

# Top Tips for HR Leaders

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**Getting the right policy and guidance in place to become a Fertility Friendly Workplace**



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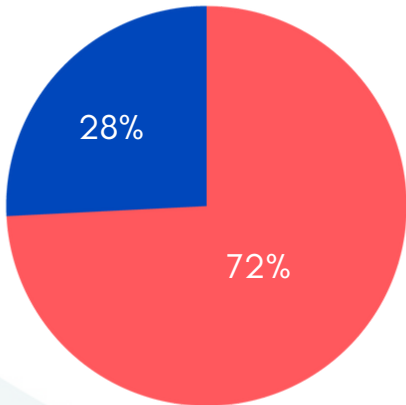
As part of **National Fertility Awareness Week 2023**, we ask – what can you do to ensure your organisation is set up support your employees going through fertility treatment?

Just like the menopause conversation only a few years ago, there is now a much-needed focus on the gap in support and education around fertility and its impact on individuals in the workplace. With fertility issues on the rise and increasingly making the headlines, the business and operational impact of not being able to support your employees – and the risks associated with not doing so – have become more apparent.



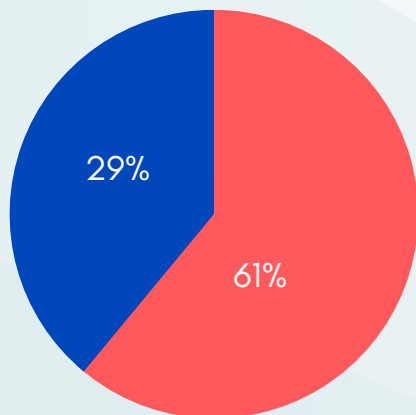
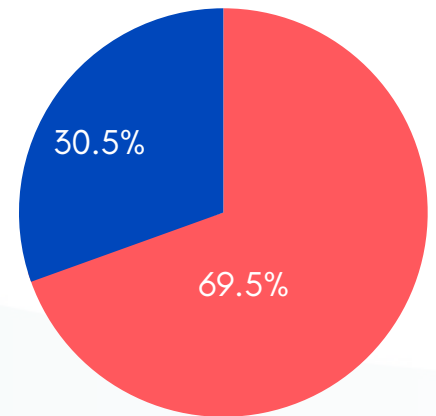
## But just how big an issue in the workplace is it?

# Research by Fertility Matters At Work found: -



**72%** of respondents felt that the topic of fertility was **not recognised and valued** in their organisation

**69.5%** said that they had to take **sick leave** during their treatment, with many feeling **they had no choice**



**61%** of employees **don't feel confident talking to their employer** about trying for a baby

If you consider that on average, **1 in 6 individuals and 1 in 7 couples** (all of working age) are affected by fertility issues and 92% of those affected will take time off work for some kind of treatment (Fawcett Society: 2023), it's clear that **your organisation needs to act now.**

# When it comes to policy or guidance, what is important to consider?

Some organisations prefer an informal guidance document to a formal policy, setting out the specific support on offer, whilst signposting to extracts from existing policies.

Policy or guidance can work equally well, and we encourage these to be written in the tone of voice of the organisation, with an understanding and appreciation of the sensitivity of the topic.

Before you start to introduce a policy or guidance it's important to consider:

- ✓ What is the overriding objective of this policy/ guidance?
- ✓ Who needs to be involved in creating it?
- ✓ What is the most important piece(s) of information you wish to get across?
- ✓ How much detail do you want in the policy/guidance?
- ✓ When and how do you want to launch it?
- ✓ How will you measure 'success'?

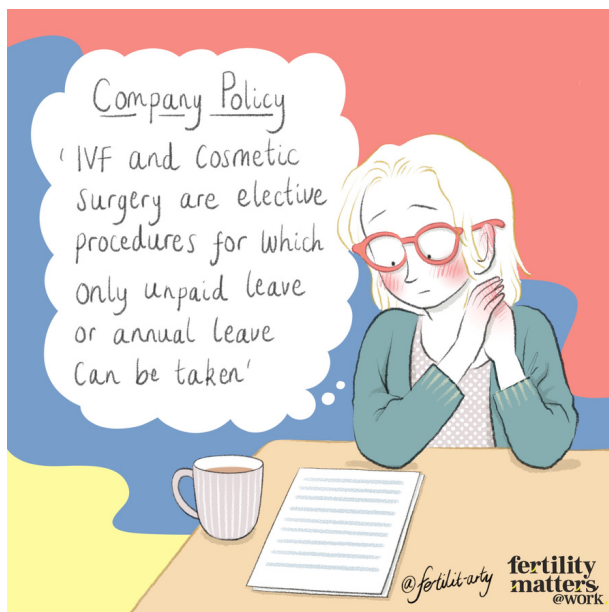
# Top Tips for Policy/Guidance Success

First things first....

## 1) Accessibility is crucial

It's important to ensure the policy is not hidden amongst other policies that aren't relevant or can cause distress, such as the maternity policy.

