**Podcast transcript**

**Series 1, Episode 8: Working Parents and Carers**

**Opening credits** Talking Inclusion with Steven Copsey

**Steven** Hello and welcome to Inclusive Employers podcast ‘Talking Inclusion with’

I'm Steven Copsey, and today we're going to be talking about working parents and carers, and how we can support this population to be more successful at work.

Before I introduce our guests, in case you don't know us, we're Inclusive Employers, our mission is to make every workplace an inclusive employer, where every colleague values differences and can contribute their skills and experiences fully to their organisation.

These podcasts are for anyone who has an interest in inclusion and diversity. In our podcast, we share life stories and experiences. We learn about best practice and hear practical advice for employees from our guests as well as Inclusive Employers own I & D experts.

Today I'm joined by two brilliant guests. Kate who is a physiotherapist for the NHS and also a parent to Emily 11, James 15 and Daniel 16. Hi Kate

**Kate** Hi

**Steven** And Simon. Simon has a three year old son Jacob, and works for Sport Wales. Hi, Simon.

**Simon** Hi Steven.

**Steven** And of course, our head of Inclusion Services North, Rosie, who has recently had baby Euan, who is now six months old. Hello Rosie.

**Rosie** Hi, Steven.

**Steven** So our guests today are among the 7 million parents and carers in the UK right now. So we're going to talk about what employers should be thinking about, what barriers many parents and carers face to building successful careers. And finally, we're also going to share some practical tips and advice on how organisations can support parents and carers.

First, Kate, Simon and Rosie are going to share their own experiences as parents and how being parents has impacted their life at work.

Simon, I'm going to start with you. So you became a father three years ago? Can you start by telling us if you took parental leave? And if so what did that look like?

**Simon** Yes, I definitely took parental leave. I think my wife would have killed me if I didn't. But I took it especially as Laura had a caesarean, it was emergency caesarean. So my employers gave me three days off special leave to actually almost be her carer of those three days, because for the first three days, she couldn't really move out of bed. So my parental leave didn't start until three days after that. So I had one week full pay paternity and one week statutory pay. So in the end, I have about two and a half weeks off, which was, it was actually an awakening. So it's good. Yeah.

**Steven** Two and a half weeks, you know, compared to obviously, statutory maternity leave, there's quite a difference there. How did that feel at the time? Did it feel enough?

**Simon** Obviously, I’d have liked more, because I think in those first few weeks, you get to bond with the child, and I felt a bit bad after two weeks kind of going ‘Right, I'm back off to work now’ and then leaving my wife to it.

So I think, yeah, in a perfect world be amazing to have more time. But yeah, but at the time, I think it was just yeah, because I didn't know any different I think two weeks to me, I was like, ‘Oh, brilliant I got two weeks’. But yeah, in the long term, more would have been absolutely brilliant if it could.

**Steven** And do you think Laura would have coped with you for more than two weeks?

**Simon** I think she was happy for me to go to work. I think I also took another week to leave and she's like, ”No, no, no, it's fine!”

**Steven** Kate - your children are now 11, 15 and 16. How long was your maternity leave? Obviously, that might have varied throughout the different pregnancies. And how did you employer support you with those?

**Kate** So as you can hear from the ages, I created a slight complication in my first maternity leave by having to tell my employer that I was going to go on a second maternity leave. So the plan had been throughout that I would take as much maternity leave as we could take, to spend as long with them as babies as we could. So the plan was always a year with each of them. Then on my third maternity leave with Emily, we found as a family unit that child three was fine, child two was actually the ‘ooooh’ moment. But in terms of where James was at that time, my son who has Down Syndrome, it was necessary for me to take some extended leave it at that point. So I actually took longer and ended up with almost two years then with Emily, Emily as a baby.

**Steven** Rosie, Euan is six months old now, and you're currently still on maternity leave COVID aside, has your leave been as expected?

**Rosie** I think it's pretty hard to say COVID aside obviously it's my first baby, so I don't know what life would be like without having COVID and a baby at the same time, but has it been what I expected… Erm No, I think it's been a lot harder actually.

I've wanted a baby for a long time, I've had a baby, and then I suppose I wasn't expecting it to maybe be quite as hard as it is, I thought work was hard, and then having a baby was going to be like a little break, and that's absolutely not my experience, it’s pretty tough going. I think it was made harder because of COVID, because I couldn't have the support, and I couldn't go places. I had a baby at Christmas. So it was cold, and everything was shut.

So being stuck in was very, very difficult. But things are definitely getting easier now he’s getting older. And now I'm starting to worry about that transition back to work as I come back in two months time now. So yeah, you've kind of just get used to being a mum, or I've just kind of got used to being a mum, and now I'm thinking about oh, no, I have to now think about being a working mum, which I suppose is going to be a new challenge as well.

