

the buzz **B** Parenting

Family forum



SASHA BROWN, family care co-ordinator at Community Family Care, dishes up some parenting advice for Christmas

Having visitors over

With the holidays around the corner many families will have a busy calendar over the next few weeks. Having people visiting your home or going to visit friends/relatives can be exciting for children, and in turn can lead to a variety of problem behaviours such as showing off for attention or having tantrums when people leave. Children can often learn that problem behaviour is overlooked when others are around and can use it as an opportunity to misbehave, sometimes turning what should be a fun visit into a stressful time for parents. We've put together some simple tips for parents to help plan ahead.

Plan ahead

Prepare your child in advance for having visitors. Tell your child who is coming and what you would like them to do whilst they are visiting. It is often useful to plan some activities to keep children entertained, or take activities with you, as bored children are more likely to misbehave. Try to plan visitors or visits at times that don't disrupt your child's routine – tired and hungry children are less likely to be happy guests.

Rules

Setting two or three simple rules can help remind your child what is expected of them while you have visitors or are out. For example, say excuse me if you need to speak to mum/dad and wait until we have finished speaking, share your toys, play nicely with others. Discuss the rules with your child, along with rewards and consequences, and remind them before visits. Agree on a reward with your child if they behave well, eg time with mum/dad or choosing a story.

Praise

Give your child lots of praise each time you see them behaving well so that they are getting your attention for the good behaviour rather than having to misbehave to get attention from adults.

Consequences

If your child starts to misbehave, get close and gain their attention by using their name, tell them what you want them to stop doing and what you would like to see them doing instead. Follow up with a consequence if they do not do as you have asked. Consequences could include removing the activity for a period of time.

Review

Once the visit is over review what went well with your child to reinforce the behaviour you would like to see next time.

■ Community Family Care, based at Staunton, helps families, children and young people in need of additional support. It seeks to improve parents' confidence, help with routines to get children to school, or more complex support dealing with challenging behaviours at home. The work its staff carry out includes peer mentoring and life coaches for young people, and family support programmes. www.communityfamilycare.co.uk

What impact will the Government's new maternity leave plans have on Gloucestershire's small businesses?
LAURA CHURCHILL asks the experts



Mark Owen of the FSB



Firms will suffer

MATERNITY leave could soon be shared between both mothers and fathers in a Government shake-up.

But the move aimed at stopping women feeling they have to choose between a baby or a career, could mean disaster for some small businesses, according to critics.

Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, announced yesterday reforms which would help dads play a more hands-on role in a baby's first months. Under the new system, 50 weeks of maternity leave, following the first two weeks recovery, could be shared between parents from April 2015.

But Mark Owen chairman of the Gloucestershire Federation of Small Businesses believes it could cause havoc for some employers.

He runs his Moose marketing and PR company, which has five staff members.

He said: "In an idealistic world, with a cherry on top, we would support this, but unfortunately we live in a global economy.

"This is a mad, barking and crazy idea that does not take account of the global economic climate.

"Small and medium enterprises have been going through the worst recession in a lifetime and this is going to put more pressure, workload and bureaucracy – it is like tying their arm behind their back.

"Imagine a garage employing four people. If two males want to take time off together, it would become very difficult.

"Lots of businesses are family enterprises so they want the best for their staff and want to support them as much as possible, but this could be extremely damaging."

The Government has said, in an effort to allay fears of the impact on smaller firms, bosses will have to agree any proposed pattern of time off and retain the right to insist it be confined to a continuous block.

But Mr Owen believes the measures could lead to more employers taking on staff on zero hour or freelance contracts. He also fears it could lead to prejudice at interview stage for younger males looking for work.

The right to request flexible working patterns will be open to all employees who have done

26 weeks with a firm.

Mr Clegg, who dismissed the present system as Edwardian, said: "Women deserve the right to pursue their goals and not feel they have to choose between having a successful career or having a baby.

"They should be supported by their employers, rather than being made to feel less employable or under pressure to take unchallenging jobs.

"We need to challenge the old-fashioned assumption that women will always be the parent that stays at home. Many fathers want that option too.

"Many businesses already recognise how productive and motivated employees are when they're given the opportunity to work flexibly, helping them retain talent and boost their competitive edge."

Paralegal Steve Conlay from BPE Solicitors in Cheltenham also warned employers.

He said: "While the Government must be credited with encouraging family friendly rights, the effect on small businesses will need to be closely monitored.

"Employers must be given at least eight weeks' notice of the employees' plan to take leave, however this is still a very short timeframe if the employers needs to find a temporary replacement.

"While employers can insist the leave is taken in blocks instead of the odd week here and there, any unreasonable refusal to allow the leave may result in an Employment Tribunal claim being brought against them."



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Mark Owen