

From Industry Norms to Industry Shift How AEC Reached a 91% Paternal Leave Rate



In Japan's construction industry—long known for demanding schedules and low parental-leave usage—taking paternal leave is still far from common practice.

At American Engineering Corporation (AEC), we decided to challenge that norm.

Our belief is simple: family time is not a perk. It is a foundation for people to do their best work.

■ A Turning Point in 2020 — and a Cultural Shift That Followed

AEC's first male parental leave was taken in 2020. It was not yet "standard"—but it was the spark. Since then, we have actively reshaped our internal culture by:

- ensuring every expecting parent receives individualized guidance early on.
- making processes easy to follow for both Japanese and international staff.
- rebalancing workloads across teams so no one feels "guilty" for taking leave.
- setting the expectation—at the leadership level—that childcare participation is a shared responsibility.

The result:

In 2024, 91% of eligible male employees took parental leave — far above the national average (40.5%) and unprecedented in the construction sector.

At AEC, paternal leave is no longer "exceptional." It is expected.



■ Making Parental Leave Truly Accessible — Not Just "Available"

Many companies offer parental leave on paper. AEC focuses on making it realistically usable.

To support expecting parents at every stage, our HR team provides:

- Early-stage planning support to map out leave timing, workflows, and handover steps
- Clear, simple guidance so employees don't get lost in procedures or paperwork
- English-language materials to ensure our international staff can navigate the system confidently.
- Post-return follow-up, checking on workload, reintegration, and long-term work-life balance.

And critically:

Departments share and rebalance responsibilities, so no one feels they are burdening colleagues by taking leave. This removes the biggest psychological barrier that stops many fathers in our industry from stepping forward.

At AEC, parental leave is not something employees hesitate to take — it's a system designed to be used.

■ Listening, Learning, and Sharing: International Men's Day at AEC

On November 19, AEC held an in-house event to deepen understanding of men's participation in childcare.

The program featured:

- updates on relevant legal changes
- firsthand stories from employees who took parental leave
- open discussion about challenges and lessons learned

Many employees shared how time with family increased their motivation, improved focus, and strengthened their sense of purpose at work.

The session closed with a light activity—Healthy Habits Bingo—to reflect on wellness and work-life balance in a fun way.



■ AEC's Commitment

AEC will continue creating an environment where employees—regardless of background, gender, or life stage—can take meaningful time for family without hesitation. We see this not as HR policy, but as part of building a stronger, more sustainable organization.

Because when our people thrive at home, they bring their best to work.