**Steven** And how have you started to prepare for that? You know, what is that feeling of ‘oh, I'm back at work in a couple of months time’.

**Rosie** I guess there's the practical things like making sure that we've got a nursery place for Ewan and that we have kind of, me and my husband have kind of talked about how we're going to manage that portfolio drop offs, all that sort of thing. I suppose the easy side is managing the practical. The emotional side… I've just decided not to think about it for now, and I think I'll deal with him not being there with me all day.

I guess when I return, a little bit like when I went off and I, I took a few weeks to probably more like nearly a month, to adjust to not working, because y’know work is pretty much defined me up until being a parent, I now feel like I'm gonna go through that sort of similar process, again, of redefining, you know, what, who I am, when it comes to being a parent who is going to be working full time as well. So trying to manage that, emotionally, I think is going to be a challenge.

**Steven** Simon, what about your experiences at work after becoming a parent, what changed, what looks different, what feels different than it did pre-children?

**Simon** After my two week holiday of parental leave, or whatever you call it, it brought change. It's probably my work life balance. It was the fact that, I used to go to work there, okay. I was ready to go to work and think you're ready to go home, I'm still carrying some work, I can do bits on the weekend, mostly run lots of courses in my spare time going away on Saturdays all day to West Wales and North Wales. And, but from that I can actually I don't really want to spend that, time, my spare time away from my family. So I think the work life balance changed a lot. I think, Michelle, who I used to work with, from Inclusive Employers, and she'll know, as soon as I left work, my mind switched off work.

But I think that was a bonus because I could literally spend more time with my family as I rush straight home to see my son. And then yes, it was definitely a work life balance change for me.

**Steven** And Kate, the same to you obviously, becoming a parent has so many changes.

But being a parent of a child with Down Syndrome as well, there's got to be even more challenges and changes for you.

**Kate** Yeah, I suppose the difference in terms of me as a person in work returning as a parent full stop, was I always felt I was watching the clock constantly.

It was like, what's the next thing? What's the time? Where am I meant to be? At one point, I was using my lunch, half an hour to transfer them from one nursery to another nursery and get back to work, you know, you’re constantly aware of the time and I suppose similarly to Simon, you know, when I had a team lead role, I would always put patients first, paperwork was secondary, you know, my job as a physio was was looking after patients in my heart. And so, you know, I would use time after official hours, you know, to catch up on the paperwork, and that of course, then you know, you just can't do that, because you have to be at x place, at x time to pick up from childcare.

So I suppose similarly to Simon, you know, you have to try, I must admit, I found it harder to switch off. I suppose. that's the difference between you know, having a diary of patients who can see their faces, know their complex needs, and you know, it's quite a personal thing. I found it difficult to switch off, but that's probably more me as a person than anything else. Yeah, but it's the clock watching. Definitely the time management was different.

**Steven** Kate, we’ll stay with you. Can you tell us one thing that your employer at the time did, right when it came to that maternity leave that support? And also one thing that maybe they could have done better?

**Kate** I think there was an outward appearance of the understanding. So, you know, in terms of two of my children, you know, I would call them mundane pregnancies, mundane parameters, you know, there was nothing, you know, it was part of the norm. And in terms of managers, I guess they would claim that they'd experienced the same thing.

So really, in terms of James, they would, I think there was an understanding from the point of view, you know, that I'd had another child, and they tried to be a little bit more understanding, but then that would flip into something that they didn't quite do as well, which was, no one ever asked what that really looks like in terms of a difference.

So, you know, the assumption of things been pretty much as it was for Daniel, but you know, could in part be my fault, because, you know, I'm a coper and a do-er, and I won't necessarily display to people outside my close knit unit that is a problem. But yeah, there was never that request for, you know, what are the differences? How does this look different for you?

You know, if I wasn't working full time hours, they weren't, you know, small hours, but they were classed as part time. So there'd be days when I wasn't in. So it’s that assumption, isn't it, that it's a day off. But for me, it wasn't a day off. It was probably two appointments, one of which might be in a home visit. So which also involves, you know, the mad, frantic ‘Oh, my goodness, it's gonna be a stranger in my house’. I've got to sort all that out. So there's just the hidden stresses, I suppose of what is happening within the time when you're not in work that people aren't aware of unless they asked that specific question. I wasn't ever asked that specific question.

**Steven** Simon, the same question to you there. What was one thing that your employee really did, right, and one thing that maybe could have been done better?

