

Returning to Work



Every primary caregiver feels differently about going back to work. Maybe you can't wait to return. You may feel isolated at home or are just ready for a break from constant caregiving. Maybe you're dreading it. Perhaps you love the pace of being home and in tune with your baby's rhythms. You may weep uncontrollably or feel fine about the plan to go back. You may not feel like you have a choice, so a lot of different feelings may come up. To ease this change, pay attention to these three areas:

- 1. Breastfeeding.** Let's talk pumping logistics. About three weeks before you transition back, meet with your supervisor to discuss your return. If you want to pump breastmilk, make a plan so you can do so privately. Is there an empty office or conference room you might use? Can door windows be covered by paper? Be sure to pack markers and tape so you can label your bottles or bags. Can you use the office fridge for milk storage? It also helps to store a few extra shirts at work. Leaks happen.
- 2. Child care.** One of the hardest parts about going back to work can be missing your baby. You might wonder what they are doing throughout the day. Are they happy? Sleeping? Fussing? Do their caregivers understand their cues? That's why choosing the right child care situation is so important (see our *Child Care* article). If your child won't be with a family member they know, take time to get to know your child's caregiver(s) by visiting before you start work. Share some of your baby's favorite songs, stories, and activities. Explain a little bit about their schedule, personality, and cues. Pack any other supports your baby uses (such as pacifiers) in multiples, and label everything. Dress baby so they're ready to play. Bring at least two back-up outfits. Blowouts happen.
- 3. A new schedule.** If possible, make changes to your baby's schedule the week before you begin work. Visit ahead of time so you're comfortable with the setting. If you can, drop them off for a shorter period of time the first week to give everyone time to adjust. It is OK, expected, and totally normal to call your child care provider just to check on how your baby is doing. Many child care programs have an "open door" policy that means you can drop in to check on your baby anytime. The most important thing to remember is that this transition is one of the biggest in your life. If this were happening to a friend, what would you say? Probably something like, "Be good to yourself. This is tough. You're doing the right thing. Your baby will be OK. You'll be OK."

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