

# fact sheet

## EMOTIONAL WELLBEING IN THE WORKPLACE FOR MUMS



WB workplace mum 18.12.21

Mixed emotions are often felt when returning to paid employment as a new mum. You may feel; joy, excitement, a sense of dread, guilt, fear of separating from your child, nervousness, anticipation or even overwhelm. Every parent feels differently and these seemingly opposing emotions are all considered a normal and expected part of this adjustment.

The transition back to paid employment takes time to adjust to. Aligning what is important to you and finding ways to manage the juggle is possible and important to work through.

It is all about how you approach it: knowing that mishaps will happen and that it won't all go to plan and that's OK. Allowing for ups and downs for all involved and being flexible and compassionate with yourself are key. Finding a mentor can also help.

Separating from your child can also trigger any residual feelings you may have had about being left or being in care yourself, so again, it is important to reflect on this and see how it impacts how you feel and any decisions made about the care of your child.

There are many strategies that may help ease your return to the work environment. Different approaches will work for different people and being prepared and having some ideas in mind may smooth the transition.

Here are a few suggestions:

**Have open dialogue with employer:** While more workplaces are recognising the importance of mental health, many others expect long hours and weekends in the office. Consider what is feasible for you and set expectations early with your employer to help retain these boundaries.

Communicate your needs, whether they are fewer hours or more remote-days. Hybrid working arrangements will be more common in the future and this can be a useful strategy for new parents. Ask your manager for help to prioritise your work if needed and for more autonomy to

set start and finish times around needs/family commitments.

**Taking care of your wellbeing:** After having a baby, it can be difficult to feel your needs are also important. However, it's paramount to prioritise what you need too. It's harder to care for another human being if you feel too depleted. Find time and new ways to do what nourishes you and what fits in with your family routines as best as you can. Lean on your supports.

Learn to think through your responses to others demands e.g. hit a pause button and consider the request, and if needed say 'No' to others demands. It may conserve that much needed energy.



Switch off when you finish work for the day and take time to rest and spend time with your family. Understand that flexibility will be needed and not everything will go as planned and that is OK. Take one day at a time.



**Communicate with your partner:** Talk with your partner about hopes and expectations of one another, ideally before returning to paid employment. Keep talking openly after a partner goes back to work adjusting where needed.

**After office-hours, switch off:** It's tempting to spend free-time scrolling, especially after a draining workday. Social media however can add to the depletion. It's important, to take time away from devices. Turn off notifications for work emails. Try to leave your phone in a separate room while having dinner or spend that hour or so focused on a catch up with your partner or friend or doing a special ritual with your baby so you feel connected with them after being away from them during the day.

**Rest:** 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 →



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[contact@gidgetfoundation.org.au](mailto:contact@gidgetfoundation.org.au)

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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before going to sleep. Work strategically – tackle tricky projects when you are most alert and take breaks when needed to improve your focus and efficiency.

**Eat as well as possible:** While it may feel hard at first managing the juggle, try to eat as well as you can. Make healthy eating a priority. Find shortcuts like cooking in bulk when possible or asking for home-cooked meals from family or friends.

**Move your body:** While exercise may be a challenge amid the demands of work and motherhood, moving your body is beneficial to your mental and physical health. Getting to your former gym class may no longer be feasible, so perhaps commit to walking to or from work or take turns with your partner to have a half-hour walk before dinner. Exercise, while undoubtedly hard, is a tried-and-tested way to lift your mood and improve your confidence. It also helps wind down from the day.



**Re-connect with colleagues:** It can be intimidating to reacquaint yourself with colleagues after time apart. Some people worry their relationships with colleagues may have changed. Others may become overwhelmed by questions about their time away while on parental leave.

Recognise that these connections will take time to re-establish and give them the space to develop into a new, comfortable rhythm.

**Most importantly:** Treat yourself as you would a loved one! Be kind and compassionate with yourself as you teeter into the often-challenging world of parenthood and work. Your experience may differ to your expectations, and that's OK.

If the transition becomes overwhelming, consider seeking professional help for you or your partner if either of you need more support for this important transition. 🌸



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