



The Smallest Things

EMPLOYER

WITH HEART 2.0

guidance pack



Welcome

Welcome to your Smallest Things Employer with Heart 2.0 guidance pack.

This information will help you to understand the unique needs of employees following the premature birth of a baby and will outline the ways you can support parents' return to work following the trauma of neonatal intensive care.

Our updated Smallest Things Charter reflects the new Neonatal Care (Leave and Pay) legislation that is due to come into effect in 2024/25 but goes one step further in supporting parents emotionally and financially. We hope you'll be inspired to sign up and become an Employer with Heart, supporting the needs of premature babies and their families.



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The Smallest Things

Registered charity 1171631
@_smallestthings
hello@thesmallestthings.org
thesmallestthings.org



The Smallest Things – premature baby charity

The Smallest Things is a registered charity supporting the needs of families and their babies born prematurely. The charity recognises the significant impact a premature birth has upon a family, both financially and emotionally, and understands that the neonatal journey does not end when parents bring their baby or babies home from hospital. The charity is dedicated to making the world a better place for families after neonatal intensive care and in improving outcomes for children born prematurely. Read more about our mission, vision and values in The Smallest Things Strategy.

Our vision

A better world for premature babies and their families after neonatal care

Our mission

To promote the good health of premature babies and their families; raise awareness of premature birth and the needs of families following intensive care; and to promote high-quality care for parents affected by postnatal depression, anxiety and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

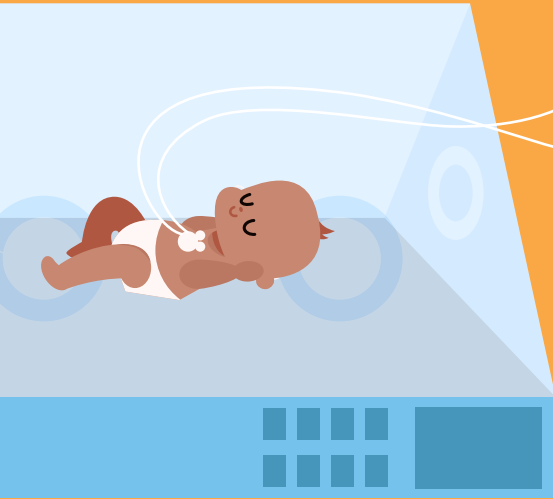


While NCT groups up and down the country are meeting for coffee and talking about pooing and breastfeeding, NICU mums gather in expressing rooms to discuss breathing support, surgery and methods of tube feeding. It's like an alternative reality where life-or-death moments are discussed in the same way as nap routines.”

Sarah – mum to twins Charlotte & Eva, born at 28 weeks



Prematurity in numbers



Every year
60,000
babies in the UK are born premature (prior to 37 weeks' gestation) and make up 38% of babies requiring admission to specialist Neonatal Intensive Care Units.¹ This is around 8% of all births.²



Maternal mental health
40%

of mothers develop postnatal depression following premature birth (compared to 5-10% of mothers delivering at full term).⁵

More than
50%

of babies born prematurely were readmitted to hospital following discharge home from neonatal care.⁴



The World Health Organization categorises pre-term birth as;

Extremely preterm
Less than 28 weeks' gestation
(5% of UK preterm births)²

Very preterm
(28 to 32 weeks' gestation)
(11% of UK preterm births)²

Moderate to late preterm
(32 to 37 weeks' gestation)
(85% of UK preterm births)²

As might be expected, those born earliest require the greatest level of support, have a greater risk of co-morbidities and spend longer periods of time in hospital before coming home.

