

## Equal parental leave: helping to form a bond which will stay for life

*By Chris Stevenson*

*Chris, who works in the Performance Development team at Aviva Investors, took delayed parental leave following the birth of his baby boy Ben — who arrived 3 days after we introduced our new equal parental leave policy.*



That first two weeks of paternity leave just goes by in a flash. In normal circumstance, that would be it for a dad. Back to work and then only catching glimpses of your child at evenings and weekends. To get the opportunity to spend so much time with Ben, especially when he was developing so fast, is something I am truly thankful for.

I was there to help with his feeding, I was there when he first started standing, when he first started giggling. I took him swimming for the first time, to a farm and a soft play. All the baby classes only run during the week so without the extra leave I would have had no opportunity to experience how much happiness Ben got from them.

I remember so clearly the first time he crawled properly. We had gone to see Ben's Great-Nan who, following a stroke, had just gone in to a care home. It is unlikely Ben would have seen his Great-Nan quite as much without my leave, as my wife would have struggled to do the long drive alone with him. As it was, my Nan got to see Ben's first crawl and really got to know him before she died, giving her some joy in those final few months.



Looking back now, the times I remember most fondly on are those where we were just hanging out as a family, doing normal things: reading to him, playing, feeding, having him fall asleep on me. I learnt so much which I would never otherwise have done. The first couple of times taking

Ben out alone were quite daunting, but just being able to do it regularly has given me so much confidence in how to care for him.

It does spoil you though! I now get to see him for an hour each evening (assuming I leave work on time) and am often shattered after a long day. But he loves it when I come home, and his eyes light up. Maybe that would happen anyway, but I do feel having six months with him has helped me form a bond with my son which will stay for life. I am so grateful to Aviva for being innovative in identifying that this equal opportunity measure is so important. I imagine in time it will be the norm for business but Aviva has paved the way.