**Simon** They did right - They were really good, because again, it was quite a complicated birth and awareness of my wife's in hospital. Vanessa was still in work at the time, and she was also in for a few days before the actual birth. But they were really good at this, they actually said just do what you need to do. If you need to go to be in hospital, go to the hospital. And they were really supportive of what my needs were in that sense. And especially, I was very lucky to work for a local councillor, we had sort of special needs days he could take for emergencies. And so I'm not sure if that's the case across all employers, but it was the fact they said, Okay, well have these three days, just go be with the wife and sort things out, and then obviously, go into your maternity leave. So I think from that point of view, they're really, really supportive and just saying, just, whatever you feel is best, just go and do it. Because I think they knew that sort of that was more important than my actual job, in a sense, just go and be with my family before anything else.

So that is what they did really, really well. I'm really struggling to find out something they could have done better. Because, again, it's sort of I’ve only worked for a local authority for seven years. So that was the only sort of employer I’ve had, so I don't know what other things that are out there that employers could do.

**Steven** Rosie - opening ‘us’ up here.. What about Inclusive Employers? What did we do right, what could we have done better?

**Rosie** Of course, Inclusive Employers are absolutely perfect in every way. I would not say differently. But all joking aside, no, it has been very good. It's been a very good experience.

Obviously, I'm not back at work yet. So I have quite a limited experience when it comes to the process of parenting and working. But in regards to what they did well, I would say the keeping in touch has been really good. So my manager, Claire, we're in contact and she was very, very good at the beginning to just say, Look, we'll openly say I'm not going to contact you for at least the first few weeks. But if you want to contact us do and I haven't forgotten about you, it's just I think you need some space from us. And I think you need to adjust to life as a parent. So she gave me that space. And then she contacted me and she didn't expect anything in return. And it's been helpful for me to have that contact to uh, you know, I've attended a few training days I've attended a few kind of all team meetings, but it's never been an expectation. It's always been a choice, and the choice for me felt right to do that, because I think it will help my return that I've not been completely, you know, separated and not talk to anyone in the team for eight months. So that's been really good. But obviously, when it comes to the actual return process, I am yet to experience that so well, we'll see how that goes.

**Steven** Now we're going to talk about the barriers for parents and carers at work, and how it can sometimes be difficult to continue on the same career path once they have parental responsibility.

We often hear about the rising cost of childcare being a huge issue for many people with young children. And we hear facts about parents and carers, mainly women leaving the workforce once they do have children. Many parents make changes to their work to help balance work and family life. But almost three in ten working mothers said they had reduced their hours to help with childcare, compared with only one in twenty fathers.

Rosie, what do you see as the key barriers for working parents and carers?

**Rosie** I definitely think as you mentioned Steven, childcare costs is is a huge barrier.

The first thing that me and my husband did when we started looking at nurseries for Euan, was work out, well, how much would we earn, if we dropped down to four days, three days, you know, lots of different kinds of combinations of our two working pattern is to work out how we were going to cover this cost. Because it's not insignificant at all, you're talking about a huge amount of your income. So yeah, I think that that is a big part of it.

But other barriers, as I've mentioned previously, would probably be just the adjustment either way off on leave back to, to work as well. And me and my husband were actually taking shared parental leave. So when I come back to work, he will actually be stopping work and taking some time to look after our son. And it's not paid in the same way maternity leave is. So it's quite hard for families to do that it’s very hard as the second parent in our circumstances, the father, to actually make that decision to take real time, not just those first couple of weeks, but real months to do that, because actually, we're having to foot the cost as ourselves as a family, the government doesn't cover that cost, and a lot of employers don't enhance share parental leave and the way that they enhance maternity leave. So I'd say that it's a really big, big barrier for people as well. And if we want to change as a society, and we want to see fathers really take an active role in their children's lives, then we have to make that viable for families, we have to actually say, Okay, well you're able to do this. Because we're able to kind of do it financially as well. So yeah, I think that's a huge part of it.

And there's a big culture shift for people as well, to accept that men may actually want to be at home with children, because we expect women to want to, and again to to be okay as a woman to return. Because sometimes, I’ve even have a few comments. I'm coming back after eight months, which is a significant period of time. And people have sort of said to me, oh, did you not want the whole year as if like, I wouldn't want to be with my child. And it's like, actually, I want my husband to spend time with our son. That is a choice that that is, in some respects, a sacrifice that I've made. And I felt judged sometimes that I would not sort of want to be with my child, because I want to come back to work and I want him to have that valuable time as well. So we have a huge societal shift in this sort of microaggressions for men and women, and I'm sure for LGBTQ+ families as well. There must be lots of microaggressions that they experienced which is unique to them.

