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Nicky is the owner of HR Support Consultancy. She has a BA(Hons) in Business Studies, is a member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and has been a practising HR manager for more than 20 years. HR Support Consultancy has provided the BVNA Members Advisory Service (formerly known as the Industrial Relations Service) since it began in 2002.

Time off for sick children

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The *Vet Times* reported in 2015 that just 2.3% of registered veterinary nurses were men.

In families with a mother and a father, it is very often the mother that has the biggest caring responsibility for children and is more likely to have to take time off work if a child is ill. Last year three million work days were lost due to parents taking the time off work to care for sick children and 67% of parents took time off and analysts believe that women take more than 28% more time off for this reason than men (*The Telegraph*).

It is not surprising then, that in a profession that employs mainly women, that this is an issue of employers.

Time off for dependants is unpaid unless an employer is willing to give paid time off under the terms and conditions of employment.

- The right is to a reasonable amount of time off – normally a day or two but this will depend on individual circumstances.
- The right to time off is to deal with emergencies involving a dependant.
- A dependant is someone who depends on an employee for care. This could be a child, a grandchild, a parent or anyone who depends on you for care.

All employees have the right to time off during working hours for dependants, this time off is intended to deal with unforeseen matters and emergencies. There is no legal right to be paid, although an employer might pay you. There is also no limit to the amount of time you take off, but your employer could raise this as a concern if they feel it is excessive and it is affecting your job.

A dependant could be a spouse, partner, child, parent, or someone who depends on an employee for care, for example an elderly neighbour.

The leave can be taken for example:

- to deal with a breakdown in child-care – perhaps the childminder is ill.
- to put longer term care in place for children or elderly relatives.

- if a dependant becomes ill or is taken into hospital.
- to arrange or attend a funeral.
- If your child has had an accident at school.
- If your child has been suspended from school.

The right is to a 'reasonable' amount of time off, although it is not stated how much is reasonable and this will obviously vary. In most cases a day or two will be sufficient to deal with the immediate crisis, but it will depend on the individual circumstances. If you need to take a longer period of time off, you might be asked to take annual leave or you might be entitled to Parental Leave.

You should always tell your employer the reason for your absence as soon as possible.

Remember this leave is for unforeseen events and emergencies, it is not for appointments that have been booked in advance.

Your employer should not refuse you this time off, and should not refuse you promotion, training, or select you for redundancy if you have taken time off in an emergency to look after a dependant.

Parental Leave

This is unpaid, and you are entitled up to 18 weeks leave for each child up until their 18th birthday. You can take up to 4 weeks each year for each child and the leave must be taken as whole weeks (unless your child is disabled).

You must have been employed for a year and have parental responsibility. (An employer can request proof). Sometimes an employer will extend parental leave to those employees who don't meet the criteria – you will need to check this.

If you would like any further information about this or any other employment subject, please do contact us.

For further support with this or any other HR issue, BVNA members can call the BVNA Advisory Service Helpline on 01822 870270 or email nickyackerley@hrsupportconsultancy.co.uk.