



‘Extra Time’ With Dad

IMPROVING MEN’S HEALTH
THROUGH UK PATERNITY LEAVE



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Since 2003, Movember has challenged the status quo, shaken up men's health research, and transformed the way health services reach and support men – taking on prostate cancer, testicular cancer, mental health, and suicide prevention with unwavering determination. Movember has raised over £945.8 million for men's health, thanks to a passionate network of Mos. These critical funds have delivered more than 1,000 men's health projects around the world. Championing new research, cutting-edge treatments, and healthy behaviours. To learn more, please visit Movember.com

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Building on a 20-year legacy of investment in men's physical and mental health, The Movember Institute of Men's Health launched in 2023 and has ambitious goals to enhance quality of life for millions of men worldwide. Uniting global experts in the field of men's health, the Institute will accelerate research and translate it into tangible, real-world outcomes.



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Introduction

Dads, members of the Movember community and ambassadors are calling for urgent action on UK paternity leave policy – and their voices could not be clearer.

Retired footballer and TV pundit Troy Deeney speaks from direct personal experience of both extremes:

“My youngest son was born in December 2019, I had to be back at work within 48 hours which was really hard but I accepted it as part of my career as a footballer. I have recently had another baby and had much longer off which has made such a difference in terms of being able to support my partner and bond with my child. I wholeheartedly support this push for improved paternity leave in the UK.”

Former England Rugby international and TV pundit Ugo Monye is equally unequivocal:

“The current paternity leave in the UK is simply not good enough. Those first few weeks with a newborn are incredibly stressful and difficult so rather than expect dads to return to work after two weeks, we should be giving them more time to bond with their babies, learn to be fathers and not increase stress about work or money. I sincerely hope our voices are heard on this crucial proposed policy change.”



Ugo Monye and Professor Green

Scottish broadcaster and journalist Gordon Smart highlights the mental health toll of the impossible conflict many dads feel:

“As a dad I have always felt conflicted between being present for my children but also being able to provide for them and that can really affect your mental health. The current paternity leave policy in the UK does not allow for dads to adequately bond with their children and sends the message that it’s all on the mums from the very beginning. The call to increase paternity leave to six weeks makes a huge amount of sense and would really take that pressure off all parents.”

British Rapper and mental health campaigner Professor Green adds:

“Improving the amount of time dads get with their children can only be a benefit to everyone involved. It will fundamentally improve the mental health of new dads who already feel a lot of pressure at the start of fatherhood to be everything to everyone. If they can at least have a decent chunk of paid leave at the start, it will relieve both a financial burden and the burden of feeling like they are just not present.”

Together, these fathers represent a clear and compelling call to action supported by the public. **Researchers at More In Common** said;

“This research is some of the largest scale polling conducted on fatherhood and paternity leave to date. Our nationally representative survey of over 3,000 Britons, complemented with qualitative research, shows that on the case for better paternity leave, the British public is united. We deliberately stress-tested public support and found support for extended paternity leave to be durable, even in the face of arguments against it.”

The evidence, the experience and the appetite for change are all there, alongside the opportunity to change policy to support the dads of this generation. Now it is time for policy to catch up.

About This Research

This report draws on new polling from More In Common published for the first time here, it is supported by polling from Whitestone Insight in 2025 and presented alongside a substantial body of existing published research.

More in Common surveyed 3,046 GB adults online in March 2026, representative of the national population by age, gender, region, and voting intention. Three online focus groups were also conducted in March 2026. The focus groups explored a broad range of topics including fatherhood, the role of men and boys in society, online influencers, masculinity, and paternity leave. More in Common is a member of the British Polling Council.

Whitestone Insight surveyed 598 UK fathers aged 18–44 online between 16–17 April 2025, exploring symptoms of paternal postnatal depression and anxiety, suicidal ideation, and views on paternity leave. Whitestone is a member of the British Polling Council.

All data marked ***NEW*** is the More in Common data published for the first time in this report.



Executive Summary

The UK's paternity leave entitlement is the worst in Europe.^{1#} New Fathers are entitled to only two weeks' paternity leave at less than half of the National Living Wage. Self-employed fathers get nothing at all. On Fathers' Day 2026, Movember, The Dad Shift, and leaders across parenting and workers' rights are calling on the government to change that.