Put yourself in the shoes of an employee needing to undergo treatment because they are unable to have a baby. Having to search through a maternity policy that details what you are entitled to after you have a baby could be triggering.



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**Our clients say:**

*"It was the best workshop we have had by a long way; it found a great balance between information/facts and personal anecdote. The hosts were outstanding - professional and great communicators - and the panel with Shaun was high impact. I took a lot from the session and feel well equipped as a leader on this topic."*

**James: Director - ALDI**

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# Top Tips for Policy/Guidance Success

## 2) Inclusive and appropriate language is essential

It's very important to ensure it is inclusive of ALL paths to parenthood.

Some points to consider include:

- The title - "Fertility Policy" is more inclusive than "IVF Policy". Not all fertility treatment is IVF, so it's important not to exclude other forms of fertility treatment and reference other paths to parenthood, such as surrogacy, which will also require time off for medical appointments.
- Understand that this is a people issue, not just a women's issue. Policy should reflect this and use gender neutral terms throughout.
- Fertility treatment is often one of the only ways the LGBTQ+ community can have a child, so the policy should be inclusive.
- Understand that not everyone going through fertility treatment is in a relationship, so try not to exclude those who may be embarking on a solo path to parenthood.



# What should be included in the policy?

Firstly, acknowledge that this is a sensitive topic and provide assurances that, as an employer, you recognise the physical and emotional impact this experience can have. Let employees know the process – how to disclose and seek support, who they should speak to and emphasise confidentiality.

## Share entitlements to paid leave:

The biggest question for employees is often around the time they can take off work. As mentioned earlier, 92% take time off work for treatment ([Fawcett Society:2023](#)) so it's important that organisations are clear on the paid leave available to staff.

This doesn't have to be a significant cost to the business. There are huge benefits in offering support through paid leave such as reduced sickness absence, improved engagement, talent attraction and retention.

A recent study by Fawcett Society and Totaljobs found:

**28% of employees want to see paid compassionate leave**

**26% are in favour of flexible working arrangements**



Paid leave is important for three reasons:

- 1** Fertility treatment is a medical treatment requiring frequent, often late notice, appointments that are difficult to plan far in advance. There can also be procedures where sedation is needed, requiring a day off to recover.
- 2** The financial burden can be a significant source of anxiety, with 68.8% of couples having no access to NHS-funded treatment, meaning many self-fund IVF treatment at a cost of over £5000 (+ medication costs) each treatment cycle (NHS). If employees are required to take unpaid leave (23%), or to use annual leave, this can result in an even greater financial burden.
- 3** Anecdotally we hear that sick leave is taken where employees have no paid leave available and don't feel comfortable sharing what they're going through to ask for paid time off to attend appointments.

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Our clients say:

*“The launch event covered a wide range of topics, from understanding the process of IVF including their lived experience to bring that to life. Natalie and Becky were not only knowledgeable but also compassionate and empathetic, making the webinar a safe and supportive space to discuss sensitive issues. The support offered to our colleagues that volunteered to be part of the panel was fantastic and really put them at ease while at the same time being clear about how they might feel sharing their experiences. The impact of our colleagues' shared experiences was relatable and a great way to approach it. The balance of Natalie and Becky's input and their experience was perfect. I would highly recommend this membership and launch event to anyone who is on a similar path. It's a wealth of information and support. Thank you to Natalie and Becky”*

**Jacqui Sutherland: D&I & Health and Wellbeing - HEINEKEN**

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How much paid leave is made available is down to each organisation, bearing in mind that **a typical IVF cycle will have between 6-8 appointments.**

When sharing entitlements to paid leave it's important to make clear:

- The number of days paid leave
- If time can be taken in hours (this can be beneficial to both employees and the business in reducing time away)
- How this is recorded
- If the number of days is allocated per treatment cycle or per year (per treatment cycle is preferable as fertility treatment can take multiple attempts)
- Absence won't be counted towards any absence management procedures



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**Our clients say:**

*“As a Store Manager it's important to me that we create a space for colleagues where we open up the conversation around fertility treatment and pregnancy loss. By sharing their personal stories, Natalie and Becky together with our colleagues have really helped me to understand the challenging journey to parenthood and how we can all be more supportive.”*

**Sam Thompson: Store Manager - CENTRAL CO-OP**

**”**

# Flexible Working and Reasonable Adjustments

Access to flexible working arrangements is pivotal for employees who undergo fertility treatment.

Every person is different and will have varying needs, so enabling temporary flexible working can help keep someone at work during treatment.

Providing some examples of what this might look like, such as adjustment of working hours to accommodate appointments or working from home to support the administering of injections, can better equip line managers to have two-way conversations about tailored support.

## Access to emotional support

Comprehensive emotional support for employees experiencing fertility treatment is essential. Fertility Network UK found that 90% reported feeling depressed and over half (56%) of those surveyed have used an employee assistance programme (EAP) for emotional support.

