

PREPARING TO RETURN TO WORK AFTER MATERNITY LEAVE

Returning to work after maternity leave and mastering the balance between working and parenting can be a daunting challenge. Here are some tips which may be helpful in assisting your transition back to work. Should you wish to discuss any concerns you have in relation to this or any other issue, please contact the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS) by phone at [0761000030](tel:0761000030) or e-mail cseas@per.gov.ie. For individual Employee Assistance Officer's details, click on the 'Meet the Team' photo on our website www.cseas.per.gov.ie.

Prior to returning to work:

Childcare

- Organise your childcare (crèche, childminder or relative carer) as soon as possible, perhaps even while you are pregnant. It may be more difficult than you anticipate to source a childminder and some crèches have long waiting lists. Also, if you have a relative carer, confirm details with them at an early stage
- Consider what your back-up childcare options might be, in the event that your regular childcare provider is not available for any reason. Is there a relative, friend or neighbour who can help out? If there are two of you at home, you may need to work out who will take leave if required
- Do a trial with your childcare provider prior to returning to work – start off with an hour while you are present, building up to you leaving but remaining outside the door for a few minutes, before doing longer stretches
- Remember *separation anxiety* is normal in young children but there are ways to make it easier. Devise a goodbye routine with your child, letting them know you will be back later. Don't prolong your goodbye if your child is upset. Usually your child will settle within 5 minutes. If you wish, it may be helpful to wait outside and have a carer let you know how your child is after a few minutes or you may wish to call them later. If allowed, it may help for your child to have a special toy or blanket from home
- Ask if your childcare provider can send you photos during the day



Work

- Decide what day and date you are going to return to work e.g. on a Monday or later in the week? If desirable, ask if it is possible to arrange a phased return. You may be able to use accumulated annual leave or parental leave
- Arrange to meet with your colleagues and line manager prior to your return to work. This can be arranged virtually if it is not possible to meet 'face-to-face'
- If relevant, do a trial run of your new journey to work (if there is a change due to childcare). Remember to factor in time on your commute for a 'drop off' at your childcare provider

CSEAS, 4th Floor, St Stephen's Green House, Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2 D02 PH42

Tel 0761 000030 email cseas@per.gov.ie website www.cseas.per.gov.ie

- If your flexibility is more limited than previously, talk to your line manager about this prior to your return to work
- Breastfeeding mothers are entitled to paid breaks from work (one hour per day) or reduced daily working time (one hour per day) to facilitate breastfeeding or lactation, until your child is 2 years old. Speak with your line manager prior to a return to the workplace so that appropriate facilities can be put in place. Ensure that your baby will take expressed milk in a bottle or cup. Build your supply of breast milk in advance of your return to work and invest in a suitable pump

Having returned to work:

If there are two of you at home and one has taken a primary role in childcare and household tasks up to now, you can rebalance this. You can divide up the tasks described below in a way which suits your family situation. For both of you it is important to:

- Take a common sense approach
- Enjoy the challenge by being flexible and taking ownership of jobs
- Embrace your new life and take pride in your new role, get stuck in!



At Home – look at ways of making life easier:

- Cooking – pre-plan for the week ahead, have 2 day dinners, batch cook at weekends
- Look for help with household cleaning and explore all options e.g. family or a cleaner
- Make a plan for your grocery shop and consider buying your groceries online
- Treat yourself to a take away on Friday

Mornings – try to reduce stress and make your mornings more efficient, do what you can the night before:

- Leave your clothes and your baby's clothes ready the night before
- Shower/bath at night – this may not be for everyone!



- Make tomorrow's lunches after dinner
- If possible, let baby have breakfast at their childcare setting
- If you are having breakfast at home – organise what you can the previous night e.g. cereal in a bowl
- If there are two of you at home in the morning use teamwork to get everyone ready on time
- Leave everything in an accessible place e.g. inside the front door
- If possible give yourself an extra 15-30 minutes in the morning to cope with the unexpected spills, dribble or worse!
- If relevant, pack extra clothes for yourself in case of any baby related stains you notice on arrival at work

Family time – with full-time work this can be a challenge. Here are some ways to have quality time with family:

- Quality time with your baby can be as simple as their bedtime routine
- Be fully present with children, ditch the phone
- Give children focused attention for 5-10 minutes – studies have shown just 8 minutes a day, one on one with your child, can significantly increase their self-esteem and confidence levels
- Have breakfast/dinner as a family at least once per week

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Self-care – it is important to look after yourself



- Schedule 10 minutes (at least) of 'me-time' per day
- Exercise – 10 mins walk per day is 70 minutes per week and can easily be incorporated into your day, perhaps at lunchtime
- Go shopping for new work clothes if your budget allows. Alternatively, find a friend or alterations shop that can help you reclaim and upcycle your favourite clothes
- Go easy on yourself and realise you are doing your best
- Get rid of the guilt. Speak with others who have been in the same situation. Remember that you are setting a positive example for your child as well as working to give them a better future and opportunities they would not otherwise have
- If your child is still waking at night and you're struggling to cope with tiredness try to get to bed early at least a few nights a week. If there is someone trustworthy available to take turns with you at night or allow you the opportunity of a lie in, use them. If you are using public transport to get to work you could use the time to relax. Perhaps read something or listen to music

Remember it does get easier...

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