With the support of the Movember community, this report sets out the public health case for reform. It draws on new polling, powerful personal testimony, and a growing body of international evidence.

In the newly published Men's Health Strategy for England it states "fatherhood sits at the intersection of health, employment and family policy. It is another critical life stage, and an important part of our family networks, which is shaped by societal norms and expectations. While recognising that not all men are or will become fathers, fatherhood is both a critical transition point where many men may require additional health and wellbeing support, and an opportunity to engage men in their own health".² Improving paternity leave is a real opportunity for government, supported by the public, to improve the health of men and deliver on increasing equity among families.

*#Based on OECD Family Database data (April 2025). The UK's paternity leave is paid at just 19% of earnings - the lowest full-rate equivalent of any European country in the OECD dataset. A handful of non-OECD nations (including Russia, Ukraine, and Bosnia and Herzegovina) offer no statutory paid paternity leave at all, but among EU and developed European countries, the UK ranks last. **

THE ASK IN SUMMARY

In the upcoming publication of the parental leave review co-led by the Department for Business and Trade and the Department for Work and Pensions, we are calling on government to announce improved paternity leave with³:

- Immediate reform to extend paternity leave to six non-transferable weeks at 90% pay (capped). With 2 weeks taken immediately, and the remaining 4 weeks to be taken any time in the first year (in one week or larger increments)
- A phased expansion – following Spain's successful model – to reach twelve weeks at full pay within three years

This is a credible, costed pathway with public support. And the cost of inaction – measured in men's mental health, family breakdown, the continuation of the motherhood penalty – is far greater than the cost of reform.

The latest Labour Party Manifesto⁴ committed to reviewing the parental leave system 'so it best supports working families, within our first year in government'

6 in 10

of the British public support increasing statutory paternity pay – dropping only four points when shown cost arguments.*

6 in 10

of the British public say that spending quality time with children is becoming something only wealthy parents can afford.*

92%

of the British public say it is important for fathers to spend time with their children the early month.*

1 in 2

fathers say financial pressure is by far the biggest barrier to extended paternity leave.*

1 in 2

Almost half (49%) say being a good father is what it means to be a "real man" followed by protecting your family (39%), being caring and supportive (37%), and providing financially (34%).*

82%

of fathers say improving paternity leave is the single biggest action government could take to support their mental health.**

45%

of UK fathers experience multiple symptoms of depression or anxiety in their baby's first year.**

1 in 15

new dads experienced suicidal thoughts in the first year of fatherhood.**

* New Data from *More in Common*, March 2026. ** Data from *Movember/The Dad Shift*, April 2025.

Section 1: A Moment Not to be Missed

MEETING MEN IN FATHERHOOD

Becoming a father is, for many men, one of the most significant transitions of their life. It reshapes identity, restructures daily routines, and reorients a man's sense of purpose and priorities. Research consistently shows that fathers are spending more time engaged in direct childcare, offering greater emotional support, and expressing affection more openly toward their children than ever before.⁵⁻⁶ It is a moment of personal growth when men are motivated to look after their health, to be present, to show up differently than the generation before them.⁷⁻⁸

As relationships and social roles shift however, it is also a moment of risk, new fathers also contend with rising financial pressures, disrupted sleep, and changes to physical activity – a constellation of demands in which newfound joy and considerable stress routinely coexist.⁹ These challenges affect not only the man himself, but relationship quality, father-child bonding, and broader family cohesion.¹⁰⁻¹²

For health services, for policymakers, and for society, the early days of a new baby is a moment that can be seized for a strength-based intervention with fathers. Better paternity leave can not only harness an opportunity to support men's health but can also work to prevent the risks directly impacting men and their families.

Today's dads: a generation trying to do things differently

The image of the distant, disengaged father belongs to another era. New polling by More in Common makes clear that British men have moved on.

Almost half of all Britons – 49% – say that being a good father is what it means to be a 'real man'. This is the single most common answer, ahead of financial provision, physical strength, or any other measure. When asked what makes a good father specifically, the top answers are spending quality time with children (60%), being a good role model (53%), and having a positive relationship with the other parent (31%). Financial provision comes fourth, at 28%.