**Steven** Simon, Kate, thinking about your careers, thinking about barriers challenges, personally, that you felt because of being a parent. Simon, what did that look like to you in the workplace if there were any

**Simon** It’s very similar to what Rosie said about childcare costs, but a couple of things.

One thing is probably drop off times for schools. I know he’s only just started school nursery, but he starts at nine. So most jobs now obviously you start your working day at nine o'clock. So I dropped him off to school. And then luckily he's got his child minder in the afternoon. But when he starts primary school full time, he's going for a 3:30pm finish, And then hope, luckily, you've got family nearby. But again, that's how we cater for that sort of, when you pick them up from school, if grandparents can't do it, we still find another child minder, and yes, that can be quite a tricky one to try and get into work and drop Jacob off at school.

And thinking from a career point of view, I kind of stayed. I didn't want to take a risk while going for new jobs. I think, I did after a while to talk these things were more stable now. But from a career perspective, I didn't think okay, if I get a new job, what would that look like with family time, would I have to take out, would it be more work with more pressure on me. And so I kind of stayed in the same role with the same things, but then eventually did branch out to get new employment.

But for me, I was a little bit more worried about thinking, well, this is what I know I've got my routine, I know I can pick my son up from here and there, these are my set hours, I know my employer. Yeah, so it's quite a bit worried about moving on to a new employer, in the case, they have different support mechanisms.

**Kate** The difficulties that I had arose from having a child who was unpredictable in terms of, what might be happening. So initially, when he was very small, the unpredictability came from the people giving us lots of different appointments and different times, different investigations, and I would have no control of that

And then, as he's got older, obviously there more to do with himself and within education. And, again, I suppose it comes back to perhaps to a lack of communication. I mean, we're talking about employers, but sadly, we all know that it can be specific persons or personalities that are a barrier rather than the wider organisation. And when I would have conversations, it was quite a 2D conversation. So you know, if I would present the difficulty I was having in terms of needing time off, the solutions wouldn't necessarily work, they would never come from the other side. And that's not meant unkindly. That's just how it was. And, you know, I was quite proactive as a parent and would come to them with a difficulty that I was having, say, for example, you know, a last minute appointment that had been given to us. But I always come to them with that and a solution. I think if the reason for that is because already had a sense of the fact that there was going to be a problem, obviously, otherwise, I wouldn't have felt the need to present them with the whole solution in coming to them.

So I think that if we, if there can be a little bit more understanding, because there's a little bit more knowledge, that's helpful. And this isn't meant unkindly, but a lot of parents will have had negative experiences, perhaps parents who, or individuals who, aren't particularly keen on work or don't like their work, we all know people who do sadly take advantage of systems, and that can cloud how they behave towards other parents and other individuals. And you feel like you're asking for the world. At times, when it's something that's completely out of your control.

I did have to reduce my hours, and then on returning with Emily after, after a short break, extended maternity leave, I wasn't able to return to my job, that I actually had a demotion because they said that I couldn't do my hours within the seniority that I'd been in previously.

If I could have a conversation with that Kate right now, I would give her a bit of a talk into, and say ‘excuse me, you need to have a chat about that and take some advice’ but when you've got three children under five or six, and you just need to be in employment, and at the time to be fair, the NHS you know was going through one of those times when anyone who was anyone near retirement age was asked to, you know, retire etc. So it was not great timing for me, but I definitely did, sadly become affected by the fact that my life experience was changing and they took the opportunity then, to make financial savings and my career progression then was totally affected by it. I was a team lead and then I came back down, and it's difficult then to come back back through. That might be, you know, I made the decision, I suppose ultimately to put family first.

Steven Simon, do you feel that being a father is meant that you were treated differently to mothers as a working parent?

**Simon** I thought we were very naive, I don't think so. I feel probably not in a bad way. I think there's probably more pressure, I think Rosie, enter into this as well, but there's probably more pressure on say female colleagues when they come back from that nine months, because they're had nine months off bonding with that child, and that they just got that taken away, but they've had that time to go into work, they haven't got that child near them, they've got use that in their set up, 9 months to a year, whereas the male only had sort of two weeks. So I saw that bond their child, but my norm hasn't been changed.

**Steve** Do you think if you had had maybe nine months off of parental leave, do you think coming back would have been a very different experience for you?

**Simon** Oh yeah definitely. I think it'd be so much harder.. I feel it's got to be a lot harder to come back. But nine months of different routines, seeing different people, and then you go back into an office, and you've probably got that totally different routine of where you've got different conversations, you're routines are totally different, so for me, I think it would probably be a massive change, If I did have that nine months off.

**Steven** Rosie, do you think there any barriers to work that employees aren't talking about or aren't thinking about when it comes to being a parent or a carer?