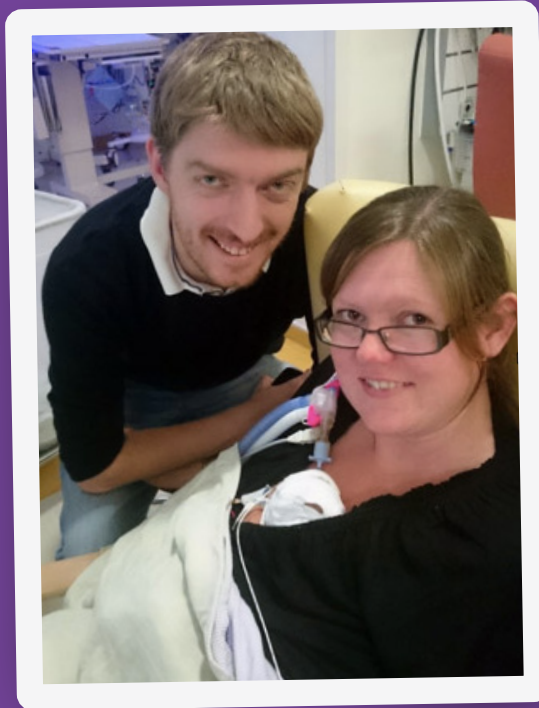


24%

of parents to babies born prematurely between March 2017 and May 2021 reported a diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder⁴

COST An average stay in neonatal care will cost a family in excess of £2,994 through travel costs, eating away from home, parking charges, unpaid leave from work and childcare costs for siblings.³

¹ Bliss (2023) Statistics about Neonatal Care. ² Office for National Statistics. (2013) Pregnancy and ethnic factors influencing births and infant mortality. ³ Sky News (2022) reported via Bliss: The very real costs of having a premature baby. ⁴ The Smallest Things. (2021) After NICU 2021: A Post Pandemic Report. ⁵ SN Vigod, L Villegas, C-L Dennis, LE Ross. (2010) Prevalence and risk factors for postpartum depression among women with preterm and low-birth-weight infants: a systematic review



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Matt's story

“My son Harry spent 107 days in hospital, taking up 3.5 months of my wife Sally's maternity leave. Harry and Sam were born 15 weeks early at 25 weeks' gestation in October 2015. Sadly, despite fighting hard, Sam passed away after 16 days yet Harry fought on with lots of challenges. When we finally brought Harry home he was on oxygen and most days were spent at check-ups or hospital visits. It wasn't until he was six months that appointments became less frequent and by then we were already planning Sally's return to work as a teacher.

If we had received additional leave, we would have been able to spend more time with Harry and cherish being together as a family. We could have had some time to come to terms with the loss of Sam and be more prepared and able to commit to returning to the workforce. Bringing in additional neonatal leave will support families all over the country and enable them to focus on those precious moments you never get back.”

Matt, Dad to Harry and Sam, born at 25 weeks

”



Sarah's story

“When it was time for me to discuss returning to work after maternity leave, I asked for more time.

My employer said no. I'd spent 197 days of my maternity leave visiting my premature, sick babies in neonatal intensive care.

My daughter Eva died on Day 201. It felt like my maternity leave was ending before it had even begun.

I had a long list of follow-up appointments for Charlotte, my surviving twin, and for myself. My focus needed to be on her health, her development, her nutrition and our bond. How could I leave that to someone else? There was no choice: I resigned.”

Sarah, Mum to Charlotte & Eva, born at 28 weeks





“

Heather's story

“My employer had signed up to The Smallest Things Employer with Heart charter so I got an extra 10 weeks of paid maternity leave. If this had not been in place, I would have missed out on Spencer walking for the first time. It has made a huge difference to my family.”

Heather, Mum to Spencer, born at 30 weeks, and Neonatal Nurse at Birmingham Women's & Children's Hospital (an Employer with Heart)

”

What is The Smallest Things Employer with Heart charter?

The Charter outlines the support employers should offer above existing statutory requirements for staff whose baby or babies are born prematurely.

It has three basic asks:

1

Extend maternity leave for mothers who give birth prematurely (before 37 weeks' gestation) by the number of days a baby is born prior to their due date. This extended leave will be at full pay.

2

Give dads and partners additional leave for the number of days between their premature baby's birth date and due date. This extended leave will be at full pay.

