something around the house, my mother-in-law looks after my daughter. When my wife gets back from work, we bathe our daughter together or sometimes my wife will do it on her own. Then my son and wife go to sleep and I stay with my

daughter and put her to sleep. Sometimes we stay awake till 2 am. I'm the one who gets up to look after her during the night.

My wife often comes home during her work breaks. If she needs to, she can even take an hour's break. In the summer I used to go for a walk with my daughter and we would visit my wife at work. We would spend a lot of time together and my wife knows everything about our daughter.

I talk about my daughter with my wife every day. I tell her what happened during the day and what our daughter learnt. Sundays are our days. My wife does not work on Sundays. Then we are all together. We spend time with both kids. We go for a walk or to the seaside.

I keep noticing things that I had not noticed before. I realise now that there is nothing more important than the family. I did not see this in the past. I did not even think about it. It is so great to be able to see your child grow up. For example, I was there when my child first smiled, when she had her first tooth, when she learnt how to sit and stand up. It is a pity that I did not see my son grow up. I used to work on a shift which gave me a day off every three days. When I came home he would be asleep and when I woke up he would still be asleep. I actually saw very little of him during that time.

But I love both of my children and pamper them a lot. When my son was little I would

not be at home for long periods of time but later I got to spend a lot of time with him. I took him fishing once. Now we either go together or he goes on his own. This summer he wanted to sail with the fishers, so I stayed with him for the whole day. I try to meet the needs of my child. Of course, when my daughter was born, I started spending less time with him and now the mother spends more time with him. Maybe he is angry with me about this. When he comes home from school (he is in the second grade), I always ask what he has for homework and he says: "*Nothing.*" Later that evening, however, he will do his homework with my wife. He loves his sister though. He plays with her and looks after her.

When I took paternity leave, my colleagues at work were very amused. All my colleagues at work are women. Sometimes, I would need to go into work while on paternity leave and they would ask me: "*How is our young mother doing?*" But they got used to it. It is not usual to see a man taking care of a small baby in our country. But I really do not care what others think. My family is the most important thing to me!

*2 February 2005*



# Gytis Matulaitis

28 years.

Machine operator.

Has two children – Miglė, Tauras.

## 54 GYTIS MATULAITIS

*“When I go to work is when I miss my child the most”*

This is our second child. Our first daughter went to kindergarten as my wife was working at the time. When my wife took maternity leave to be with our second child, our first daughter stayed at home with her for half a year. She would cry because she missed the children in the kindergarten. When my wife’s six months were up, she told me: *“Maybe you should stay with the baby while our daughter goes back to the kindergarten. It would keep her busy.”* She tried to convince me for two whole weeks. She told me to consider it as it would give me a bit of a rest because I was working three shifts at the time. I decided to try it.

Some of my colleagues could not believe that I was taking paternity leave and would ask me

how many months I was taking off. When I said that I was going to stay with my child for six months, they laughed at me and joked that I was taking “maternity” leave. Some reacted positively but others wouldn’t believe that I really wanted to go out on paternity leave. They thought I just wanted some time off to go on holiday abroad. They still think that the paternity leave is a cover-up!

I assumed it would be like that since it is not common in Lithuania for men to take paternity leave. People have different opinions about it. Fathers are just starting to take paternity leave here in Lithuania. Some people were surprised when I told them about it while some understood that if the wife earns more, it is natural that the husband should take paternity leave.

It’s been four months now and my son will soon be ten months old. When the child is calm, you do not do anything special. We get up (usually we sleep till about 10 am), then we eat and after a couple of hours we have lunch and have another nap. When my son sleeps, it is easier for me. That’s when I can rest. When he is awake he crawls everywhere and I have to look out for him. He turns everything upside down and takes all the drawers out. I need to calm him down when he cries, and sometimes I wouldn’t know why he is crying. In the evening he stays with his mother and then I’m free. My wife comes home at 6 pm and she stays with the child till

about 10 pm. The rest of the day we are together with him.

It feels as if the days spent with the child are similar to each other. I see nothing special in them. The only special time was when he started walking. I could not look after him every single minute and once he rolled over, hit a corner and his eye went all blue. I did not know what to do. I called my wife and told her everything. My wife came back home straight away and took care of it but he got better very quickly. He likes to just stand up and go. He just does not know how to turn yet!

Each day you discover something new, especially now that he's started crawling. He misses his mother a lot. When she comes back, he runs to meet her. He does not want to eat and does not let her get changed. You know, a mother is a mother, and no father can substitute that, no matter how good he is.

Is taking care of a child a woman's job? Maybe the majority think it is but I don't think we men are very different. We can take care of children even if many believe that mothers should be primarily responsible for it. I don't believe that a child can "spoil" a man - a father. I think it is a very good thing to look after your child as not every man has the opportunity to do that. This is the real challenge. It doesn't matter who is doing it. I believe both parents should spend a lot of time

with their child. It makes no difference whether you are a man or a woman.

I feel great at home with my child however the time when I will have to go to work is approaching and I find myself not wanting to go back to work very much, I would rather stay here at home with my child. My wife says that I should extend the leave but the allowance is very small, just 90 Litas after the first year so I am thinking of going back to work and finding a nanny. We'll see.