**Rosie** I would say probably more on the carer side than on the parents side. I think as a society and as workplaces, we've kind of got our heads around the idea of parents.

And we're getting our heads around the idea of same sex couples, single parents who diverse families in that way. However, when it comes to being a carer, and whether that is for a child or young person, or that could be for your partner or a parent or someone in your life that has a disability or a medical needs, I think we still struggle or employers still struggle with that, because they, I guess they haven't got a blueprint for it. Whereas we've all you know, we've I'm sure all have very different lives. But we all either have had a parent or multiple parents, or we've been brought up by someone or we're a parent ourselves, or we've watched millions of TV shows where there's parents, we get it, there's a blueprint, whereas when it comes to caring, we haven't probably seen as much of that. And so we don't know what to do about it.

And also, particularly if we think about the conversation around disability in general, in the UK, and in UK, workplaces, we're pretty far behind. No, we aren't talking about disability inclusion in the way that we're talking about gender inclusion, the way that we're talking about, well, it's now starting to talk about race, and we just people, flounder and they're worried about it, and they're worried about offending, they don't want to say so if someone comes to work, and they say, actually, I'm gonna need some time off, or some support because my partner has a disability, and I need to help them maybe it's that they need help with personal care, maybe it's that they need help going into appointments, I think a lot of workplaces would go, we can't do that, because you're not that parent, and then our child, but it's like, actually, no, I can do that. And I will do that. Because they're a person that I love. And that is important, you know, whatever your relationship is to them.

So I think we probably still need to do a lot of work for carers and how we keep them in work if they wish to be in work.

And because some may not want to, but if they wish to be in work to do that, but also have the time, the mental and emotional space, as well as the physical time to be that person because I have disabled people in my family and some of my family members are carers for them. So it's not, it's not my experience, but you know, it's secondary in my family, but I know that it's not easy to go to work and switch off from that person's medical needs, wherever they may be, because they don't stop because you're not there. And you may still be worrying about them. Or you may be caught watching and thinking actually, they don't get to that doctor's appointment on time, you know, then the weird delay because we'll have to re-book and they might not get their medication and that might affect them and it goes on and on and on. So I think we probably need a lot of education when it comes to caring for the people in general.

**Steven** And what about you Simon - Do you think there's anything that we could be speaking about more as employers, when it comes to those barriers for parents?

**Simon** I probably say it's more about every parent has a different need, and for their child and their lifestyle, sort of my kind of thinking just for that employer to communicate with those parents who have gotten them to where they do employ, and say, right…. ask them what their needs are, because as an employee, you're not going to know, you will know have an idea. But that said, there's no blanket approach to go across everything. So it's about trying to speak to each individual and say, actually, “what do you need from us as an employer?” because once they've done that, that parent will feel almost invested within that company, then they know that that company is trying to show an interest in their personal needs.

And for me, that is amazing. Because, when my employer does that, I'm like, brilliant, you're actually interested in me as a person and what my family needs are, and nine times out of 10.. Look, there's no official stats behind that. But nine times out of ten, you'll probably work harder for that individual.

And they said, you will have those colleagues who do have employees, who won't do this sort of necessary work. But there's a better chance of getting people to do the work if they feel that that company cares about them as well. So just speak to the employers find out their needs when they come back from maternity or paternity. And think about what do you need from us to make it a bit easier for you to come back, and there will be little things in there that they do already. But it's about just getting those deep conversations going, lots of communication backwards and forwards, because it will change as well, they won't just be one conversation when they come back. And that's it, we're done. It's sort of three months time, have another conversation, three more months have another conversation. And I think that, for me, will be the sort of main thing there, hopefully reduce those barriers.

**Steven** And, Kate, what about you thinking from either a parent or carer perspective? What aren't employers thinking about enough?

**Kate** I think one of the big things I found through work, and I found through education, is there was a big drive for equality. Everyone, you know, treat everyone equally, and that that was that was the big drive. And when you're the family unit, or representing the person that's impacted on, it's actually really difficult, because it's, it's not helpful, it is equity, and, sadly, equity can be a little bit more difficult for managers to get their head round, because it's looking different to other people and to other employers, and I think a lot of employers are nervous about that, because you know very much that your end goal is that the person is afforded the same opportunity and has the same experience. But the way in which to get there is obviously quite different, you know, you're not giving everyone the same height box to stand on to see over the wall, you know, as that fabulous picture shows, it's actually given that person who's got difficulty and extra big box.

And some employers and some employees around the people you know, that that have been impacted on really struggle with that, because they think they're getting something for nothing and being treated differently, without seeing that you're being treated differently to be treated the same, and to get the same outcome.

