

fact sheet

RETURNING TO WORK AFTER HAVING A BABY



What to expect at first app 21.05.21

There is much to process as you return to the workplace after having your baby. You may experience a wide array of emotions. You are managing many changes such as: separation from your child, potentially a different workplace or new colleagues, child-care arrangements, the juggle of work and family life, feeding issues with your child, changes in family dynamics and financial decisions, to name a few.

Every parent feels differently. There is no right or wrong way to feel as you return to work. You have just navigated a change of identity and now another change is ahead. It can be useful to take some time to reflect on what you have done; being at home doing one of the most important jobs that is caring for your baby. Then take some time to think about what lies ahead and what you need to do to make it work and how you feel about it.

There are many strategies that may help ease your transition back to work. Different approaches will work for different people, so experiment with what works for you.

BE HONEST WITH YOUR BOSS

While more and more workplaces are recognising the importance of mental health, many others expect long hours including weekends in the office. It is tricky, yet important, to recognise and assert yourself to set clear boundaries with your employer. It can be useful to have these type of conversations with your employer before you return to work and understand their expectations. Be clear about your needs, whether they are fewer hours or more remote-days. These conversations can be anxiety inducing but are beneficial to your wellbeing in the long run.

PRIORITISE YOURSELF

After having a baby, it can feel as though your needs are not a priority. However, it's important to find time for yourself. It's difficult to care for another being if you are feeling depleted.

COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR PARTNER/SUPPORT PEOPLE

Discuss your feelings about work (among other issues) with your partner or a trusted support person. Allow yourself to be vulnerable as you discuss your fears, goals and frustrations. Equally, ask your partner questions about how they are faring with work. If you notice your partner is struggling, encourage them to seek support. If you are struggling, let your partner know you need some extra support too.

CHILDCARE

It can be difficult to find the right place/person to look after your child when you return to work. There are many options to choose from. Decisions are often guided by finances, age of your child, local day care centres or the type of care you prefer. Some parents like the care to be located close to work or close to home or prefer a family member to do the caring. Some prefer sending their child to smaller family day care centres whilst others choose one that they have heard good reports about. We suggest that you take your time, visit a few places or as many as you need to, ahead of time if possible, and see what suits you and your child. Ease your child into childcare if you can, dropping them for shorter periods to prepare them to stay for several hours. This can make it smoother for you and them. It is hard to say goodbye for both parent and child on the first day even if you are looking forward to returning to the workplace.

AFTER OFFICE-HOURS

It's tempting to spend free-time scrolling, especially after a draining workday and many sleepless nights. However, social media can cause anxiety and decrease confidence, especially when friends are posting about their seemingly 'perfect' lives. Be mindful of how much you engage with your →



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Gidget Foundation Australia exists to support the emotional wellbeing of expectant and new parents to ensure they receive timely, appropriate and specialist care.

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What to expect of first app 15.4.21

devices and spend time away from them. Try to leave your phone in a separate room while having dinner or going to bed, for example, and spend that hour or so focused on a conversation or a good book.

REST AND WORK SMART

Fatigue can impair work performance. Try to prioritise rest as much as possible: go to bed early on weeknights, find time to sleep on weekends and wind down an hour or so before going to sleep. Work strategically – tackle tricky projects while most alert or leave the office early to beat traffic and finish up from home. Take breaks at work to improve your focus and efficiency.

EAT AS WELL AS POSSIBLE

It may become harder to eat healthily while juggling work and family life. Hopefully, things will soon settle into a rhythm and eating well will feel easier. Keep things simple to start with. Make healthy eating a priority when you can and if you feel like a treat, do so and enjoy it. Finding shortcuts like cooking in bulk when possible or asking for home-cooked meals from family or friends might also help.

MOVE YOUR BODY

While exercise may feel impossible amid the demands of work and motherhood, moving your body is crucial to your mental and physical health. Getting to your former gym class may no longer be feasible, so perhaps commit to walking to work or take turns with your partner to have a half-hour walk before dinner. Exercise is a proven method to lift your mood and improve your confidence. Choose something you enjoy.

RE-CONNECT WITH COLLEAGUES (SLOWLY, BUT SURELY)

It can feel awkward at first to reacquaint yourself with colleagues after time apart. Some people worry their relationships with colleagues may change. Others may become overwhelmed by questions about their time away from work. Recognise that these connections will take time to re-establish. It can be useful to keep in contact with work colleagues whilst on leave or go into the office with your baby to say 'hi' every so often. This can help you can gauge how things are going there as well.

BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Treat yourself as you would a loved one! Be kind and compassionate with yourself as you teeter into the busy world of parenthood and work. Your experience may differ to your expectations, and that's normal. If the transition ultimately becomes overwhelming, consider seeking professional help.

At Gidget Foundation Australia we are here to support you. 🌸



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