I work with timber and this is the fourth month of my leave. Maybe you relax a bit too much at home and I've put on some weight. When you do not go out and spend all your time at home, you do miss work but when I go back I know that I will miss my child. When you leave your child with a nanny you will always wonder how is he doing with a stranger.

When my wife went back to work, I would ask her whether she was thinking about us. She would say that when you work, you don't think about that. She said that she knew we were doing fine. She trusts me.

I am doing my best to be a good father so there are no problems. I try to make time for my child and to play with him and keep him busy. I think that paternity leave helps you get to know your child better. In the future I believe I will understand my child

better and will understand his problems better.

Would I recommend paternity leave to other fathers? Actually, I can't recommend it. It depends on the father. Some may prefer to stay at work rather than spend time with the family. However, I believe it is useful for a father and a child to spend time together, so why not? I think it is very worthwhile to take paternity leave.



# Darius Žvirblis

30 years.

Financial manager.

Has two children – Goda and Ignas.

## 58 DARIUS ŽVIRBLIS

*“It is a difficult job to raise a child”*

I was on parental leave for more than a year – from the 14th of August 2001 till November 2002. My wife took maternity leave at the same time but I think it was also parental leave for her at that time.

I decided to do it not for financial reasons, but because I wanted the experience. It was my decision. If the laws regulate for paternity leave, we should take advantage of it. I wanted my child to have both parents and to spend time with them both. It might sound romantic but I think that it unconsciously affects a child that his parents are together. That is the main thing.

I was the first of my friends and colleagues to take the paternity leave. At first it was only a theoretic possibility. Later the theory turned into practice. I worked for an institution

which grants parental leave so I found out everything about it: its benefits, allowances, and guarantees. My wife’s reaction to my decision was very calm. She was very happy as she knew that I was going to help her out. As for our relationship, it grew stronger because common problems and common concerns bond people together. Besides, when you have a child, your relationship grows stronger.

At first I was at a loss. I believe this was because everything felt more difficult than I had expected it to be. However, the advantage was that we were both at home – my wife and I - so it was easier for us. I must say, though, that the few first months were quite stressful. When you have children you have to rearrange your agenda so that it meets the needs of your child. It is not easy to adjust to their rhythm as it is a difficult job to care for a child. It is even more difficult than working somewhere else as you are emotionally attached to your children. You cannot say ‘no’ to your child. You have to accept many things and do everything the way it should be done.

When the mother is breastfeeding, the child does not really need the father very much. He cannot actively be involved in the process and can only help with the housework. At first I thought that a father and a mother should participate equally in the life of a child but I found out that during the first few months this cannot be the case. I was really stressed when I discovered that during the first

months the child needs the mother more than it needs the father. Then, little by little, you grow closer to your child and realise how pleasant it is to be with her. Every father should participate in the raising of his child and experience what it means.

What makes a good father? A good father spends a lot of time with his child. It is difficult to define a good father. Maybe a good father is one who feels close to his child. I have a problem with definitions like “a good father/a bad father” or “a good mother/a bad mother”. All children need their parents from the time they are born. Being strict or not so strict does not make you a better or worse as a father.

When I was on the paternity leave, I felt the need to do some other work. Maybe it is a human nature. When a child is born, the woman’s body adjusts to it immediately. Maybe it is more difficult for men. They need some form of activity. For this reason it is much easier for men to decide to go back to work after having spent time with their child but it is a very difficult decision for a breastfeeding woman. The relationship between a father and his child is different. It is not as close as that between a mother and her child.

I do not believe in stereotypes. I grew up in a very freethinking family. There were very few stereotypes in my family. If there is the opportunity for fathers to take paternity

leave, they should take the chance. It was natural for me to do it. For most people, the decision on whether to take paternity leave is directly linked with financial considerations, therefore, one must solve financial issues first so that both women and men have the opportunity to take leave without any discrimination. If this is sorted I think there won’t be a problem. There will be no problems when we place men and women on equal footing.

*20 January 2005*

# Malta

*I spent four days sleeping at the office (yes, you read correctly: we have a bed at the office). Xandru, my six-year-old son called to ask when he'd see me. Feeling guilty, I bought him a game on my way home. He hugged me, and thanked me for the game, adding: "Now when are you going to play with me?" I fell silent, unable to answer. Finally we found a day when we could be together. My mobile phone wouldn't stop ringing. Every time my son opened his mouth to speak it would ring. Xandru would wait for me to hang up. Then it would ring yet again. Fed up, he told me "Daddy, I think it would be a good idea if I had a mobile so I would be able to speak to you".*

*We live in a country where culture dictates that the male is the breadwinner of the family. A*

*typical man in Malta will not only have a full-time job, but will also have a part-time job straight after work. I believe that this is discriminatory against men who, like me, want to stay home and do the housework and watch their children grow up. In Malta, merely thinking about this alternative is almost a sin.*

*I think it's about time that men became aware of their right to parental leave so that they too can spend time with their children. This is a great idea when you think about it. It is not only the children's right but also that of fathers to be a part of their children's lives and upbringing. The right to wake up in the morning and be able to plan a day, a week or a month with their children is something most fathers can only dream about. Parental leave*

*would also benefit the workplace since an overworked man is not going to work to the best of his ability. A wife's worries over babysitters would also be shared, as would those over the cooking, cleaning and the children's homework.*

*Be it in the workplace or at home, there should be no distinction between men and women. Laws should be made in a way that both sexes will benefit by having more choices and more possibilities to combine care and work.*

*I believe that we should spend as much quality time with our children as we possibly can. The usual 'I don't have time' and 'I'm working so hard for the sake of my family' excuses are just not good enough anymore! It's time to make a change and that moment is now!*

*Peppi*

PEPPI AZZOPARDI,  
*Television journalist in Malta*





# Daniel Dempster

34 years.  
Teacher.  
Has two children.