Men themselves reflect this shift. Previous polling showed 90% of dads agree that fathers today want to be more involved in their children's lives than previous generations. Over three quarters say they value their role as a father more than success in their career.

"I always used to look at my mom, okay, she's always present. But I think it's always a father's role that's always underappreciated. But once you're older and you have your own kids, that's when you realise the role of the father."

Retail assistant, Birmingham

And yet the support is too often not there. New More in Common's polling found that 92% of Britons believe it is important for fathers to spend time with their babies in the early months of life. Paternity leave was the most emotionally charged topic across a series of focus groups focused on men and boys – and fathers described the statutory two weeks as not just inadequate, but often painful.

More strikingly still, 56% of Britons say politicians do not value the role played by fathers. Among fathers themselves, that figure rises to 62%. This is a majority view, held by men and women, across every part of the country with the exception of Greater London (42%).

Policy is a generation behind

In the UK, new fathers receive two weeks, paid at a flat rate of £194.32 per week – less than half the minimum wage for a full-time worker.¹³ Self-employed fathers and kinship carers, who step up to raise children when parents receive nothing at all.

The consequences of that gap are not abstract. They are measured in men's mental health, in relationship breakdown, in children who grow up with less of their father than either of them wanted.



Section 2: The Hidden Health Crisis

A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

Since the current government took office, almost 1.3 million babies have been born in the UK.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ For many of those births, there is a father or partner navigating one of the most challenging transitions of life – in most cases, with barely two weeks of support before being expected to perform as normal at work.

45% of UK fathers experience multiple symptoms of postnatal depression or anxiety in their baby's first year. Nearly 1 in 15 new dads reported suicidal thoughts during that period. 1 in 12 reported frightening intrusive thoughts, such as deliberately hurting their baby.

Movember & The Dad Shift, Whitestone, April 2025: 45

When fathers were asked what would help, their answer was clear.

82% of fathers agreed that 'the single biggest thing government can do to better support new dads' mental health is give them a decent amount of properly paid paternity leave to bond with their babies and support their partners.' This view was consistent across all age groups.

Movember & The Dad Shift, Whitestone, April 2025



This is not a coincidence. The UK's current paternity policy creates a perfect storm of mental health pressures. When fathers return to work after just two weeks, they face a simultaneous combination of financial stress – paternity pay costs someone on an average salary over £1,000 in lost earnings, against the estimated £10,000 cost of a new baby – severe sleep deprivation, work performance pressure, and profound guilt and loss at not being present to support their partner or bond with their child.¹⁷

“I was caught in a catch 22, guilt eating me away from both sides. I couldn't 100% commit to either of my roles, the worker and provider, or the partner and new father... It shouldn't take a mental break[down] to get time to be a father.”

– Dad of 1

“I had to return to work while my baby was still in the hospital as I couldn't afford to take unpaid leave... My mental health fell apart when I returned to work. I felt terrible for not being there to support my partner and our baby's recovery and it broke my heart to know my baby did not have her dad there for her.”

– Dad of 1

“It has quietly left me feeling helpless. Giving more than you have to give is unsustainable, and I've now reached out for support with my mental health. I don't want to be complaining – not to the world, not to my family, not even to myself. But two weeks is not enough.”

– Dad of 2

Movember's own Director of Research, Dr Zac Seidler, has observed:

“the perinatal period is a point at which capability, motivation, and openness to change align in ways that are rarely replicated at any other stage of a man's life. Health systems and policymakers have an opportunity to embrace this. If we meet men in that moment with adequate time, financial security, and support, we can set them on a trajectory of better health that lasts decades. If we send them back to work after two weeks, sleep-deprived, financially stressed, and guilty, we establish a different trajectory entirely.”

The long shadow: bonding, belonging, and men's health over a lifetime

Research consistently shows that fathers who report close connections with their children live longer, have fewer mental and physical health problems, are less likely to abuse drugs or alcohol, are more productive at work, and report being happier.¹⁸ The early weeks are critical. Studies from the UK, Iceland, and Sweden all show that fathers who are more involved in childcare in the first year are significantly more involved in the long term.¹⁹

Many fathers returning to work struggle to develop the confidence and competence in caregiving that comes from sustained early involvement. A dynamic is established that can persist throughout childhood.

