

13 June 2023

Weekly Blog

By: Rob Tice



Supporting staff who are facing fertility challenges

Well, well, well.....what a weekend!! I mean summer has really arrived in style hasn't it and just in time for my birthday!! Us Brits are not usually very well equipped at dealing with the scorching heat (or the cold, or the snow, or the wet...common theme there??) We took to the Tissington Trail on the bikes with the girls, the plan being that it is super shady due to the lovely trees at either side of the trail...good plan right? Well, yes in theory. However, a mass tree surgery operation has obviously been carried out since our last visit, meaning there was virtually no shade...just hot, beating sunshine and 2 very hot and bothered 11 and 6 year olds!

The yummy picnic and super river (along with rope swings) that we found, certainly helped cool us all down, as did the ice cream afterwards ... In landlocked Derby, that is about the next best thing from the beach (where my heart truly lies!) My birthday is actually today – steady on with the gifts and cards that I know you will all throw my way Shhhhhhhh, the next birthday will be a big one, so save it for then!

Enough about my weekend, I hope you guys are all managing in the heat and managing to enjoy it. Settle in with an iced coffee and catch up on my musings...

I wanted to use my blog this week to highlight a really difficult and sensitive topic: supporting staff experiencing fertility challenges.

I think it's really important that we discuss these challenges because that is going to help us remove some of the stigma and taboo and that way we can better support those going through these challenges.

It seems that currently there is something of a lack of understanding around the way to support staff facing these challenges. A recent CIPD survey found that just over 27% of employers either have a standalone policy dealing with fertility challenges or include provision as part of a wider policy.

Added to that, there is currently no legal framework for supporting staff who are dealing with fertility challenges and going through IVF or assisted conception. There is a private members bill working its way through Parliament which aims to give staff paid time off for IVF treatment but it could be a good long while before that becomes law.

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So what can you be doing to support staff in the meantime? Well, the CIPD have, really helpfully, put together some principles of good practice and these can be summarised as:

1. Raise awareness – developing awareness and understanding can reduce the stigma and lessen the stress staff are under. You can do this through formal training, particularly for managers who might have to handle sensitive conversations or just making sure that it is clear where staff can go if they find themselves facing these challenges (whether that be a manager or HR);
2. Create an open, inclusive and supportive culture - sharing positive messages about the support available and setting the expectation that line managers and colleagues will show empathy and understanding can, again, reduce stress for those going through fertility challenges. The easier you can make things for affected staff, the better it is for all involved.
3. Develop an organisational framework to support employees – essentially, build specific policies or provision within existing policies to tackle this issue head on. Beyond that, you could look at building a resource with details of where staff can get expert advice, for example by providing details of any employee assistance programmes they can access and signposting to external specialist charities.
4. Manage absence and leave with compassion, clarity and flexibility – even though there's no statutory right to paid time off for treatment, you could look at offering that as a benefit to staff. Otherwise, you will need to treat absence related to fertility treatment in the same way as any other medical appointment or period of sickness absence. You will just need to be clear about what people are entitled to.

The full CIPD guidance is a really good resource for employers who have staff experiencing fertility challenges and it can be found here: <https://www.cipd.org/en/knowledge/guides/fertility-challenges/>

If you want to find out more about how to support staff who are going through fertility challenges or if you want to expand your knowledge on other really tricky family-friendly rights matters, then you can sign up to our next event on this very topic: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/family-friendly-rights-5-july-2023-tickets-652679380597?aff=odtdtcreator>