## DANIEL DEMPSTER

*“I miss not having the time to spend with my children as I did while I was on parental leave”*

When I went on parental leave my daughter was 10 months old and my son was around two and a half. My wife had just gone back to work after being on leave for two and a half years and we had decided that I take some time off to take care of the children while I finished a teaching degree which I was reading for.

Neither my daughter nor my son were going to school at the time so they would spend the whole day with me. During the day I would be doing all the regular things – cleaning, cooking, washing clothes, etc. The rest of the time I would spend with the children – playing with them, taking them out or watching a video with them. Sometimes my mother or mother-in-law would come over to take care of the children so that I would have some extra time to do the

housework but this happened very occasionally – once a week at most.

Taking parental leave was a family decision. At the time my wife was earning more than I was. We had a mortgage at the time and two expensive toddlers, so financial considerations were very much at the basis of our decision. I was an instructor studying for a teaching degree, so my going out on leave for a year would not have affected my career prospects and would have allowed me to focus on my studies even more. The regulations on parental leave had just been published. I must have read some work memo or some such thing, so shortly after the birth of my first child I enquired about it and a year after the birth of my second child, when my wife went back to work, I went out for one year of parental leave.

People were either neutral or in favour of my decision. I remember when I told my colleagues they just said: *“See you in a year then.”* My wife and I took the decision together. No one else influenced us and I was glad to find that both our families supported us. In fact, I don’t think I came across any negative reactions at all.

It was great to have so much time to spend with my children. You see them grow up and you also learn a lot about yourself. For instance it taught me to be very independent. It wasn’t the first time I had taken care of small children. I had taken care of my baby brother before getting married and I often babysat my cousin’s child during that period too. I had a pretty good idea

of how to take care of little children – how to feed them, change nappies, etc. But being alone with my children for an extended period of time taught me to be independent and very resourceful. You take on new responsibilities and become more capable of taking care of yourself because you need to take care of the others.

Taking care of the house and two children I was on the go all the time! Then when my wife would come back from work, I would go to university. When I got home we would put the kids to bed and that was it. It was a very busy time indeed!

The hardest thing of being on parental leave had to be being alone with the children for so long. I used to love spending time with my children. I used to take them everywhere. Like, for example, if I needed to take my car to the auto mechanic, I would take them with me. But at a certain point it almost drove me crazy. Being with two children all the time with no-one my own age to talk to was a bit maddening! I would have to say that cutting myself off from work and from my colleagues was the most difficult part. I was glad to go back to teaching after the parental leave period was over!

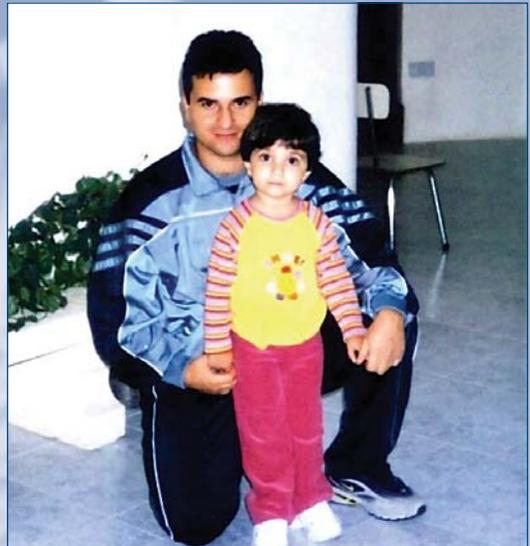
While on parental leave, you get to see your children grow up but what happened is that now that I'm teaching full-time I still get home a lot earlier than my wife. In a way, although being with my children for such a long time has made me get to know them and create a bond with them, I think they now take me for granted.

Since their mother is at home a lot less than I am, they are always very happy to see her and tend to prefer spending time with her rather than with me.

I would recommend this experience to every father! It is an amazing experience to be with your children and to see them grow up. You get the chance to enjoy them and spend time with them before the hectic days of school, homework and private lessons start. It is a very special period of time and I would recommend it to all the couples who can afford it. I would suggest however that the option to take parental leave be extended to after the child is eight years of age. Different families go through different situations and particular conditions may require that a parent be with his/her child on a full-time basis after the age of eight. Besides I would not limit parental leave to a number of years the way it is now. If the couple can afford to have one spouse on parental leave for more than four or five years, they should have the option of doing so.

