

Parenting in Science

The positive aspects of parenthood!

In a survey of 2,500 scientists, including grad students, postdocs, and faculty, among faculty, almost twice as many women (45.4%) as men (24.5%) had fewer children than they desired. Among graduate students, nearly four times as many women (28.5%) as men (7.2%) worry that a science career will keep them from having a family. (Ecklund and Lincoln 2011, <http://genestogenomes.org/the-family-business/>)

Parental Leave & Parenting policies and funding

The Family and Medical Leave (FMLA) act gives employees that have been employed at least 12 months and 120 hours over that time up to 12-weeks of unpaid, protected leave a year. For postdocs at UW, policies differ depending on whether you are the birth mother of a non-birth parent. Birth mothers are eligible for 90 days of paid sick leave regardless of employment status in addition of FMLA benefits if eligible. Non-birth parents are eligible for up to 12 weeks of leave thru FMLA but not eligible for paid sick leave unless the birth mother or infant have a serious health problem. For both birth and non-birth parents, time off is paid from grant funding and PI's are prevented from blocking salary during parental leave. Grant funding agencies, however, may have specific leave rules that supercede leave requirements. Additionally, if you don't want to use grant money to cover your leave can opt for unpaid parental leave.

Graduate students can request graduate on-leave status for parental leave and are eligible if they are in good standing, satisfy graduate program policies pertaining to leave and have completed at least one quarter although for international students this is extended to 3 consecutive quarters. However, on-leave graduate students are not entitled to faculty counsel, thesis filing, university housing, student insurance or financial assistance.

For more information on UW's policies: <http://ap.washington.edu/ahr/working/welcome/family-friendly-policies/>
<http://ap.washington.edu/ahr/policies/leaves/paid-sick-leave/>
<https://grad.uw.edu/policies-procedures/general-graduate-student-policies/graduate-on-leave-status/>

Discussion Questions

How does this affect family planning choices? Career choices?

Struggles at different career levels and for different genders?

How can we better accommodate parenthood in science? (Access to childcare, Tenure-clock extensions, fellowship and grant flexibility/increased duration, etc.)

From Stan Fields' Genes to Genomes blog: Should the NIH award fewer training slots and fewer research grants to ensure that those it does accommodate childbearing?

How is industry culture different?

Lab culture

A recent survey of more than 1,000 postdoc parents ([*Parents in the Pipeline: Retaining Postdoctoral Researchers with Families*](#)) reported that the response and support received from the postdoc's supervisor is a major determinant of the overall experience of being a postdoc parent.

Discussion Questions

Power structure in science gives a lot of control to individual PIs - should this be more standardized?

When choosing a lab/PI, would you take issues like being "family friendly" into account? Should you care about this even if you don't have and don't plan to have kids?

How does lab culture in general affect your experience as a parent? What are particular things PIs or lab-members can do to make the lab a parent friendly environment?

For parents: How does your perceived perception of how your co-workers view your schedule affect your experience as a parent postdoc?

What are remedies for parents (or anyone) experiencing dysfunctional lab environments?

Gender-specific Parent Issues

Birth parent

Breastfeeding requires access to a Lactation Room and time for pumping (which varies per person and over time, but typically every 3 hours when you first return to work).

Both access and time are required by law (Affordable Care Act & Fair Labor Standards Act, see <https://www.dol.gov/whd/nursingmothers/>), and the room must be "a place, other than a bathroom, that is shielded from view and free from intrusion from coworkers and the public"

The compliance with these regulations is variable. There are only 14 official Lactation Rooms on campus.

Non-birth parent

How do societal, lab, and/or PI pressures influence the duration of paternal leave?