3

Support parents returning to work following the birth of a premature baby. Babies born too soon can have ongoing medical needs, requiring regular hospital appointments and check-ups. Consider formal and informal flexible working patterns and offer additional paid or unpaid leave.

Why should we extend leave for parents of premature babies?

- To give mothers extended leave to recover from the physical and mental trauma of premature birth and neonatal intensive care.
- To give fathers and partners additional paid leave to be with their baby in hospital as well as when their baby is discharged. Partners cannot be expected to perform at work while their baby or babies are in neonatal intensive care. **Research suggests that 66% of fathers returned to work while their baby was still receiving neonatal care*.**
- To help a smooth transition back to work when the time comes. Research by The Smallest Things suggests returning to work was **not possible for 11% of parents due to their own medical needs and 16% because of their baby's needs.****
- To join a growing list of Employers with Heart from across all sectors in the UK and be able to use our logo as a public display of your compassionate, family-friendly policies. **You'll also be added to The Smallest Things 'Hall of Fame'.**



“It’s so important for new parents to feel supported. In that moment, everything else takes a back seat and it’s wonderful that Sony Music are acknowledging that by introducing this.”

Paloma Faith on the news that Sony Music had become an Employer with Heart



* BBC News (2019) reported via Bliss: Parents of sick babies need more leave, charity says
** The Smallest Things. (2021) After NICU 2021: A Post Pandemic Report





Will it cost us a lot of money to do this?

The number of families affected by premature birth is small. **Just 8% of births end in pre-term labour**, with the majority (85%) of premature births happening between 32-37 weeks, therefore requiring less additional leave. We believe that the relatively small costs involved will be outweighed by the successful return of mothers to the workplace, the ability of fathers and partners to focus at work and overall employee loyalty and retention.



“We pride ourselves on the level of support and compassionate understanding we provide for our employees. We appreciate that it can be an extremely difficult and worrying time for those who experience premature labour and family is of the utmost importance. FSCS believes that parents facing the worry and uncertainty of visiting their premature baby in hospital should not spend that time as maternity or paternity leave.”

David Blackburn, Chief People Officer |
Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS)



Award-winning employers

The Smallest Things works with companies and organisations to promote the changes they have made. Our Employers with Heart are frequently in the news, gaining coverage in trade magazines, local papers, as well as national and regional broadcast news.

Employers with Heart have gone on to win national awards, for example the Guardian Public Service Award for Workforce Wellbeing was won by Waltham Forest Council for introducing extra leave on full pay to employees who have a baby born preterm.



Neonatal Care (Leave and Pay) legislation: above and beyond

The Smallest Things led the campaign for extended, paid parental leave for families of premature babies and change is coming. New statutory legislation, however, doesn't go far enough to support the needs of staff whose babies are born prematurely.

→ **The new Neonatal Care (Leave and Pay) Bill** was introduced via a Private Members Bill by Stuart McDonald MP (below) in 2022. The bill received cross party support and will achieve Royal Assent in Spring 2023. New statutory leave and pay entitlements are likely to be available from 2025.

→ Neonatal leave will be available to employees as a day one right and will apply to parents of babies who are admitted into hospital up to the age of 28 days, and who have a continuous stay in hospital of seven full days or more, up to a maximum of 12 weeks.

→ Entitlement to Statutory Neonatal Pay, like other family-related pay rights, will be available to employees who meet continuity of service and minimum earnings tests, to provide both consistency and ease to employers who will administer the entitlement. The leave will be paid at a rate of around £160 per week, up to a maximum of 12 weeks.



Scan the QR code to view the footage



Why should we make this change now for our employees?

- Parents need their employers to provide support above and beyond new statutory requirements.
- Legislation for new Neonatal Leave and Pay may not come into effect **until 2025** and does not go far enough.
- **Statutory Neonatal Leave and Pay will only cover the time a baby is in hospital.** It does not take into account the developmental needs of a baby born prematurely or the ongoing appointments, medical interventions and readmissions to hospital that occur after coming home from neonatal care.
- Once home from hospital, parents need to time to recover from the

trauma of a premature birth and neonatal intensive care stay. They also need time to bond with their baby without the pressure and worry of work and pay.

