

# Report

## ***I am director - can I be a parent too?***

Jemima Levick, 16 February 2015

I am a director - can I be a parent too?

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- Do we need financial support to enable directors to pay for child care while working? it is not acceptable to 'pay to work' because all your fee goes on childcare.

- It's not always financial, some directors have found that even with an offer of financial support the real issue is not being able to find suitable child care. If identifying suitable carers is the issue, would on site nursery places be preferable? Is this reasonable? Realistic?

- this is especially true when you're invited to tour or work away from your home base

- Identified that this is an access issue, same as any other. Debate - it could be argued that this is a choice, not a requirement.

- Some Arts Councils have recognised this as an access requirement and have accepted a budget line as appropriate. Do they all? If they don't ACTION Is this something that SDUK could lobby for?

- Finance is not the only issue at stake. Time management is equally of concern for us

all. When you're freelance, are you in a position to negotiate? When you are in rehearsals with a limited rehearsal period can you realistically demand flexible working hours or shorter working days when there's a show to go on (which is hard enough in our truncated rehearsal schedules as is)

- are co-directing relationships or experienced assistants/associates a way to facilitate easier working hours?

- those without kids, and those who have had kids, don't or didn't realise just what was/is at stake in terms of working conditions, expectations, demands etc... SO we need to begin to share information; begin to disseminate models of best practise, examples of ways of working, and for people to explain the who/what/why/where... So that people who are modelling a budget or leading a process can be well informed about what to expect or what can be expected. ACTION - SDUK could share this information amongst its membership

- If information is shared then the people that are making decisions about budgets, policy etc can't be excused for simply not taking it into considering. These people need to be supported to be flexible and to think differently - there are many quite frightening examples of institutional bad attitude - by women as much as by men ('I went back to work as soon as I'd had my baby so get over yourself')

- we need to teach people HOW to take these things into consideration i.e. understanding that if you are working in a small organisation and pay yourself a small salary then you are able to claim 103% of that if you do go on maternity leave; that there are options open to you to claim maternity pay if you're freelance...

- ACTION - SDUK could disseminate information about what to expect and can be expected
  
  - are there models of best practise already in place that we can learn from? Is there someone setting a really good example that we could share in order to form the basis for negotiation and for policy making?
  
  - How do we propose these new models of working? Can SDUK help facilitate this conversation? Policy implementation or guidance? ideas and ideals - rehearsing 4 long days over a week, provision of car parking to help facilitate child care pick up/drop off, is there a space in the building to feed? Openness to flexible working hours?
  
  - American Equity offers a 'straight 6' (with a half an hour break) or '7/8' (hour long lunch) hour day
  
  - some places in Sweden work a 10am-1pm and then 6-9pm day in order to accommodate family requirements
  
  - Some had experience in Norway working 11am-3pm over an 8 week period
  
  - Northern stage had a model of rehearsing 12-8pm in the past (which to be honest was more to do with time in the office than childcare, but still demonstrates that the usual 10am-6pm model can be altered)
- ACTION is there a piece of research to be conducted into successful models of practise that we could learn from? Could SDUK commission this? Or perhaps it's forum thread on the website that parents can contribute to as they accumulate

information? This could also be a knowledge exchange “I am taking my baby with me on tour and I wondered what the child care offer is like in Derby? Are there nice groups to attend?” and a tool to reassure/alleviate fear - “knowing someone else is doing it / has done it makes me feel like it's not impossible

- ACTION Those of us who are running organisations can start very simply with leading by example, i.e asking what time people need to leave (school pick up) and facilitating this where possible

- We have to recognise that that this is all subjective - it's different for everyone, which is why we need to be flexible and open to discussion (just as we would discuss specific access requirements)

- Reminder - this doesn't just effect women. Dads count too! We need to be asking questions of parents as primary carers not just of mothers. Do we need to ensure that we, as practitioners, flag it up too? Don't just rely on being asked

- How do we deal with actors (or other creatives)? When is the best time for this conversation to happen? Lots of women don't mention that they have kids in case it discriminates against them (there is enough evidence to suggest that this might be the case) so having this conversation too early might be considered threatening.

- Is it right to encourage bringing babies into the rehearsal room? For some yes, for others there are limits. If it's ok for one then is it ok for everyone? What happens if we end up with more than 3?! What is the policy on this and who has one? How can we be compassionate leaders while taking everyone's needs into consideration?

- Is it worth investing in directors or actors if you know that they might get pregnant? If we have them, do we openly share our maternity policies? Are they in employee handbooks? Or do we wait for people to ask, in the hope that if they don't see them, they won't be given any funny ideas?! In all seriousness, if we are investing, how do we plan for maternity? Budget for it? Cover over it? Etc ACTION can SDUK provide a downloadable pro-forma maternity / childcare/ adoption policy document to its members so that people can use as a template? (Similar to equalities policy?)

- ACTION As and when legislation becomes available SDUK to circulate this to members so that directors are clear about their rights as parents

- How does all of this alter our artistic enquiry? Do parents find themselves more inclined to programme kids work? Some yes, some no.

- How can we facilitate directors to see theatre when they have small children? (like baby cinema offer) Does this demand a provocation of some kind - to create work that parents and children that satisfies both? (like Tim Spooner?) 'Relaxed' Performances are becoming more common, so could babies be included? Should there be a space that grannies/dads can wait in with baby so that mums can breast feed at the interval? Should we be encouraging a free crèche for a matinee performance? What challenges are there to this? Cost? Insurance? Space? Local authority approval? Inspection of provision? Ikea do it - can't we?! ACTION maybe SDUK could challenge/encourage its larger building based members to try this?

- ACTION We can all add 'childcare' as a budget line to all our shows, even if we put a 0 against it. At least we are keeping it alive.

- A quote to live by (and reminder that we are all human beings) "Love is not a deviant activity" which doesn't identify parenthood as the specific subject. Does this need to apply to partners, caring for elderly parents, adoption leave (etc) too...?