



Returning to Work with an Infant

A mother's return to work after the birth of a baby can be difficult. It takes time to adjust to being a new mother and to becoming comfortable with your baby. Too often, just as this is happening, it is time to go back to work. Parents find themselves having to balance their personal needs with their baby's needs, and their need to nurture and be with their baby with the need to work. Some people reevaluate their decision to return to work at this time; others assess their options.

There are several steps that you can take ahead of time to help you prepare for your return to work. Some of the suggestions that follow may help you to decide whether and when to return to work; others may help to make the return smoother for you and your child.

Before the baby is born

1. While you are still at work, check your personnel policy to find out your options. Find out about use of sick leave, length of maternity leave, extended maternity leave, benefits, paternity leave and family leave after you return to work. Some parents may be eligible for a full year of parental leave, which can be shared or taken by one person.

Explore with your employer various possibilities such as returning to work gradually, part-time work, job-sharing or flexible work hours. Both parents must know what their employee options are. You may not decide what you will do until after the birth, but a clear understanding of your options will help you decide later.

2. Consider your child care alternatives ahead of time. Research each type of care – centre-based, family-based, in your home – and each type's advantages and disadvantages. Find out what is available through your provincial child care branch, local child care information sources, parent resource centres, other parents with infants, books and the Internet.

Finding child care takes time – contacting agencies, investigating waiting lists,

checking subsidy eligibility and finding out about availability. Visit some of the people or places you are considering before the baby is born. Think about what might work for your family. Try to decide on some of the very basics – type of care, licensed or unregulated, cost and distance, for example.

3. Find out what babies need and what high quality care for an infant should look like. Babies' brains are developing quickly and their healthy development needs to be nourished. Can you continue to breastfeed? Do you want your baby in one-on-one care? Do you want your baby to be with other babies his age? With older children? Think about what is important to you and respect your needs too.



Once you do the preliminary work and have narrowed down your search, you may find some of your best choices have long waiting lists. You may be able to add your name to reserve a spot for your baby. After your baby is born, his/her actual presence will allow you to come to know what is special about his/her needs. Be prepared to keep your options open.

When you decide to return to work:

1. Give yourself plenty of time to find care. What works for one family may not be right for your own. Write down your thoughts after you visit each child care setting for reflection later.

2. You need to be able to trust someone else with your child and your baby needs to feel

secure about your return. From time to time, leave your baby with others. Increase the amount of time as your return to work approaches.

3. If possible, choose care that allows you to start your baby gradually so that both of you can become accustomed to the new situation.

4. If you are breast-feeding, find out whether the child care you have chosen will support you if you continue. If you decide to stop, provide opportunities for baby to willingly take a bottle from someone else.

5. All family members need to be involved in caring for the baby and in choosing child care, as well as in sharing responsibility for shopping, cooking, housework, dropping off and picking up the baby, for example.

6. Plan to be involved in your child's care. Communicate regularly with your child's caregiver, in person, by telephone and through logs.

7. Arrange backup care for situations such as when your baby or your baby's caregiver is ill. Try to have more than one backup arrangement. Introduce your child to these arrangements.

8. Plan ahead by doing things that will simplify your life during the first few months. For example, stock your freezer, set up schedules and routines.

9. Have realistic expectations. It will take time to adjust to being a working family.

10. Watch carefully to ensure that your baby stays happy in the care setting you have selected.

Your choice of child care is important for you and your baby. The right choice can enrich both of your lives.

Print resources

Mother of All Baby Books (2001). Anne Douglas
A Parent's Guide to the Early Years (2002). Joint project of Best Start: Ontario's Maternal, Newborn and Early Child Development Resource Centre and Family Communications.

Websites

Canadian Child Care Federation www.cccf-fcsge.ca
 Child & Family Canada www.cfc-efc.ca
 Canadian Health Network www.canadian-health-network.ca