

Ready or not here it comes... back to work!

BY PATRICIA CAREY OF ABC PARENTING



Returning to work after having a baby can be a daunting prospect for any parent, whether you are a first time parent or second or third time round; the emotional feelings are just the same.

In today's economic climate, most parents have no choice but to return to work, and now there is overwhelming evidence to show that up to 80% of the total UK workforce are mums and dads, with 70% of those being women.

How to prepare yourself for return to work? Where to find an ongoing support while working? How to avoid the constant feeling of guilt so familiar to "back to work" parents? How to keep enjoying the work you've enjoyed before your child was born but start hating now?

Some of your questions answered by the director of ABC Parenting Patricia Carey.

You and your employer

Never leave the decision to return to work to the last minute. As soon as you know that you will be returning, you should consider what time will you be taking on maternity leave. If you are returning to work at the end of your ordinary maternity leave you do not need to give your employer notice of your return, you simply return to the same job you were doing before you left. If you have taken additional maternity leave, you must write to your employer 21 days before you return, giving notice of the date that you intend to go back. Supports for working mums and dads varies from company to company, some have practices which may suit people with parenting responsibilities, but are not necessarily introduced explicitly with that aim and there are no firm policies in place. There is a large gap between the availability of practices and their use. Policies are often discretionary without formalised written conditions and much deci-

sion-making about entitlement rests with line managers.

REMEMBER:

- When you go back, your employer must let you return to the same job that you were doing before. If this is not reasonably practical, your employer must offer you a suitable alternative job with the same terms and conditions, the same status and the same type of work that you had before.
- If you want to change the way you work after becoming a parent, you should approach your employer with a good reason and they must take your request seriously. Indeed, UK law says that your employer must have a good reason for refusing to let you work flexibly in order to look after your children. Your employer cannot demote you for wanting to work part-time. If they decide that the job will not work in this way, they must give you reasons why not in writing.
- It is extremely rare for an employer not to grant permis-

sion to take time off at short notice, although this is generally not paid.

- New rights for parents and carers came into force on 01.4.07. Talk to your employer if you are finding things tough.

Childcare options and arrangements

Only five per cent of British workplaces offer help with childcare, so take your time to arrange one. Consider the type of childcare you will use and begin by arranging interviews with people or places you are considering

OPTIONS:

- Relative or friend
- Childminder
- Day nursery
- Nanny
- Mother's help or au pair

You can contact your local Children Information Service for information about childcare in your area.

Attachment and Separation

Very few mothers find it easy to leave their child for the first time when they go to work but it does get easier.

Babies under six months may have been quite happy to be left at the nursery or childminder but suddenly at 11 months old this has changed and they begin to cry when you leave them. Separation anxiety often kicks in at this age. Also sometimes the attachment process that starts from about six months takes a little longer. Generally speaking though once your baby has gone through the attachment process, then generally the separation anxiety is less traumatic. Post natal depression, mother's anxiety and stress in the early months, lack of routine and little or no socialising opportunities for baby later can interrupt the attachment stage

TIPS:

- Make sure your child has had plenty of visits to the carer or nursery before you start back to work as this will make them less likely to be upset when you leave them.
- Remember to allow extra time in your schedule for last minute disasters such as your

- baby being sick on your work clothes. Take along some of your child's things, such as a favourite toy or blanket that will help reassure him or her.
- Explain to your child, no matter how young, that you are leaving but that you will be back later. The child will get used to the routine.
- Although leaving a baby crying is very distressing, remember that in the majority of cases your baby will stop almost as soon as you have left and will have an enjoyable day.

Don't battle with your child – you will lose

Babies and toddlers are often not on the parent's time 'they run their own time' and this can become a serious problem when you return to work. Struggling with a toddler is a real stress in itself and you can't win. All you can do is plan ahead; allow as much time as possible for everything and make some preparations in advance. Leave your child with their carer for short periods so that they can get used to each other and you can deal with any teething problems. Try a practice journey at the same time of day that you will be travelling when you start back and time yourself. Talk to your child carer, develop a strategy and stick with it. Sometimes a good tactic is to surrender to your offspring: if your child won't get dressed out of pyjamas in the mornings simply take him /her to nursery or childminder in their pyjamas and bring the clothes with you (pink tutu and boots looks great on a toddler) ... And finally, be prepared for everything you have so carefully organised to go awry in the first few weeks on your return to work. It happens to all of us, and we all survive, and eventually settle into the routine. **M&D**

Useful websites

www.workingfamilies.org.uk
www.babyfriendly.org.uk
www.fatherhoodinstitute.org.uk
www.earlysupport.org.uk
www.thechildrensfoundation.co.uk
www.fsa.gov.uk