- As a compassionate, inclusive employer, you want to go above and beyond the statutory minimum requirements to offer your staff the support they need at a traumatic time in their lives.

- Families who experience prolonged periods of time in hospital face **mounting costs associated with hospital stays**. Paid at a statutory rate for the duration of time their baby is in hospital, many families will be forced to return to work too soon.



We passionately believe that time spent in a neonatal unit, helplessly watching your fragile baby in an incubator covered in wires and tubes and surrounded by beeping machinery, should not count as parental leave. Not only is precious time with a newborn replaced by fear and worry over health issues (or even survival), but the journey does not end when (and if) a baby leaves hospital.

The Smallest Things
The impact of Covid-19 on maternity and parental leave
House of Commons
Petitions Committee



Scan the QR to view full report

SIGN UP NOW:



The Smallest Things Employer with Heart charter

We agree to:

1. Extend maternity leave for mothers who give birth prematurely (before 37 weeks gestation) by the number of days a baby was born prior to their due date. We will pay extended leave at full pay.

2. Give dads and partners the time they need to be with their baby in hospital. We will grant additional leave for the number of days between their premature baby's birth date and due date at full pay. This extended leave is in addition to statutory paternity leave or any shared parental leave.

3. Support parents returning to work following the birth of a premature baby. We understand that returning to work can be a difficult time for parents of premature babies and that babies born too soon can have ongoing medical needs, requiring regular hospital appointments and check-ups. We will consider formal and informal flexible working patterns and offer additional paid or unpaid leave.

The Smallest Things Employer with Heart charter



Company/organisation name:

Signed:

Name and position:

Date:

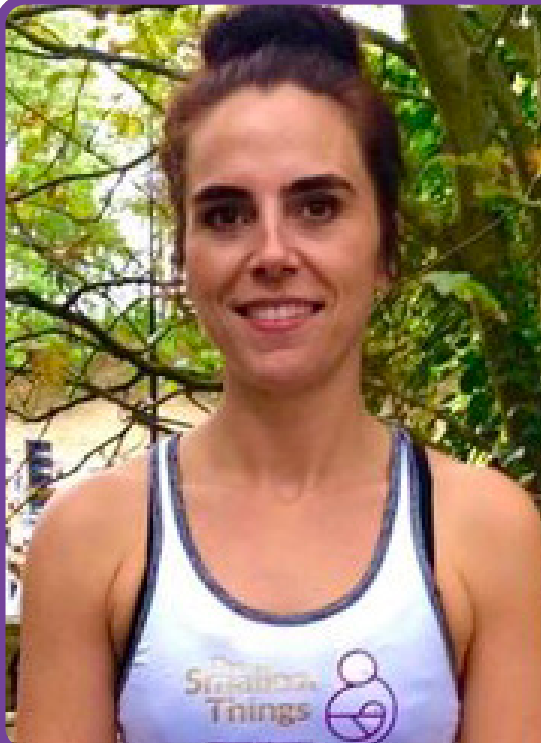


What's next?

Send a signed copy of the Employer with Heart Charter, along with relevant amended parental leave policies to **hello@thesmallestthings.org**

Once your updated parental leave policies have been reviewed, we will be in touch to add you to our online 'Employer with Heart' hall of fame. You will receive our Employer with Heart charter mark and we will work with you to promote and celebrate the changes you have made.

Do not stop there – ask any partner, suppliers or contractors you work with to sign up to the charter too!



Supporting The Smallest Things

The Smallest Things is a tiny charity making a big impact. Run largely by volunteers we rely on the support and generosity of others. There is no fee attached to becoming an Employer with Heart, however we do ask private companies to consider making a donation to the charity, however we ask private companies to make a donation to the charity and consider other ways you and your teams can support our work. There are several ways you can do this:

- ➔ Choose The Smallest Things as your charity partner
- ➔ Support our annual fundraising events
- ➔ Promote The Smallest Things and the work we do through social media