So I think, hugely, that is still a big difficulty throughout society. I think employers could acknowledge the fact that the health and education system that I've navigated as a parent/carer is enormous and very complex, and so I've developed quite a lot of skills along the way, which they could be utilising so you know, in terms of problem solving, time management, communication, written skills, oral skills, you know, they've had to ramp up. And it would, you know, be nice to see employers recognise those additional skills that carers gained through what they're doing every day and thinking nothing of it sometimes.

And also, there's an assumption that you're working part time hours means that you're not that perhaps bothered about being in work, you know, and I was actually never offered the opportunity to go on an external course, when you know, there was assumption was that well, if you're working part time, you're probably not going to find time to do this. So then, you know, your CPD and your professional development starts to suffer a bit with that because you're there but you're kind of not there. You're kind of tied blind to this pulpit because you're the person who has to do less hours and again, nothing, no horrible, no nastiness intended in that, but it is what happens because that's just historically how people have been treated.

And I think it goes back to if they had more insight into, you know, what's going on behind that carer, behind the need to be part time, they'd realise that it's not because they're suddenly disinterested in the job or being employed. It's just that there are other factors now to consider.

And so, you know, we can, if we're offered opportunities, still within employment, that we'll be able to consider those because we've got quite good at looking at bigger picture and juggling things.

So yeah, there are things still to be done, and I would say, you know, the equity button is still to be pressed, people are kind of dancing around it a bit and trying, but it's not coming quick enough, and as a carer, at the moment, with a young lad who's approaching 16, I'm actually quite anxious about that move to adult services now, because that's going to be something different, again, that employers would have to consider because, you know, as a parent care, you've got that security of school being nice or half free. And, you know, I know where he is, and hopefully it does look like he will continue in education. But at some point, it almost feels like he's going to fall off the edge of a cliff, there's that further management of paperwork, negotiation, etc, etc, going forward, for us to be able to achieve another level of balance with my being in work and whatever, you know, my children are doing at that time. And I'm sure that's difficult for for a lot of parents as well who reached 16 regardless, but there are just some extra things that, obviously, we'll have to factor in.

**Steven** We've talked about barriers and challenges for working. So now we're going to talk about real practical advice, and what employers should be doing for parents and carers in their workforce.

So Rosie, I start with you, obviously, you're an inclusion and diversity professional. Can you share your top tips for employers when it comes to supporting parents and carers in the workplace?

**Rosie** Absolutely, Steven, I think we've covered lots of great things already, but just to reiterate some of the things that Simon and Kate have both said.

I think that open conversation, I know that Simon said like, you can't just have a conversation once when the person returns, and then expect that to be you know, the same for the rest of their time as your employee, because people change, you know, if it's a child, they're obviously growing up, and they're, they're changing, but also if the person they're caring for is a disabled person, their needs are going to change over time as well. So you have to keep that conversation alive. It's building that into regular one to ones, or if you know that the person is caring, or parenting and saw a specific needs, maybe making a plan with them to say, well, how often do you want to kind of review how we support you, and making a decision, because what we've got to remember is that it's not one size fits all, every family is going to be different, and they're going to change differently as well.

So it might be that one of your employees says, you know, let’s just have a once a year review, whereas other says, actually, I need to sit down once a month, just for fifteen minutes and kind of say ‘This is what's coming up this month’, you know, ‘this is what I'm going to need’, and I'll be able to work here and not there at whatever it might be. So just having that open conversation all the time is really important.

I think the second thing that employers need to think about is policy. Getting some really good quality parenting and caring policies. So that can be one policy, can be multiple policies really, as long as they are readable and understandable by your employees. It doesn't matter whether they're in one or multiple documents.

So what I think they need to cover is one, let's make sure that language is gender neutral. You know, we're talking about lots of different family circumstances here. And let's make sure we also recognise that sometimes people might be single parents as well or single carers, that isn't always a partner in that situation. So looking at that language, making sure that any of our employees who look at that policy feel included when they read it, they know that this is about them.

But also then thinking about the financial side, how are we supporting people if we you know, are we a enhancing maternity where we can, if we can enhance shared parental leave, can we do that as well? And thinking about how we support people, and actually, but then also things like carers leave, you have a carers policy, do you offer a certain amount of days or hours that people can take for carers leave, because as a carer, you are going to need some additional time off work, whether that is for a once a year hospital review, or whether that is a monthly thing, because it depends on your circumstances. But how do we have something in writing that says what people are entitled to.