A good father always puts his children first. He will feed his children before eating himself. He provides for them financially but is also there for them when they need his support. Being a good father means always thinking of your children and putting their needs before your own.

*23 January 2005*



# Edward Grech

35 years.

Clerk in government department.

Has two children.

## 66 EDWARD GRECH

*“My attitude had always been ‘Let’s have children first and think about the problems later.’ Both my wife and I knew that we definitely wanted children so we decided to go for it and figure out the logistics later!”*

My wife is a notary and at the time when we had our first child she was just setting up her private practice. It really wasn’t an option for her to stop working. It would have had too big an impact and she was just starting to pull in some good clients. I, on the other hand, am a public service employee so a few months leave were relatively easy to manage and wouldn’t have affected my career progression in any major way.

I was lucky career-wise, as while I was out on leave there was a public exam for the grade of principal. Since I had just lost a few months of service due to my being out on parental leave, I technically wouldn’t have qualified to sit for

the exam. However, I could still take it as an external applicant on the basis of my having a first degree. Like I said, I was lucky.

I got very positive reactions overall. At least no-one reacted negatively in front of me! I think that your friends and family know you well enough to know how you feel about certain things and I think my decision did not surprise them at all. In fact, those who were aware of my wife’s work situation immediately acknowledged that it was the best course of action for both of us.

Being on parental leave definitely taught me that taking care of children requires a great amount of dedication. I was not aware of this before. In fact, before I went on parental leave I didn’t use to help out much with the housework or with caring for the baby. I found out that it involves both effort and a form of mental engagement. You have to plan ahead for what you think she will need, be constantly aware of what she is doing and generally plan your day around her schedule. What you do and when you do it depends totally on the times whether she is awake or having her nap! Now that I know what it takes to run a home and bring up a child I try to help out my wife more – though I’m sure that if she were here she would say that I don’t do enough!

There are a lot of things that you cannot do when you’re taking care of a child. You have to be with them all the time and you give up going to the office every day and meeting colleagues and friends. That was very difficult for me. At work I am always very busy and when I’m not I

make sure I have a quick word with a colleague or two. When I was at home there was no-one I could talk to and I couldn't go out either! My daughter was just a few months old so most of the time I would be feeding or changing her. There wasn't much interaction or communication. I must say being isolated from the outside world was very difficult for me and, while I would definitely do it again if it were necessary, I wouldn't look forward to it.

Another challenge was not having enough to do. Like I said, I am always very busy at work and I ended up at home with time on my hands. This made me very uncomfortable and restless at times.

Undoubtedly, whatever your feelings at the time are, you will always be able to say: "*I was with my daughter during the first years of her life.*" She will not remember it but you will and it is something you treasure and something you are pleased to have done. Now my daughter is four years old and when I tell her that I had stayed with her and that we had played this or that together when she was very young it is starting to mean something. I believe that, as she grows older, she will appreciate my taking time off work to be with her and in a way it will make her grow closer to me.

The relationship with my wife improved in a positive way. On the one hand it allowed me to contribute to the household chores. It also made me appreciate how time consuming and tiring taking care of a child can be. My wife was very happy to be given the opportunity to devote

time and energy to setting up her own practice. It was very important to her at the time and it has paid off so I would say the relationship itself has benefited from our decision.

A good father is someone who participates in the upbringing of his child. He will put in a consistent effort to help his wife and share in the housework, etc. The experience of parental leave shows you how much effort needs to be put into caring for your family and this makes you chip in and help out. A good father is there for his family. He is there for his children and for his wife whenever they need him.

While I don't regret taking parental leave, I don't think I would do it again: Like I said, staying at home wasn't easy for me so if, out of necessity, I have to do it again I would make an effort to go out more. I would make time to meet friends and not spend so much time alone at home. We have since had another child and we have made different arrangements, so really I don't think I would consider going out on parental leave again.

I would tell fathers to plan ahead so that you can fill your day and have adult contact during this time. I would also suggest to the authorities that they consider including parental leave as time spent in service. Even half the period could make a difference so that one would not lose out too much on such things as seniority ranking and eligibility for internal exams.

15 January 2005



# Jason Aloisio

34 years.  
Teacher.  
Has two children.

## JASON ALOISIO

*“It is such a worthwhile experience. I heard my daughter say her first word!”*

It was only sensible that I will be the one to stop working and take care of our daughter. My wife earns a higher salary than I do and we couldn't afford to lose that source of income. Besides, my wife has more opportunity for advancement. I'm a teacher so I can only go so far in terms of career advancement but taking time off work at that point in time would have affected my wife's prospects within the company.

When my wife was getting ready to go back to work after her maternal leave, I told my wife that I would stop working for a while to take care of the child. I wouldn't have done it if she was a newborn (she was actually nine months old when I went on parental leave), but I was the one who proposed it to my wife and she was very happy to hear it.

Most reactions from other people were positive. In fact, a couple of friends of mine – also teachers – later approached me to ask for advice on doing the same themselves. One of them actually did take a period of parental leave some time later.

I think there is some shift in thinking in terms of stereotypical male and female roles and parenting although change is slow and will take some time yet. Sadly, the strongest negative reaction I came across was from my students. I teach 14 to 15-year-old girls. Some were very incredulous when I told them about my decision. A few even found the idea laughable. It is very sad to observe that even at this age all they think about is getting married and staying at home to take care of the house and the children.

