



## F W° Maxing Your Maternity Leave

Nothing about having a baby is expected, including the monumental impact that starting a family will likely have on your career. In this session, we covered off on all the basics, including paid parental leave, your rights at work, the role of your partner (if you have one) and the – often difficult - transition back to the office. Our panel of inspiring and honest working mums reveal how they juggle their busy competing interests (and also what happens when those balls come crashing down in a heap on the floor).

**Panellists: Prue Gilbert, CEO and founder of Grace Papers, Alys Gagnon, CEO and founder of The Parenthood and Jessica Smith, former Paralympian and motivational speaker**

*Here are the five key takeaways from the panel:*

1

### YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO REQUEST TEN PAID “KEEP IN TOUCH” DAYS. USE THEM WISELY

Keep in touch days allow you to go back to work occasionally — and be paid for it — while you’re on parental leave. It’s a smart way to remain connected to what is going on in the office, or perhaps take a course and refresh your skills. Taking advantage of these will help ease your eventual return to work. These are paid working days that most employees don’t realise they can ask for. Prue Gilbert suggests using one or more of these days for professional development to keep your skillset current. You might use some of the days to attend a major event or meeting that you’d worked on prior to going on leave. It’s important for you to remain in touch but also for your employer to be reminded of how good you are.

2

### THINK ABOUT YOUR “PROFESSIONAL VISION” AND MAKE IT KNOWN

A professional vision can help you transition back to work after maternity leave and assist in helping you achieve your career goals in the long term. Prue Gilbert advises finding an advocate within your company before you go on leave; someone who has your back and knows your [professional vision](#) for the future. They will help make sure you don’t become “invisible” whilst you’re out of the office. This person should be able to vouch for you and know what your intentions are, so that assumptions aren’t made on your behalf by others. It’s important to do this work before you head off on leave. You can use [The Grace Papers’](#) handy Professional Vision Tool to unpack your purpose and articulate your vision.



3

### TALK TO YOUR PARTNER ABOUT THE KIND OF PARENTS YOU WANT TO BE

A combination of societal structures, stereotypes, biology and good old-fashioned sexism means that overwhelmingly mothers become primary carers for children. If you have a partner — male or female — then take the time to discuss roles and responsibilities before you give birth. Think about the kind of parents you want to be, the rituals that were important to you growing up and the gender roles you might unintentionally be communicating to your kids. Talk about how you will maintain the trajectory of both your careers.

Jamila Rizvi and her partner sit down weekly and divide commitments like pick-up and drop-offs, activities and play dates, depending on their respective work schedules. If you're sharing care with a former partner, then a clear articulation of responsibilities is even more important. If you're single, don't be afraid to lean on those around you.

4

### NEGOTIATE, NEGOTIATE, NEGOTIATE

When you announce to your manager that you're expecting a baby, do not go into the discussion without a plan. Use this opportunity to discuss your professional vision, how long you expect to take for parental leave (noting that your intentions might change), and what it might look like if you decide to come back early or extend this period. Let your manager know what level of contact you'll require if there are changes to the company structure and your role.

Alys Gagnon suggests that if you feel confident enough, then discuss whether your employer is willing to keep paying your superannuation contribution during leave. Know your rights under the Fair Work Act before commencing this discussion; be aware of what you're entitled to ask for and what you're entitled to receive.

5

### USE THE CHILD CARE SUBSIDY TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

The child care subsidy is a new formulation of the previous child care benefit and child care rebate payments. If you've had kids previously, then it's worth checking in to understand how the system has changed as you may be entitled to more help than before. [The subsidy pays the majority of your child care fees](#) if you're part of a lower income family. Even for families on middle and some higher incomes, there is support available. Remember that this payment is available to help with before-and-after school care for primary aged kids.

**OUR MATERNITY LEAVE PODCAST WILL AIR ON THE 10TH OF SEPTEMBER.**