And the reason why I say get it down in a policy is because, you know, we'd love to say that every line manager in our organisation is wonderful and inclusive, and really cares about all of the staff that they manage, but we have to be realistic that as employers, not every single one of our line managers is going to be like that, you are going to have some wonderful line managers that do that naturally, and that will always make sure that people get what they need. But you're also going to have some line managers that don't get it, they just don't get it no matter how much training you put them on or whatever, they're not getting it. Whereas if you have it in a policy, you at least have a baseline, you at least say actually is part of your employment here, this is what you're entitled to. So even if your line manager isn't great, you can say, as an employee, like this is in the policy, I need to take advantage of this policy. And they can go through the motions in making sure that you get that. So yeah, make sure you do have that kind of written down and don't leave it up to those individual line managers to be good and empathetic or not good and not so empathetic.

And then the third thing to me is around education, we need to make sure, and I think I mentioned this previously specifically about carers, I do think we have a lack of education around what it is to be a carer, what that might look like, and it's sort of varied forms. So I don't necessarily know how much education we need around parents, maybe I would say more around single parents or LGBTQ parents, and the different ways to parenthood. So you know, thinking more about adoption and IVF, and all the different ways and particularly around things like loss as well, and and who that Includes Employers have put resources around about child loss, whether that's baby loss, through miscarriage. So, you know, we're thinking about that whole journey. It's not just simple. A man and a woman have a baby, the woman takes nine months off, they return, we get that. But that's not life, you know, life isn't as simple as that. You know, there's there's loss in the weight of that journey, then there's some times unfortunately, as part of that journey, but also there are lots of different families. So you need some education around that. And you couldn't you could embed that into your D&I training.

So if you've got some good quality, you know, ideally, either face to face or online, face to face, you know, live training, not e-learning, where you're using scenarios and case studies, let's make sure some of those case studies maybe involve people who are carers, or LGBTQ families, so that we're starting when we're educating people to think about those things, and then continuing that education as well. So if you're putting people on leadership training, again, making sure the things they think about as leaders, how are we going to support the parents and carers in our teams? What do we need to know about those, and continuing that education through people's journeys.

**Steven** One of the things that you mentioned Rosie really sticks out with me.

Some people will know that my mum has bipolar disorder. And she's been sectioned a number of times over the years. So I've had to, you know, drop out of education for a bit, I've had to drop out of work, sometimes. It might just be for a few days here or there. It might be for a week. But it wasn't until I actually started with Inclusive Employers, when people would even when there was nothing going on. Just say, “oh, how's your mum doing?” Just something as simple as that.. And I would say “Oh, she's fine. Why are you asking?” But it’s like oh, absolutely, yeah, there's a whole thing in my life that I never really got to talk about in previous careers in previous industry, because if you sort of showed any sign of weakness, then that could be a sign of ‘Oh, maybe you can't do this job’. So it used to be, oh, I'm gonna have to take annual leave or a sick day, or I'm gonna have to do this. Whereas now, you know It's something I'm so comfortable talking about, that even the fact that, you know, my mum knows that if anything happened, I could be there within an hour, and it'd be fine with work, I can take my laptop with me, I can do stuff wherever she is. That's almost made everything feel so much better, just being able to have a normal conversation about that and the other day to day. So I don't think that we can really underestimate that. Yeah, just drop it into conversation, drop it into one to ones, you know, if we've got these inclusive cultures at work, these conversations are just naturally going to come out and make people feel better, more comfortable and supported. So yes, I think that's a really great point there, Rosie, but we can't overlook.

**Rosie** It fills me with joy to hear that you feel like that placement wise, because that's well, I suppose I'm not a line manager, right now I'm on maternity leave. But when I return and as a line manager for me, personally, that's all I ever want for my team, all I ever want is for them to feel like they can be themselves.

And you know, we talk about being yourself being the true self being your whole self, whatever the language might be in regards to your gender identity, sexual orientation, your disabilities, but it's also that extension.

So for you, your mother's bipolar, right, that is part of you, you know, I know, she's experiencing that, but you will never be separate from that. So for me as a line manager, and I hope the line managers listening to the podcast, like you are doing a good job, if the people that you manage can bring that whole story with them, and you don't have to understand bipolar or whatever it is, you don't have to know anything about it to say, how should you know? And then just let them talk? Or how are you feeling? That's a really easy, and you don't have to have any knowledge about it. So yeah, I'm really pleased that you feel like that.

**Steven** Simon, Kate - Do you have any advice you'd like to offer employers from your own experiences that we've not already covered? So Kate, let's start with you.

**Kate** I would just say that, Rosie has just in an in a nutshell, I think it's that understanding of as a carer, and like, I know, as a parent, you still come with with your family, you know that they sat on your shoulders, but as a care of someone that lifelong disability, it she is right, it's part of me. And that makes me quite emotional [sobs].