Being on parental leave was a very worthwhile experience. Not an easy one but very worthwhile. I had to learn a lot of things – especially on how to take care of the child. For the first few weeks I would be calling my wife at work to ask how to do this or that, but after a while I got better and managing daily tasks became easier.

The important thing is being with your daughter - spending time with her, feeding her and playing with her. This creates such an incredible understanding. In fact, although I only spent nine months with her she appeared to be more attached to me than she was to her mother for quite some time. This could have been partly due to the fact that my wife used

to work long hours till our daughter was around five years old, even when I went back to working full time, she would still see a lot more of me than she would of her mother. I must say this created a very strong bond between us which lasted a few years. We became friends. Another thing you notice is that when you spend time with them at that age, you can teach them a lot and they become a bit like you. I always wanted to instil in my children love for books and learning so I used to spend a lot of time playing with her, reading to her and even playing with those plastic baby books.

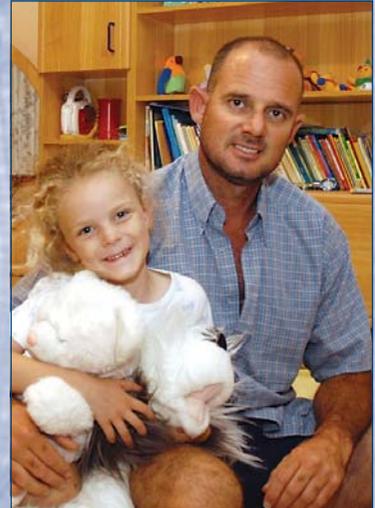
When she was about four something happened which showed me how much of an influence I had had on her. She was playing with some cousins of hers and they had a lot of toys strewn all over the floor. At one point she noticed a book lying amongst the toys. She picked it up, walked over to a quite corner of the room and sat there for a while reading. It was then that I realised that my efforts to teach her to love books had paid off.

I think it helped my wife, and our relationship, tremendously. In a way it relieved her of a lot of pressure because I was here taking care of our daughter and of the housework. At one point my wife was sent to work abroad for three months and, since I was on parental leave I could accompany her and take our daughter with us. That was a wonderful experience and we could never have managed it if I was working full time.

I faced some problems after parental leave – mainly to do with work. Before I went out on leave I was teaching at a particular school. I was very happy there and was hoping to go back after the parental leave period was over. I was on parental leave for an entire schooling year and when I went back the following year I was told that my place had been taken and that I was going to be transferred to another school. I was very upset about this as the school I was to be transferred to was sort of ‘inferior’. I spoke to my union about it and eventually had the transfer reversed but I think that it should be a matter of policy to safeguard the posts of those fathers who decide to take the parental leave option. Overall parental leave was a very special experience. You actually grow with your child. You witness her development and it makes you grow too because you take responsibility for her and understand her and relate to her. And I think the effects of my spending time with her when she was still young are still there today – seven years later.

I would suggest that some financial backup be offered to couples who decide to take this option. It is difficult to live on a reduced family income. I would also suggest that the post of the person taking the time off be safeguarded so that the individual can resume his working life with minimal disruption.

*20 January 2005*



# Richard Abela

31 years.  
Physiotherapist.  
Has three children.

## 72 RICHARD ABELA

*“I had always thought I would like to take time off work to be with my children. When my youngest turned four I said: It’s now or never!”*

Parental leave was always something I was interested in but I had been putting off taking the decision for a while. I had three children when I decided and seven months before my youngest daughter turned five, I went on parental leave with the objective of spending time, not only with her, but also with our other two sons.

My wife was all for it. She supported me all the way. She knew how I felt about it. She thought it was an experience I should have and she backed me completely. She completely appreciated the fact that I wanted to take time out from work to spend time with our children despite the financial limitations that such a move would pose. Finances are important in taking these decisions. In fact there were times when I would tell my wife: *“Maybe I should go back to work next month.”* But then we would

make an effort, stretch the budget out a bit more and I would be able stay on for another month. It wasn’t easy. We’re a five-person household. That’s many mouths to feed! But we made it and I’m glad we did.

My parents were the most taken aback and also the most fearful of me making the move. My mother was convinced that I would lose my job. She worried constantly and sometimes no amount of explaining would convince them that it’s something you have to do, whatever the risk. My friends were a bit surprised, I think. It’s not very frequent that a man takes time off work to stay with the children and a couple of colleagues made a couple of sarcastic comments along the lines of, *“Why? Are you pregnant?”* On the whole, though, the reactions I came across were pretty mild. When all is said and done I think people forget and just get on with their lives and let you get on with yours so when I went back to work, things were back to normal – the way they had always been.

Parental leave had a number of effects on my life. It hasn’t been that long ago and I still feel some effects today. For one I have a great relationship with my daughter. As she was already four at the time, we had the chance to spend a lot of time together and get to know each other. Today we have such a good relationship that we know what the other is thinking just by looking at each other. I also feel like she considers me her friend. I’m aware that this may change over time but I’m sure that she’ll always remember what I did for her and that our relationship will always be special because of it.

