

## From Prime Minister to Working Parent in 6 weeks

In many respects it's astonishing that I found myself discussing this week's announcement from New Zealand's Prime Minister on the BBC Breakfast sofa yesterday morning. After all, women have been combining work with parenting for years! But it's been a while since we've seen it at this level; Benazir Bhutto was the first elected world leader to give birth while in office in 1990. In my view, Jacinda Ardern is an inspiring, progressive example of modern parenthood - demonstrating her commitment to work and public duties at the same time making space and positive choices around family as a legitimate part of life.

Does Ardern truly know what she's letting herself in for? The question is, did any of us know this before we became parents? Absolutely not. Many of us approached our first pregnancy with a high degree of certainty - we thought we knew how it would be, we made plans and hoped life would resume. And in the case of Jacinda Ardern, the plans so far include: a deputy PM in place to handover to, six weeks maternity leave (during which she intends to remain fully contactable) and partner Clarke Gayford taking on childcare. In conversation this week Ardern candidly acknowledged her anxiety to do a good job as a public servant and a parent, wanting to be a present parent and also their shared excitement at what lies ahead.

As many new parents will also tell you, it's only when we come out the other side and are trying to get to grips with this new life, we realise the scale of the change. Only this month, [Serena Williams](#) shared her struggles with new motherhood and immense joy at being a parent. The interesting thing is going to be the narrative associated with Ardern's journey; firstly in becoming a mother, then returning to work and combining the two at just six weeks in. She will be living and working through this transition in a very public arena. With that in mind, I wonder when and if changes to plans occur, how these will be portrayed; as a sign of failure or genuine recognition of multiple seismic shifts and a need to adapt to survive. Irrespective of the job we do, combining work and parenting inevitably requires help and a level of adjustment as parents work out just how to combine these important competing identities and make life function in a way that works at a private and public level.

The other narrative at play here is the changing role of fathers. Men want to be more active and involved in their children's lives. Indeed where this is the case, [research](#) has shown women are much more likely to progress in their career. Yet in the UK, statistics indicate still only 5% of new fathers in the UK have taken up Shared Parental Leave (SPL) since it was introduced. Responding to this, the [APPG Women in Work 2017 Report](#) recommended Government should ensure parents are financially rewarded when opting for SPL to send a clear signal about the role that both sexes play in bringing up children.

It's never going to be a perfect journey - there's a whole heap of stuff to sort out and compromises along the way. But it is worth it. As a working parent Ardern is going to bring special insights to her role as PM when she returns. We'll follow her story with interest.

