

“I bet you’re looking forward to going on maternity leave! You get a year break from work!”

Assuming that maternity leave is a holiday and not taking into consideration the physical and psychological impact of having and caring for a baby.

On returning back from maternity leave “Great, you’re back! You can jump straight back in, we can’t have a pharmacist on the rota and them not working properly!”

A lack of reintroduction back into the workplace, you’re expected to pick up where you left off.

**Said to parents or carers who are late joining a meeting as they have caring responsibilities
“Everyone else can make it on time” or “Nice of you to make it!”**

Demonstrates a lack of empathy and understanding of the persons caring responsibilities, makes the parent or carer feel awkward.

Particularly senior women with children who say “I had to manage without flexible working or it was harder when I was a parent so just deal with it”

A lack of support from parents in senior roles as they didn't have the options available to them or their circumstances are different.

“Nice of you to have the day off or finish early!” said to parents or carers who have had to call in sick or change their working pattern to finish early to manage the sick person their caring for.

People minimising the caring responsibilities, indicating they’re taking a holiday for the day.

“I know I shouldn’t ask.... but are you planning on having children or more children?”

A really intrusive question about peoples plans to have a family.

“What does your husband think about the pregnancy?”

Making heteronormative assumptions, not everyone has a male partner.

“Why can’t your wife leave early to pick up the child(ren)?”

There is an assumption that they have a wife – they maybe a single parent or in a same sex couple. There is also an assumption that women should be the primary caregivers and that flexible working arrangements are not available for men.

“Where is your partner?” or “your partner can help with childcare, can’t they?”

Assuming that there is a two parent family, some families have single parents.

“They can’t be given the promotion as she has a little one and will probably want another soon”

An assumption is made that because the woman is a parent she won't be fully committed to the role and will likely be going on maternity leave again so away from the organisation.

“Where does your baby get their dark hair from?”

This could be a sensitive question for a parent who may have used donor conception and/or surrogacy or be an adoptive parent.

“Who does your child look like?”

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Predominately said to women “Shouldn’t you be heading home to your family? Who is looking after your children?”

Assuming that women take on the majority of the caring burden, this is very rarely said to male colleagues.

Said to parents who have adopted or difficulty conceiving “Couldn’t you have children of your own?”

Reinforces the message of inadequacy if you’re unable to have children naturally.

“What a wonderful thing you did by adopting those children”

Indicating that the children are unwanted and the adoptive parents are heroes.

“Do your children know how lucky they are that you adopted them?”

Indicates that adopted children should feel lucky.

Predominately said to women “Why do you want to work full-time? Do you not want to be with your children?”

Assuming that women do not or should not want to return to work fulltime as they should be looking after their children.

Said to pregnant women or women who have come back after maternity leave “oh, you have baby brain!”

Indicating that because they’re pregnant they don’t know what they’re talking about.

“Oh, I could never love someone else’s child”

Adoptive parents can’t truly love the children they adopt.

Said in a disappointed or judgemental manner “oh you’re pregnant again! Didn’t you just come back off maternity leave?!”

Insinuating that you haven’t left it long enough before getting pregnant again and you need to ‘earn’ your next maternity leave.

“oh, you’re pregnant! That’s not good for us!”

Becoming pregnant is a problem for the department.

How to recognise pregnancy, maternity, parent and carer related microaggressions?

We’ve collected some real-life examples of pregnancy, parent and carer related microaggressions, with an explanation of why these comments or questions can be offensive, insulting or insensitive.



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