“For my second child, the timing meant I only had 1 week of leave to take, so had 3 weeks total. This felt really rushed and I didn't bond with the newborn anywhere near as well. I suffered quite bad paternal postnatal depression around month 3-6 and ended up having to get therapy. I genuinely feel if I had longer off work this could have been avoided.”

– Dad of 2

A bonding gap that is becoming a class divide

It is not just that bonding time matters. It is that access to it is increasingly determined by wealth.

New Data - More in Common, March 2026

60% of the British public say that spending quality time with children is becoming something only wealthy parents can afford. When told that over 90% of paternity leave currently claimed in the UK goes to the top 50% of earners, that figure rises to 68%. Among those who are financially struggling, it rises to 77%.

More in Common's polling found that 50% of all Britons – and 51% of fathers specifically – identify financial pressure as the single biggest barrier to taking extended paternity leave, far ahead of job insecurity or workplace culture. The fathers best placed to take advantage of better leave are those who can afford to absorb the income hit. The fathers who stand to gain the most from the mental health and bonding benefits of extended leave are the least likely to be able to access them.

The relationship cost and the motherhood penalty

Inadequate paternity leave does not only affect fathers. When men are forced back to work days after birth, mothers are often left to shoulder the entire burden of childcare and physical recovery alone. This has profound implications for gender equality at home and at work.

When fathers are absent in those early weeks, the division of caring labour can be set: mothers take on the primary parenting role and fathers are often locked into the provider role. Research shows that patterns established in the first months of a child's life tend to persist.²⁰

The consequence is what economists call the 'motherhood penalty': the reduction in women's earnings, career progression, and workplace equality that follows childbirth, and which is closely linked to the unequal distribution of childcare. Countries with longer, better-paid paternity leave consistently show smaller gender pay gaps – because when fathers take more leave, mothers' careers are less disrupted.²¹

The human cost of this asymmetry is also plain in what fathers and mothers tell us directly.

“We nearly broke up several times during that first year because he couldn't get time away from work to support me. Our child had serious health issues and was in and out of hospital, and it all fell on me to deal with. I felt like a single mum.”

– A Mum

In research conducted by Movember and The Dad Shift in 2025 with Whitestone, 59% of parents said inadequate paternity leave made it harder to share childcare more equally over the long term and 39% of separated parents said that not sharing caring responsibilities more evenly was a factor in the breakdown of their relationship, a figure that would equate to some 800,000 households.

The evidence from countries that have reformed paternity leave is striking: in Iceland, the introduction of three months' paid paternity leave led to a significant reduction in divorce rates – an effect that persisted even fifteen years after birth.²²

Workplace safety: the risk no one is talking about

There is another dimension to this crisis that rarely features in the paternity leave debate: workplace safety. A survey by On The Tools of 2,000 tradespeople found that 53% felt physically unsafe at work after the birth of a child due to exhaustion.²³ The stories from safety-critical professions are more alarming still.

“I was driving blue lights the day I got back, despite having had no sleep. I also carry a taser and have to make high-pressure decisions in violent situations. It just didn't feel safe to be back at work so soon, for me or the public.”

– Police Scotland Officer, Dad of 2

“I was doing multiple 12-hour shifts in a row on low sleep, coming home to help as much as I possibly could then repeat. Baby was born at the start of October; by mid-November I was burnt out... Eventually I got diagnosed with severe depression and ended up off work for nearly 3 months.”

– Paramedic, Dad of 1

Masculinity, men's health, and the intergenerational cycle

There is a wider context to this crisis. Britain is in the middle of a live and at times anxious debate about what it means to be a man. More in Common's polling found that nearly half of Britons believe the wellbeing of men and boys has declined over the past decade.

'Looking after their mental health' is the area where most Britons think men and boys are doing badly. Online influencers – seen as nearly as influential as parents in shaping young men's understanding of masculinity – are viewed by 80% of the public as having a negative impact.

