



Smooth transitions: Navigating maternity leave and return to work

Returning to work after parental leave is a significant step in the parenting journey and is not just a logistical hurdle to overcome but it can be a whirlwind of emotions too. You are different person from when you were last at work, and your priorities, goals and focus has likely shifted.

Some parents may count down the days before they can return to their working routine, while others may return out of necessity. Whatever the reason, it is completely normal to move through a variety of emotions including excitement, anxiety, and even guilt.

While going back to work may be a challenge, here are some tips to help make the transition as smooth as possible.

Go easy on yourself

Firstly, know that you will feel a range of emotions throughout this transition period and that whatever you a feeling is completely normal and okay. Returning to work after parental leave is not supposed to be easy, so let yourself feel whatever emotions come your way and give yourself some grace if you find it harder than you thought you might.

Make time to look after yourself through self-care, even in short bursts – do something each day that makes you feel good. Remember that it's important to maintain an identity and purpose outside of being a parent, which work can help you achieve, and you are a good parent regardless of whether you work or not

Get organised

Part of the challenge of returning to work is working out all the logistics you didn't need to worry about before. The more organised you are, the more in control you will feel. Once you have worked out your childcare arrangements, also arrange who will do drop off and pick up. You might also like to do test runs of your travel routine so you know how much time to factor in for traffic, public transport, or weather. Also think about things you can do each day to keep on top of your routine including choosing outfits and packing bags the night before to make getting ready in the morning easier. You might also want a morning checklist so you don't forget anything important.

Plan your return

Before you return to work, you can use your 'keeping in touch' days to check in with your manager and team to get up to speed on what has happened in your absence. Consider starting your child's new care arrangements before you return to work so they have time to adjust to their new normal as well. Check with your employer what entitlements and facilities you will have access to as a working parent. For example, you may need time and space for breastfeeding or pumping which your employer can support you with.

Also consider if you want to ask your employer for any flexibility or changes when you return to work. For example, you may want to do a phased return to work (part-time and increasing hours over a few weeks), reduce your hours or do some work remotely. You may also have an entitlement to flexible unpaid parental leave days that you can utilise. The Fair Work Ombudsman has a range of resources to help you understand your entitlements and how to request flexible working arrangements.

Ask for help

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Whether it's your partner, family, friends, or a professional, having a support system in place is crucial. They can provide emotional support, help with childcare, or assist with household tasks.

Returning to work after parental leave is a significant transition, but with the right preparation and support, it can be a positive and fulfilling experience. Embrace this new chapter with confidence and know that you are doing an amazing job both at home and at work.

Something on your mind?

If you require counselling, coaching or support, our clinicians are here to help. Call, chat or request an appointment online.

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