You know, I'm James's mum, through school, that's what I was known as. And then it's quite difficult to go into work, where you're suddenly that chunk of you isn't, acknowledged and it really, you know, it's, it's changed me as a person, and therefore, I can't expect it not to have changed me as a professional. Just that, you know, that conversation as Rosie say, and as parents and as carers, we have many pieces of information that either come from, you know, schools or reports that we have to write, etc. You know, if someone had said, “Oh, you know, you're doing James's statement at the moment for, you know for education and aid”, if they'd have said, you know, “how's that going?” you know, basically, we outline James's life, we explained to school, you know, everything that happens to him, and if they did turn around and said, “Oh, can I have a read, you know, to get that insight” because I've got it, it's like a little document of who he is, but you can't write about who he is without actually writing what our family is, and therefore who I am.

And so yeah, employers being a bit nosy, being brave and getting out there and and asking for information. I think the policy writing is key, but within that the acknowledgement that there needs to be flexibility because just as the parenting groups is now so diverse, so is the caring route.

And you know, go into someone and saying, I've literally just been phoned up by ENT, and they want to do this investigation tomorrow, but won't actually be able to come in for three days. And they turn around to you and say especially if it's only for the first day, because then you should be able to sort out what you doing for the other days, and yes if you know if that was perhaps, what ideal or whatever ideal or typical is, you know, individual that was caring for that might work, but it doesn't work with a child with varying needs, or a family member with varying needs. Because then if you start to eat into people's annual leave, as we all know, you haven't got your work life balance, and that starts to knock everything off kilter. And you get other difficulties. But then yeah, I would say it's the communication. Which is a massive thing for me good communication, and equity being brave enough to treat us with with equity rather than equality.

**Rosie** Can I add to what Kate was saying about the special leave use as well?

Yes, the policy for most people is the first day you take special leave, and then you should be able to sort it out. But why should you not move your child or adult that you care for? If they are in hospital, needing an operation, you know, or an investigation, they're there for a few days, the policy is you should be able to sort all the people out to care for them. But why should you ? You're their parent or their loved one, and if you want to be there, that's a choice, of course, if you want to be there, because that makes you feel better, that makes them more calm and comfortable.

And thinking about I don't know, Kate's child, so, you know, I don't know, their particular personality, but my sister in law who has a learning disability, she's going to feel quite panicked if her mum isn't there. And she's an adult, she's 30 years old, but yeah, that we could sort out other people to be there, but what she wants is her mum to be there. And if that involves three days off, that should be okay. Because it's about that individual and what they feel comfortable with, and that, you know, for some of them is that is their Mum, or another significant kind of person.

So I think we've got to think as employers about, we may have a policy that says special leave the first day, but please talk to that employee, please have a conversation where you will understand what their person that they're caring for needs. And if that's them, then I think we should say that's okay. You know, it's not going to be every week. This is a special circumstance. So let that be okay.

**Steven** And Simon, how about you any advice you'd like to offer employers, from your experience?

**Simon** Two little things, the one Rosie mentioned about policies, again, they are amazing, but an option to have easier read versions of them as well. So have your policy option and easy read version, because I think I did a course a while ago, and it says that like most documents are written in sort of a degree language, when the average reading age of the population is much lower.

And I remember going through the paternity forms in the council, and I was there looking and thinking ‘What does that mean? Do I get two full weeks or I get one week?’ And I thinking ‘right’ but then most it up for employers to have different versions of it to break it down to possibly an easier read for their employees.

And I think one that stood out for me was it's not really just the top tip. But I moved jobs recently, about three weeks ago. And then the first two weeks of trying to make a good impression, I had to try and take an afternoon off as I didn't have childcare in the afternoon. It was last minute. And I messaged my line manager and the first thing he said was that ‘Family comes first don't worry about it’.

And I was just like, for me, that was amazing for me, it’s brilliant .Okay, because I was open and honest, and I didn't try and hide it, sometimes you try and hide it, but I told him straightaway. And yeah, that's the first thing you said. So if an employee for companies, yes. And family, to me comes first. If you're in a workplace, and certainly you do need to leave, there is a valid reason not just kind of do it is to get out of work in a way. But yeah, that's where my two top tips I would say.

**Steven** Thank you to all of our guests today. Thank you, Kate.

**Kate** Thank you. Thank you, Steven.

**Steven** Thank you, Simon.

**Simon** Thank you.

**Steven** And thank you, Rosie.

**Rosie** Thanks, Steven. I'm looking forward to coming back.

**Steven** To find out more about how Inclusive Employers can support parents and carers in your organisation, visit [www.inclusiveemployers.co.uk](http://www.inclusiveemployers.co.uk), that's www.inclusiveemployers.co.uk.

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