Simon Rice, Chief Impact Officer, Movember Institute notes “Into this vacuum, the UK paternity leave system sends a clear message: your job is to be a provider, not a carer. That message actively undermines the model of fatherhood that both men and the public say they want. And it has consequences.”

Children with more involved fathers are less likely to develop emotional or behavioural problems, less likely to smoke, drink, or misuse drugs, and better able to regulate stress as adults.²⁴⁻²⁵

Kathy Jones, CEO of The Fatherhood Institute makes clear “By improving paternity leave we can close the gap and prevent boys who have previously missed out on close paternal relationships to being as vulnerable to the mental health challenges we see in men today.”

Jane van Zyl CEO of Working Families says; “Providing dads with the right to care – and be cared for – is the single biggest impact this government could have on promoting what Working Families knows: parents just want to be the best parents they can be. This would allow mums and dads of all types and kinds of families to do just that.”

Section 3: What Britain Thinks

“The public case for paternity leave reform is not a progressive niche. It is a majority position, held across party lines, across genders, and across generations”

George Gabriel, Founder of The Dad Shift reflects on the new polling.

Fathers matter – and the public knows it

The finding that 92% of Britons say it is important for fathers to spend time with their children in their early months is not a contested finding – it holds at above 90% for Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat, and Green voters, and at 91% among Reform UK supporters.

When asked what makes a good father, 60% put spending quality time with children first – ahead of being a good role model (53%), having a positive relationship with the other parent (31%), and providing financially (28%). The public has already moved to a model of fatherhood centered on presence and relationship and policy has an opportunity to catch up.

“You miss them because you’re not there, you’re at work and saying, ‘Oh, they did this today.’ I’m like, ‘Oh brilliant, I wasn’t there.’ I literally live at the moment to exist... and you’re missing all these moments that you wish to cherish because you’re not being supported.”

– Teacher and father of two, Birmingham

The financial barrier: reform must address pay, not just leave

The single most consistent finding across More in Common’s polling is that financial pressure. 50% of Britons, and 51% of fathers, identify financial pressure as the biggest barrier. Job insecurity (12%) and workplace culture (12%) trail far behind.

This has a direct implication for policy: extending the length of leave without substantially improving the rate of pay will not work. Fathers will not take leave they cannot afford. The reform must address both.

“Even for him to be off for those two weeks, things were really tight because he was the main breadwinner for us. So it didn’t feel like we had a choice.”

– A mum from Hove and Portslade

Strong, durable public support for paternal leave reform

New Data

60% of Britons support increasing the rate of statutory paternity pay. There is majority support among every group of party supporters except Reform UK voters (49%). Support is highest among Green voters (75%).

More in Common tested what happens when respondents are shown the strongest available argument against reform – that it might increase costs for employers and taxpayers. Support dropped by just four points. In addition lengthening paternity leave to six or even eight weeks has majority support amongst voters from Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green voters .

64% of Britons say that both increasing the length and the pay of statutory paternity leave would demonstrate that the government respects the role of working fathers.

“I’ve been working since I was 18 and I’ve never had to claim for anything... the one time I need a bit of support and it’s not there.”

– A teacher and father of two, Birmingham Selly Oak



Section 4: The Case for Change

The evidence from countries that have reformed paternity leave is unambiguous. When fathers are given adequate time and financial security to bond with their children, the benefits flow in every direction – to the fathers themselves, to their partners, to their children, and to society.

What the evidence shows

Fathers who are more involved in the early weeks are less likely to experience depression in the first year. Longer term, involved fathers are happier, better at regulating stress, and more effective at managing the competing demands of work and family.¹³ The mechanism is clear: sustained early engagement creates a positive cycle. Fathers who are present and supported build confidence and competence in caregiving. That early involvement becomes a foundation for lifelong closeness – and lifelong health.