Signposting to EAP provisions, Occupational Health or specialist counselling through insurance programmes allows a policy to recognise and support the emotional impact.

# Signposting

In addition to the above components, signposting to the additional support available to employees, such as employee networks for informal peer to peer support or specialist external charities, is also recommended within policy and guidance.

## How can we make our policy live and breathe?

Having a policy that includes all the above is great, but to create a fertility friendly culture it needs to be brought to life.

A psychologically safe space for employees is a vital part of this process, otherwise having a policy may become a tick-box exercise. There are some simple ways to do this.

At Fertility Matters At Work (FMAW) we can share our expert advice on what we've seen work and what might be the right fit for your organisation.



### **Our clients say:**

*Our first panel event on IWD, hosted by Fertility Matters at Work alongside our People Director, was a fantastic event where all of the panel shared their different fertility journeys and for some their lived experience of loss. Since the event we have received many messages from people across the organisation who have said for the first time they feel able to share what their journey has been or what they are about to embark on. So many people grateful to know there is a policy to guide their line manager and support available to them when they need it. This is another important step towards achieving our aim to cultivate a diverse community where everyone can be their authentic self and achieve balance through wellbeing.*

**Jo Riddell: Head of Employee Relations, Policy and Wellbeing - SELFRIDGES**



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# Getting started...

There's no better time than **National Fertility Awareness Week** to start putting in place policies and support for fertility challenges.

We've seen with recent transformation in the menopause wellbeing space that change is possible and can have huge benefits for both businesses and employees.

We know that without the right policies in place managers often aren't confident on how to practically manage someone needing fertility treatment so how can you ensure they know what to do and importantly, what not to do? Are you confident the approach you plan to put in place is inclusive and will best serve your employees?

Don't panic - at Fertility Matters at Work, we support organisations like yours in becoming Fertility Friendly - regardless of size.



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# Getting started...

Becoming Fertility Friendly isn't just a tick-box exercise that starts and ends with a policy. It's an organisational culture change involving education, awareness building, communication and support.

Using our E.A.S.E™ methodology we aim to improve workplace experiences for individuals needing fertility treatment, whilst ensuring organisations are inclusive, ultimately improving employee engagement, retention, attraction and productivity.

We have various different options available to work with us depending on your size. To find out more, feel free to book in a free call with us.....

[www.fertilitymattersatwork.com](http://www.fertilitymattersatwork.com)



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# Here to help: Meet the team at FMAW

Fertility Matters at Work is a Community Interest Company (CIC) dedicated to improving fertility support at work.

Each with our own lived experiences of facing fertility struggles and loss whilst in the workplace, combined with over 35 years professional HR experience and hosting events, we bring a real passion and authenticity to our approach.

## Becky Kearns - Co-founder



Becky Kearns is the co-founder of Fertility Matters at Work CIC, a social enterprise on a mission to ensure that fertility challenges are recognised and supported in all workplaces. Becky is a HR Professional which, combined with her own personal experience of infertility and pregnancy loss, gives her an insight into how fertility challenges impact both individuals and organisations. Since 2018 she has used her personal experience become a patient advocate, writer and speaker, having spoken about this topic on BBC Breakfast, BBC Woman's Hour and in publications such

as Grazia. Personally, following a difficult fertility journey, which involved early menopause, numerous IVF cycles and miscarriage, Becky is now a Mum to three girls thanks to egg donation. She's passionate about raising awareness and wants to change the support available for those experiencing fertility treatment in the future, particularly in the workplace.



# Here to help: Meet the team at FMAW

## Natalie Silverman - Co-founder



As a professional broadcaster and voiceover artist with 20 years experience In 2014, Natalie launched The Fertility Podcast, once pregnant after ICSI treatment, the the UK's first podcast dedicated to empowering and educating people struggling to conceive. Natalie has spoken to numerous men and women about their struggles and interviewed fertility experts around the globe and to date, the podcast has had almost one million

downloads and has regular featured in the Top 100 Mental Health podcast charts. Natalie has also developed a range of podcasts for other fertility brands within the sector, been a regular panel host and chair at key fertility industry events. In 2019, Natalie shared her experience of IVF whilst hosting a breakfast radio show in Grazia magazines' 'Womb with a View' column and was invited into the corporate setting to speak about workplace issues. This lead her to form the partnership with Claire and Becky at Fertility Matters at Work.

# Here to help: Meet the team at FMAW

## Claire Ingle - Co-founder



Claire also works in the field of HR and has a particular interest in Employee Engagement, improving culture and Staff Wellbeing. Claire had her first baby at the age of 41 after several years of trying and finally having three rounds of IVF/ICSI. Recognising there was a significant gap in workplace support, Claire started her campaign to raise awareness on people undergoing fertility treatment and balancing work when her daughter was five months old. She knew from her own experience that there needed to be more awareness and focus on this very important topic.



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# Contact Us

Get in touch today - to book a free call to discuss  
your needs, email us at

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