**Value of workplace support for the individual and the employer**

For employees experiencing difficulties conceiving, trying to have or grow a family can be a long and uncertain road that is often emotionally draining, socially challenging and financially tough. There can be significant impacts on someone’s mental and physical health. Managing the impacts alongside employment can be extremely difficult without an understanding and flexible employer. Support and understanding at work, from your employer, manager and colleagues can make a significant difference to someone. For example, when asked about the help they received at work, the majority of people said the support they received from their employer, line manager or colleagues was helpful. Furthermore, 64% of those who didn’t receive support from their employer said it would have been beneficial.

There are compelling business benefits of having a framework of support in place. Overall, our survey findings suggest a positive impact of effective employer support in areas such as mental wellbeing, commitment and intention to stay with your employer. In addition, the provision employers develop in this area will form part of an attractive employer value proposition to recruit and retain talented people.

**What support do employees most value?**

We asked people to tell us what support from their employer they received in relation to their experience of fertility challenges, investigations, or treatment. The top five are:

* paid time off to attend appointments
* understanding from the manager that it can be a challenging time
* understanding from colleagues that it can be a challenging time,
* flexibility of working hours
* option to work from home when needed.

We then asked what types of support were, or would have been, most helpful.

For most forms of support, there’s a mismatch between the percentage of employees who said they received that support and the percentage who said that support was or would have been, helpful. For example, 40% of employees said paid time off to attend appointments was, or would be, most helpful, yet only 25% received it. Similarly, just 17% said they were able to flex their working hours, whereas 29% said this was or would have been helpful. Although three in ten (30%) people surveyed said paid compassionate leave was, or would be, most helpful, just 13% of survey respondents said they received it, and it, therefore, doesn’t feature on the top 5 list above.

Overall, the spread of responses to this question is an important reminder that everyone has different circumstances and needs, and so it’s important to treat people as individuals, asking what support at work they would find useful.) is an important reminder that everyone has different circumstances and needs, and so it’s important to treat people as individuals, asking what support at work they would find useful.

**New practical guidance**

We believe that supporting people is the right thing to do, but there is also a business case for employer action here. Drawing on our [**survey findings**](https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/reports/fertility-challenges/) and wider research, the [**guidance**](https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/guides/fertility-challenges/) provides practical ideas for developing workplace support for employees experiencing fertility challenges, investigations, and treatment. It’s structured around five principles of good practice to help you design the support that would be most helpful to your employees.

1. **Raise awareness across the organisation about the need for fertility challenges, investigations or treatment to be recognised as an important workplace wellbeing issue**. Education and awareness-raising require careful thought and sensitivity in terms of language and approach, and so it’s a good idea to involve employee networks or resource groups, and draw on reliable sources of expert advice.
2. **Create an open, inclusive and supportive culture**. The aim is to break down the stigma and ensure that people know they will be supported if they want to tell people about their experience. Communicate positive messages about the support available and ensure that line managers and colleagues show empathy and understanding.
3. **Develop an organisational framework to support employees experiencing fertility challenges, investigations, or treatment**. This should include specific policy provision, line manager guidance and education as well as access to sources of expert help, such as an employee assistance programme and signposting to external specialist charities.
4. **Manage absence and leave with compassion and flexibility**. Given the lack of statutory provision to support employees with fertility investigations and treatment, consider how generous the organisation’s policy can be in offering paid leave and flexibility in these circumstances. Absence management policies and procedures should be flexible and take into account the potentially far-reaching impacts of experiencing fertility challenges, investigations, or treatment, for both partners.
5. **Equip line managers to support people with empathy and understanding**. Line managers play a central role in supporting people’s wellbeing and implementing people management policies. Employers cannot expect managers to act as counsellors or medical experts. Their role is to help employees with the work aspects of the situation and ensure that work is not part of the problem. Therefore, organisations should ensure that line managers understand the boundaries of their role, and when and how to signpost to specialist support. They need to build trust-based relationships so that someone will feel able to talk about their need for support or workplace adjustments.