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Elternzeit — Parental Leave in Germany

Elternzeit is paid parental leave in Germany allowing parents to take up to 3 years off work per child, with flexible sharing options between parents and job protection guaranteed by law.

Deutsche Begriffe: Elternzeit | Erziehungsurlaub | Teilzeit | Kündigungsschutz | Elterngeld | Anmeldefrist | Mutterschutz

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What is Elternzeit

Elternzeit is unpaid leave from work to care for a child — your employer **must** grant it. This is NOT the same as Elterngeld: Elternzeit is time off and job protection, Elterngeld is a cash benefit (some parents combine both).

Duration and how to split it

- **up to 36 months** per child, for each parent,
- to be used within the first **8 years** of the child's life, in a maximum of **3 periods**,
- **24 months** can be shifted to the period between the 3rd and 8th birthday,
- both parents can take Elternzeit simultaneously.

Registration deadline (Anmeldefrist)

You must **notify your employer in writing** of Elternzeit:

- **7 weeks** before the start, if it begins before the child's 3rd birthday,
- **13 weeks** before the start for the period between the 3rd and 8th birthday.

Work and protection

During Elternzeit you can work **up to 32 hours per week** (Teilzeit). Special **Kündigungsschutz** (dismissal protection) applies — from the moment you notify Elternzeit, your employer cannot dismiss you; return rules are regulated by your Arbeitsvertrag. Before birth you are protected by Mutterschutz (see pregnancy and childbirth), your child is entitled to Kindergeld, and after returning to work you'll need a place in Kita.

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