The relationship with my wife improved too. I would say it deepened. Partly because I shared the load of taking care of the home and the children, and also because it gave us the chance to spend more time together. Like sometimes we would be at home in the afternoon and she would say: *“Let’s go have a coffee together.”* Little things like that, like having the chance to spend time and talk, are good for a relationship.

Above all a good father strives to achieve a balance between work and family. Children need their father to be present and it’s not just about ‘quality time’. You need to spend amounts of time with your children. 15 minutes is just 15 minutes whether it’s quality time or not! The children need you to be there with them. Sometimes just being there is enough because it makes them feel safe to have their dad at home. I don’t consider myself a good father but a father who’s trying to be the best he can. I always say I’m always trying to improve and I believe the experience of parental leave has helped me improve my qualities as a father. A good father takes care of his wife and of their home too. It’s a big challenge and it makes you grow a lot as a person.

The greatest similarity with work I found was that we always spent time together in the evenings. That didn’t change. Whether I was working or on parental leave, we would all be home around 6 or 7 and then spend a couple of hours eating and talking about our day. On the other hand, when I’m working I need to make an effort to spend more time with my family. I love my work but I’m constantly aware of the fact that I mustn’t let it eat into

family time and sometimes it’s a struggle to keep a balance. When I was on parental leave I would miss the challenges of work, of doing what I enjoy and of meeting colleagues and patients. Now that I’m back at work I sometimes think of the times I spent with my daughter and of how that kind of experience will never come by again.

If I could pass through the same experiences, I would plan my time on parental leave better. When you go out on leave, you think seven months are a long time but I ended up not doing a lot of things I would have liked to do. If I had to do it all again, I would plan my time to make sure that I made the most of the time we had together.

I think parental leave is very good and very generous but what would help couples in this situation is some form of financial help. I know other countries offer parental leave on full pay and I don’t expect this of our country, but even a small contribution – like 10% of your salary – would make a difference.

I think I have gained a lot from this experience. I think I have gained as a person, even more as a father. I have grown and increased my range of experiences. I think everyone is a balance of male and female and maybe parental leave for men makes them investigate the female side of themselves and makes them better and more balanced people as a result.

13 January 2005



# William Zammit

43 years.  
Teacher.  
Has one child.

## WILLIAM ZAMMIT

*“Seeing your son grow up is a unique experience... We (fathers) didn't use to have the opportunity to do this. I would recommend it to everyone”*

Our decision to have me stay at home to look after our son was partly dictated by necessity. My wife works office hours while I am a teacher. Both my wife and I felt that we wouldn't like to have outsiders bringing up our son. My wife had just started a new job while I had been teaching at the same school for about ten years, so it was only logical that I be the one to give up work for a while and stay at home to take care of our son.

There were a few people – colleagues mainly – who doubted that I could do it. You know how it is. Some would tell me: *“Who you? A man – take care of a child?”* By

and large, however, people were surprised rather than disapproving. I think the whole sex roles concept is losing ground. A man staying home to care for a child instead of the woman is no longer such a big deal really.

Going back, I would take parental leave again! I have been a teacher all my life but I always taught older children. Being with my son taught me so much about children and about child development and growing up. You see aspects of their development that you would miss if you were only seeing them after five in the evening. It's something you can only understand if you experience it personally. Having the opportunity to be there for all that time and being able to bond with the child is a very rewarding experience. You get to see this little child grow up, to see the stages in his development. It really is an amazing experience! In a way, I would say that this was the most significant aspect of my parental leave period. It made me re-evaluate my priorities and what I consider valuable in life. I rediscovered my family. I bonded with my son and got to know him better.

Of course there were some challenges. For starters, you have to get used to staying at home all day! You have to create your own routine. You have to plan your days from scratch. I was taking care of the housework

so there were always things to do. And even if all the chores were done and you had a chance to sit down and take it easy for a while, you still had to keep your eye on the child – to make sure he's not getting up to anything dangerous.

I think the biggest challenge was missing the work. And it's not just the work itself. When you work you're living in a context - in a community so to speak. When you stay at home you're cut off from that community. For many hours every day you have no adult company at all. When you've worked for so many years like I had, you get used to going to work every morning, meeting your colleagues and interacting with them on a daily basis. The fact that I was cut off from that – from that community - and was spending so many hours every day inside the house, took some getting used to. I must say though that it was only tough during the initial period. It got better as time went by.

I think my going on parental leave made it clear that there were no sex-based distinctions in our family and that was beneficial for the relationship with my partner. Besides, the fact that my wife was able to focus on her work without coming home to cope with the housework meant that she was less stressed out at the end of the day. We were both calmer, the communication between us improved, and we enjoyed each other's and the child's company even more as a result.

The negative side to parental leave would have to be the financial aspect. Losing one of two family incomes is no minor thing. One becomes very aware that one's lifestyle has to change – even if only temporarily. Really this is the one thing that I would change. Some kind of financial aid from government would make a big difference to couples who have taken the parental leave option.