The benefits extend beyond fathers. Children with involved dads have better educational outcomes,²⁶ stronger emotion regulation,²⁷ and lower rates of behavioural problems.²⁸ They are less likely to smoke, drink, or misuse drugs.²⁹ The ripple effects reach into the next generation: boys raised with close, affectionate fathers are more likely to become the kind of involved, emotionally present fathers that Britain's sons deserve.³⁰

What other countries have shown is possible

Spain is the most instructive recent example. Before 2017, Spanish fathers were entitled to just two weeks of paternity leave. The government committed to a phased expansion, adding weeks each year with commensurate improvements to pay. By 2021, Spanish fathers had sixteen weeks of leave at full pay – equal to maternity leave this has now been increased to 19 weeks full pay. Take-up rose dramatically at every stage. The key lesson is that incremental, predictable reform works: it allows businesses to adapt, encourages cultural normalisation, and builds political momentum.³¹

Iceland's 2001 parental leave reform offers a compelling lesson in what well-designed paternity policy can achieve. The reform introduced a nine-month total parental leave entitlement, of which three months were reserved exclusively and non-transferably for fathers, paid at 80% of salary. The initial one-month earmarked entitlement alone was sufficient to drive an immediate and dramatic change in behaviour: take-up among fathers rose from under 1% to 82% in the first year.²³⁻²⁴ Research found that parents were significantly less likely to separate than those who had a child just before the reform – and this reduction in separation persisted throughout the first fifteen years after the child's birth.²⁴ The evidence suggests the mechanism is a more equal distribution of childcare and unpaid labour between parents, reducing household conflict.²⁵

Sweden's experience builds on this showing the importance of use-it-or-lose-it provisions: when paternity leave is ringfenced for fathers rather than shared, take-up rises substantially, particularly among lower-income families.³²



Section 5: The Asks in Detail

Movember and The Dad Shift are calling on the government to take the following steps. Our recommendations are staged to provide a credible and costed pathway – one that learns from Spain’s successful model and gives businesses the time to adapt while delivering meaningful change for fathers now.

STAGE 1: IMMEDIATE REFORM

These changes should be implemented immediately after the conclusion of the parental leave review:

- Move to six weeks of statutory paternity leave at 90% pay, with an appropriate pay cap to manage costs for the public purse. With 2 weeks taken immediately, and the remaining 4 weeks to be taken any time in the first year (in one week or larger increments)
- Extend statutory paternity leave entitlement to self-employed people and currently excluded groups, including kinship carers.
- Extend the redundancy protection for maternity and shared parental leave to paternity leave
- We support those campaigning for an increase in maternity pay to 12 weeks at 90% salary, followed by statutory maternity pay at national living wage

STAGE 2: PHASED EXPANSION

Following Spain’s model, we are calling on government to commit to a phased expansion of paternity leave entitlement.

- Increase entitlement by one or two weeks each year for the three years, with commensurate improvements to maternity pay at each stage, until reaching twelve weeks at 100% pay.
- Publish a clear timetable for this expansion, giving employers and families the certainty to plan ahead.

SUPPORTING BUSINESSES

We recognise that small businesses face particular pressures in managing paternity leave cover. Reform must be designed to be workable for employers of all sizes.

- Consider increasing compensation for businesses below the Small Employers’ Relief threshold, and adjusting the level at which it is set, to further support small businesses in meeting the cost of extended paternity leave.

MAKING POLICY INCLUSIVE

Paternity leave reform must work for all families, not just the most traditional.

- Consult with groups representing different demographics of parents – including single parents, same-sex couples, adoptive parents, and kinship carers – as part of any policy review.
- Use inclusive language in policy and communications that recognises all non-birthing parents, not only fathers.
- Remove the use of the phrase ‘second parent’ from policy language. It reinforces outdated models of gendered parenting and should be replaced with more accurate and inclusive terminology.

The opportunity for reform is clear. The public is in support. International evidence exists. The moment to improve in men’s mental health, reduce the motherhood penalty, prevent family breakdown, improve workplace safety, and reimagine the role of British men in society is here.

Give fathers extra time with their families now, and we give families extra time with their fathers later. The case for better paternity leave is simple, investing in the health of men today is an investment in healthy families tomorrow.

For more information, contact Movember at advocacy@movember.com

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ABOUT THE DAD SHIFT

The Dad Shift is a grassroots movement of UK fathers campaigning for longer, better-paid paternity leave. Through policy advocacy, research, and the personal stories of fathers across the country, The Dad Shift makes the case that paternity leave reform is essential for men's health, children's wellbeing, and gender equality at home.





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