



Returning to Work After Becoming a Parent

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Introduction

Going back to your job after having a baby is an adjustment for both mothers and fathers. You may feel anxious or guilty about leaving your child in the care of others. Your return will go more smoothly if you prepare yourself and your baby ahead of time and establish a good working relationship with your child's caregiver. Babies and young children are resilient. Most adjust quickly to new schedules and arrangements.

The tips and suggestions in this book will help you and your baby through this period of transition and answer questions about breastfeeding and work.



1. Preparing to Return to Work

If you have a difficult time leaving your baby for the first time, this is normal. However, your baby depends upon you for a sense of security and comfort. It is important that you remain calm so this transition goes as smoothly as possible.

Prepare yourself

- Seek out other employed parents who understand how you feel.
- Have a back-up child care arrangement in case of emergency.
- Conduct a couple of trial runs, driving to work at the time you will be traveling. Include extra time to take your baby to child care if you won't have an in-home provider.
- Check with your co-workers to find out what important changes occurred while you were away.

Prepare your baby

- Start exposing your baby to the child care arrangement at least one week before returning to work.
- Spend an hour or so with the caregiver, longer as the week progresses.
- Check to see if you can ease back into your routine by working part time for a couple of weeks. If not, return midweek so you'll have a short first week back at work.
- Prepare the diaper bag the night before.
- Pack your baby's special blanket or favorite toy for reassurance and comfort while you're at work.



Daily Time Schedule

Now that you have both yourself and a baby to get ready and out the door, be sure to give yourself plenty of time in the mornings. Build in extra time for the unexpected, such as a last-minute diaper change or spit-up on your blouse. If you're bringing your baby to child care, calculate how much time you'll need for the drop-off. It might be hard to tear yourself away at first, so pinpoint exactly when you need to leave day care and still make it to work on time.

At the end of the day, find out the absolute latest you can pick up your baby from day care without being charged a late fee. Make sure you leave work with time to spare.

The following table will help you plan your new schedule.

Times	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Leave home							
Leave day care							
Arrive at work							
Leave work							
Arrive at day care							



2. Going Back to Work

Babies cry because they would rather be with their parents than with anyone else in the world. In most cases, babies will cry as parents leave but stop crying very shortly after they have gone.

Ways to Say Goodbye

- Always take time to say goodbye to your baby, but don't prolong your farewell, even if they begin to cry.
- Create a "goodbye ritual" by providing comfort and then leaving. This helps them adjust to the idea that you are going.
- Try not to be upset if your baby cries. Separation anxiety is a normal and healthy stage of development among babies six months or older. The crying should stop shortly after you leave.
- Have a "hello ritual" when you return to reassure your baby that you will always come back.
- Avoid "sneaking out" on your child. This is frightening and teaches them that you cannot be trusted.

Establish a Relationship With the Caregiver

- Share information at drop-off and pickup. For example, let the provider know if your baby had a fussy morning. At pickup, ask the provider about your baby's day.
- Check in during the day with a quick call, email or text.
- Find time on occasion to discuss your baby's progress and development with the provider.

Take Care of Yourself

Working and being a parent can be stressful as you juggle new and different demands. It will be easier if you get organized and give yourself time to recharge.

- Make a daily to-do list with tasks for home and for work.
- Build up a support system of family and friends if possible.
- Try to balance your time at work and at home.
- Eat a well-balanced diet; eat high energy foods.
- Drink plenty of fluids, avoiding caffeinated drinks.
- Make time for yourself in the evening after your baby goes to bed.
- Keep a consistent bedtime for yourself. Try to nap on weekends, when your baby sleeps.

3. Breastfeeding and Work

Supplying your baby with breast milk after you return to work requires a little extra commitment, but over time it should become routine.

Breastfeeding Checklist

The following list will help you prepare to breastfeed during the work day.

Breastfeeding checklist	✓
Breast pump	
Breast pads	
Bottles or suitable containers to store the expressed milk	
Insulated bag to carry your expressed milk home	
Extra shirt and bra in case of leakage	
Comfortable chair for expressing milk	
Place to wash your pump and equipment	
Refrigerator or a place to keep your own cooler	

Breastfeeding at Work

Federal law requires companies with 50 or more employees to provide reasonable, unpaid break time and a private, non-bathroom space for breastfeeding mothers to express milk for the first year of a child's life.

If your employer has fewer than 50 employees and does not provide a lactation room, find another private area you can use. It should have a door that locks and an electrical outlet.

Here are some tips for a smooth return to work:

- Express and freeze a plentiful supply of breast milk before you return to work.
- Be sure your baby is willing to take the expressed breast milk from a bottle or cup before you return to work.
- If your child care is close by, find out if you can visit to breastfeed over lunch.
- When you arrive to pick up your baby from child care, take time to breastfeed first. This will give you both time to reconnect before traveling home and returning to other family responsibilities.

Pumping and Milk Storage Tips

It may take time to adjust to pumping breast milk in a work environment. For easier pumping, try these tips for getting your milk to let down from the milk ducts:

- Relax as much as you can.
- Massage your breasts.
- Gently rub your nipples.
- Visualize the milk flowing down.
- Think about your baby—bring a photo of your baby, or a blanket or item of clothing that smells like your baby.

You may prefer to offer your baby formula while you are away and breast feed when you are together. This eliminates the need to express milk. Your milk supply will adjust to the reduction of some daytime feedings over a period of time.



4. Returning to Work After Paternity Leave

Men are less likely than women to take time off for a new baby, even if their workplace offers paid paternity leave. But stepping away from the job to care for and bond with your baby benefits everyone. The father becomes comfortable with his new role, the couple learns to work together as parents and the baby benefits from the attention of both mother and father.

The Family Leave Act requires employers with 50 or more workers to give new parents 12 weeks of unpaid time with the guarantee that their job or an equivalent will be waiting when they return. If you can't afford unpaid time off and your workplace doesn't offer paid paternity leave, use vacation time, sick time and even short-term disability to give yourself a few weeks home with your baby.

- Keep tabs on what's happening at work while you're on paternity leave to make your return smoother.
- If your employer allows, consider staggering your paternity leave. You might take a week or two off when the baby arrives, then the rest later when your spouse returns to work.
- Consider working part-time or reduced hours for the first few months after your baby is born. This will give you more time with your new child and allow you and your spouse to share the load.
- If you can't work a reduced schedule, talk with your supervisor about leaving early on some days. If that's not possible, make sure to leave work at a reasonable time.
- Share day care drop-offs and pickups with your spouse. Come up with a schedule where you divide the responsibility equally.

When you return to your job, try not to bring work home with you. One of the best gifts you can give your new baby is your undivided attention.



Resources

American Academy of Pediatrics

www.aap.org

La Leche League

www.llli.org

Zero to Three

www.zerotothree.org



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