As I said before, I would do it all again. Now that I've had a first experience, I would know how to deal with my child better – how to approach him so that a better rapport is created. Even basic things, like having to be aware of what they're doing all the time so they don't get in harm's way are things that you learn by trial and error but other than that I would recommend it to anyone. It is a wonderful experience and an opportunity not to be missed.

*20 January 2005*

# Annexes

## 78 DENMARK

### PARENTAL LEAVE ACCORDING TO LEGISLATION

The Danish parental leave scheme consists of three parts:

Leave for the **mother: 14 weeks**

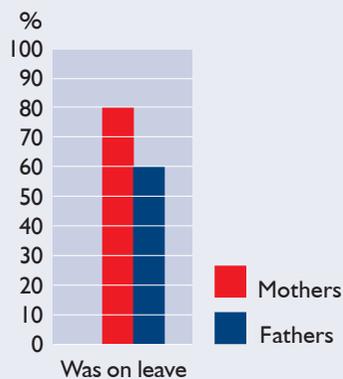
(and 4 weeks before expected birth).

Leave for the **father: 2 weeks**

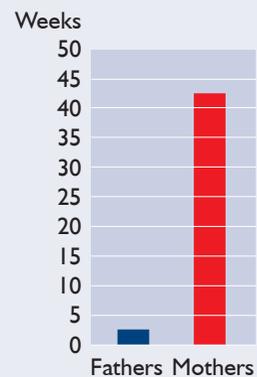
Leave the **parents** can share: **32 weeks**

During all leave at least a subsistence of 3.267 DKK per week or approximately €1.913 per month is paid. During a number of weeks – depending on workplace and on agreement between union and employer – full wage is paid.

USE OF PARENTAL LEAVE, 2003



USE OF PARENTAL LEAVE, 2003



## ICELAND

### LEGAL RIGHTS TO PARENTAL LEAVE

#### MATERNITY/PATERNITY LEAVE - 9 MONTHS:

Not assignable rights 2 x 3 months:

Mother: 3 months

Father: 3 months (as from January 1 2003)

Joint right: 3 months

#### RIGHT TO LEAVE FROM SALARIED WORK:

At birth

At primary adoption (under the age of 8 years)

At permanent foster (under the age of 8 years)

**Ends when the child reaches 18 months**

Special provisions in case of multiple birth, stillbirth, miscarriage and illness of mother and newborn child

#### ECONOMIC COMPENSATION:

80% of average wages for the last 24 months

Ending 2 months prior to 1st day of leave

Minimum payments for those with low wages (in part-time work)

Payments through the maternity/paternity leave fund

Financed by insurance levy = % of wages – paid by the employers

#### WHEN IN AGREEMENT WITH THE EMPLOYER THE PARENT CAN TAKE THE LEAVE:

In fragments (at least one week at a time)

With part-time work (for example 50% work – 50% leave)

The leave has to be taken before the child becomes 18 months old

If no agreement with the employer the worker has the right to take the leave all at once

### THE PARENTS CAN DIVIDE/TAKE THE JOINT PART OF THE LEAVE, AS THEY PREFER

#### UNPAID PARENTAL LEAVE:

Based on the EU directive

13 weeks for each parent for each child

#### RIGHT TO LEAVE FROM SALARIED WORK:

At birth

At primary adoption (under the age of 8 years)

At permanent foster (under the age of 8 years)

**Ends when the child reaches 8 years**

**Flexibility in principle as in the case of maternity/paternity leave**

#### COMMON PROVISIONS:

##### Right to employment

Protection against dismissal

Employer's liability

Accumulation of rights

Maternity/Paternity leave: accumulation

Parental leave: Protection of accumulated rights – accumulation stops

##### Statistics on the use of maternity/paternity leave in Iceland

Around 90% of fathers use their right

The average number of days that fathers use is 97

The average number of days that mothers use is 183

This means that on average fathers use the non-transferable right (3 months) while mothers use the non-transferable right and the sharable 3 months

About 16% of fathers use some of the sharable months

About 90% of mothers use some of the sharable months

About 14% of fathers do not fully use their non-transferable months

About 1% of mothers do not fully use their non-transferable months

About 85% of fathers and 54% of mothers divide the leave in some way. That number has been steadily increasing since the law came into effect

Birth rate has been increasing from 1.93 in 2002 to 2.03 in 2004

## 80 LITHUANIA

In the legal regulation of parental leave in Lithuania, the term 'paternity leave' does not exist (laws allow maternity / paternity benefits and childcare leave). The Lithuanian law on Sickness and Maternity Social Insurance grants the mother the pregnancy leave (126-140 calendar days before and after the birth of a child), for which 100 % of mother's compensated salary is paid. After this period, a mother (foster-mother), father (foster-father), grandmother, grandfather or other relatives that take care of a child, according to a family decision, can be granted a maternity/ paternity benefit until a child reaches the age of one year. From March 1, 2004, a compensated part of parental benefit amounts to 70 % of a caretaker's salary.

According to the data of the State Social Insurance Fund of the Republic of Lithuania (Sodra) from the first quarter of 2005, 98, 8 % of women and only 1,2 % of men received maternity/ paternity benefits. In the earlier years the percentage of fathers on paternity leave is even lower. The same data source from 2004 informs that an average uptake of parental leave in Lithuania is 372 days (approx. 53 weeks) among men and 498 days (approx. 71 week) among women.

