

OH BABY BABY

My Husband Staggered His Paternity Leave – Here's Why We Loved It



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My husband's company does not yet offer paid [paternity leave](#), but he allotted 10 days of his generous vacation package to staying home after baby. Instead of taking off 10 days straight, he staggered them over four weeks – and I'm so glad he did.

Before I gave birth, we planned for him to take off four days the first week, three days the second, two days the third, and one day the fourth. We saw



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startup where he worked while maximizing his presence at home in the early days with our firstborn. As he staggered his leave, the [benefits](#) of making the most of his short time at home became evident.

It helped us transition to a new normal.

When we finally returned home and my husband split his time between home and work, we began to see how a transition to a new normal would look. From the beginning, I was able to identify my [feelings of isolation and immobility](#), stuck all day in a house with a baby that would only sleep in short stretches. I leaned on support from my mother and [mother-in-law](#), who each visited for a several-hour stretch once a week. My husband similarly received encouragement from his boss, a working mom who [encouraged him](#) to work sane hours and hustle home after work.

The professional and familial support we received was crucial to helping us understand how to split responsibilities in the final weeks before my husband returned to work full-time. Initially, he focused on everything – cleaning, doing laundry, bathing the baby, changing diapers, and managing our friends' generous Meal Train contributions – so I could figure out nursing and sleep when the baby slept. Soon, though, we moved to shifts: I cared for the baby from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. until he returned from



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over, often awake for most of the night until I stumbled in with the baby at 5:00 a.m. with the words “your turn” and crashed on the bed.

It helped him bond with the baby.

I was thankful for the early morning and evening shifts my husband eagerly assumed: the meticulous nature of his lab meant little rest for him between caregiving and his professional work. Yet, both of us can look back on the first few months before our daughter settled into a schedule as a time of rich bonding with her father. A major proponent of [babywearing](#), my husband began his 5:00 a.m. shift by wrapping the baby in a Moby so she could join him for his [morning routine](#), which included stirring his homemade wine, making coffee, and washing the dishes. Tucked inside the Moby and gazing up at her father’s face, our daughter remained warm and content, and far from the smell of milk and lulled by running dishwater, the routine ended with her transition to peaceful sleep. That was great for me.

It helped us discover how partnership looked.

No amount of planning could have prepared us, of course, for the reality of early childrearing. But my husband’s ability to work out a flexible arrangement over the first few weeks made the transition that much easier. Today, I look back at that season of rapid



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presence at home in the first four weeks and his commitment to watching our daughter in the mornings and evenings helped us establish equity in our caregiving. The partnership forged from that understanding of equity does not mean 50/50 time with the baby and certainly hasn't made every conversation easy. Together, though, we've decided what roles we want to play in our daughter's life, and we each bring our best selves to the table to do so.

While this system doesn't work for everyone, it worked for us. And it may be a less-traditional form of paternity leave you'd like to consider.

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Carmen Dahlberg is the founder of [Belle Detroit, L3C](#) a creative agency that provides high-quality creative work to businesses by training and employing low-income Detroit moms.



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