The 2001 research entitled "The Evaluation of the Population Policy" demonstrated that most Lithuanian people (80 % of men and 82 % of women) thought that „nobody could take care of a child better than his mother.” The national representative survey of 2004 "EU Enlargement and Its Commitment to Women in Lithuania" also corroborates the fact that both Lithuanian women and men are still very patriarchic in their views regarding gender equality and the division of labour between women and men in private and public spheres. According to the survey data, half of Lithuanian women and men believe that "it is not good if a father looks after a newborn child for a year or two and a mother works". Furthermore, 86% of male and 77% female respondents of age 50-74 (in comparison to 50% and 43% of age 15-29 accordingly) think that "children of pre-school age suffer if their mother is working". The majority of respondents (70% of men and 63% of women) think that "the priority for a mother should be children and family, but not working" (*Source: [www.vdu.lt/sociologija](http://www.vdu.lt/sociologija)*). Despite of the fact, there are signs that the mentality of Lithuanians is changing. In 2004 survey, 48% of women and 36% of men supported the statement that "in the family where a man is earning less than a woman, the man should quit working and look after a newborn" (*Source: [www.vdu.lt/sociologija](http://www.vdu.lt/sociologija)*).

According to the 2002 survey "The Crises of Men's Roles in Lithuania," 81% of Lithuanian people living with a husband/wife/partner are satisfied with their family life. However, more women than men (19% and 10% accordingly) are unhappy about their family life. Women living in the countryside are particularly unsatisfied with it (32% of them as compared to 10.5% of men). The survey also shows that Lithuanian people value family life, emphasize quality in interrelations and would like to spend more time in family. Despite of the fact, most of daily household tasks including childcare are performed by women (79 % women and 2 % men prepare food at home, accordingly - 73% and 3 % - wash dishes, 59 % and 5 % -

do shopping, 83 % and 5 % - clean the dust and wash the floor. Basically men are active mostly in „male business” – repair domestic electric appliances, etc.; See more in „EU Enlargement and Its Commitment to Women”, at [www.vdu.lt/sociologija](http://www.vdu.lt/sociologija))

According to the 2002 survey “The Crises of Men’s Roles in Lithuania,” 77% of Lithuanian men think that they are ‘real’ men. Only 10% of men thought that they do not conform to the image of a ‘real’ man, and 14% do not know how to answer this question. This survey demonstrates that both the Lithuanian women and men consider the *breadwinning role* as the most important feature of a “genuine” man. (e.g. his ability to earn money for his family - 72% of female and male respondents; a man’s capability to do male housework like home-improvement and technical jobs - 67%; care and upbringing of his children - 67%; his taking care of his woman -66%) (See more <http://politika.osf.lt>).

## MALTA

### LEGAL RIGHT TO PARENTAL LEAVE

#### PUBLIC SECTOR:

*Parental leave duration:* 1 year + a one-off 3 year career break

*Eligibility:* Mothers and fathers in the public sector

*Right to leave from salaried work:*

- At birth, adoption or fostering of a child
- Ends when the child is 5 years old

*Economic compensation:* None

#### PRIVATE SECTOR:

*Parental leave duration:*

- Maternity leave: 14 weeks
- Parental leave: 3 months each parent

*Eligibility:* Mothers and fathers working in the Private Sector

*Right to leave from salaried work:*

- At birth, adoption or legal custody of a child
- Ends when the child is 8 years old

*Economic compensation:*

- Maternity leave: 13 weeks on full pay; one week unpaid
- 3 months parental leave: unpaid

*Important provisions according to the law (Employment and Industrial Relations Act, 2002):*

- Parental leave may be availed of either at a stretch (3 months) or in 3 parts of 1 month each.

- The employer may postpone granting parental leave where work is of a seasonal nature, where no replacement can be found, where the employee is of strategic importance to the company, where the business has less than 10 employees and where a substantial number of employees apply for parental leave at the same time.

- Right to return to same/similar job after parental leave

- Protection against dismissal

- Part-timers are entitled to pro-rata parental leave benefits

### STATISTICS ON THE USE OF PARENTAL LEAVE IN MALTA:

#### PUBLIC SECTOR:

Around 1.6% of fathers in the Public Sector use their right to parental leave – over 98% of those on parental leave were mothers.

The average number of days fathers use in the Public Sector is 365 (according to project's research).

Although Maltese fathers make use of the maximum allowed parental leave period, still they are significantly under-represented when looking at overall parental leave uptake.

#### Private Sector:

There is no data on the father use of parental leave in the Private Sector as it has only been recently introduced and we were unable to find any fathers on parental leave.

Almost all working mothers make use of the 14 week-maternity leave allocation, but it is unknown how many opt for the additional 3-month parental leave period.

The fertility rate in Malta stood at 1.37 in 2004

### WHAT BENEFITS MALTESE FATHERS GOT FROM PARENTAL LEAVE:

- An improved relationship with their child
- An improved relationship with their partner
- A less stressful life
- Increased personal growth
- A learning experience



MEN DO IT!  
STORIES OF FATHERS  
ON PARENTAL LEAVE

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