Returning to Work after a Maternity/Paternity Leave

The decision to return to work after having a baby or taking a few years off to parent your young child will depend on many factors. What kind of child care can you afford? How well can you navigate having a job and being a parent? Does your spouse support your decision? Take some time to weigh the economic, career and emotional impact of returning to work.

Factors Affecting Your Decision

Studies have had differed on the impact of daycare and returning to work. Research shows that the most important factors are the quality and consistency of care that the young children receive. Children receiving quality care usually do just fine, whether it is provided solely by the parents or with the help of daycare professionals.

For many families, having both parents work is a financial necessity. For others, it is a choice with a several variables. Consider the advantages and disadvantages of going back to work.

Possible advantages:

- More income
- Increased employment benefits
- Career satisfaction and advancement
- Break from parenting and household routines
- Social and networking opportunities
- Socialization and educational opportunities for your child

Possible disadvantages:

- Time away from your child
- Cost of child care
- Extra worry of your child in the care of another
- Job stress on top of parenting stress
- Less energy and time for family, household duties

One way of looking at whether returning to work is for you is to determine your anticipated income minus expenditures. Start by listing on a sheet of paper your take-home pay. Next, subtract anticipated daycare costs, as well as any expenditures you regularly make while working: e.g., transportation costs, lunches,

business wardrobe purchases, and any additional taxes you pay as a result of your higher income bracket and loss of yourself as a non-working dependent on your tax return. What remains is the actual immediate economic benefit of working.

It is also important to look at the long-term economic advantages of returning to work. Even if there is not much left over after subtracting child care and other expenses, returning to work now may put you on a path to greater economic benefits in the future. Someday your child may need braces, designer clothes and a college education. You will need the security of a sound retirement. As with all financial plans, it is important to look at both immediate and long-term goals.

Dividing the Responsibilities at Home

Despite major social change regarding women in the workforce, the majority of parents staying at home to raise their children are women. Yet, over 60% of women with young children work at least part-time. For many, the division of labor in the home (housework) has not changed since the 1950s. Many women returning to work report feeling added stress that the time they spend working does not translate into less time spent on household duties.

Couples need to look at how parenting, household chores, yard work, and other responsibilities will change when one partner enters the workforce. One way to do this is to sit down together and make a chart of each of your responsibilities, including home, work, and commute. Figure out the amount of time you spend on each and come to a weekly total. Then, see where you can compromise to remove some of the disparity.

Flexible Work Arrangements

Some families do the math and discover that they can meet their goals through part-time work. Working part-time or sharing a job with another worker can make balancing work and personal responsibilities a little easier. Perhaps you only want to work part-time in a position you previously occupied full-time. Try negotiating a new arrangement with your employer. You may be able to share a job with another employee.

Of course, there can be disadvantages to part-time work too. You may find that working part-time lessens your ability to have a major positive impact on your organization or your career path. Some part-timers report that the workload does not always decrease when their hours do. Not all part-time employment offers benefits such as health insurance and vacation time.

For some, the opportunity to do some or all of their work from a home office is attractive. Companies who value trained and loyal workers are often willing to consider such arrangements. Try submitting a plan that demonstrates how your proposed arrangement will meet the business needs of the company. Your superiors may be willing to show some flexibility.

If you have terminated your employment with a company before the birth of your child and decide to return, your experience may give you an advantage over another applicant. The transition to your old job will probably be easier than the adjustment to a new position with a different company. You may also be able to reclaim your seniority ranking and accrue benefits faster.

If you are starting your job search from scratch, look for companies offering flexible work arrangements and family-oriented benefits such as partial reimbursement for child care costs. Magazines like Working Woman rank the family-friendly efforts of major corporations.

Some parents choose to launch their own home-based business (e.g., writing a book, selling handmade crafts, preparing tax returns) that allows them to work around their family's schedule and care for their children. For some, this route can be both profitable and creatively fulfilling. You should evaluate the risks involved and initial capital required as well as additional responsibilities like buying supplies and paying regular self-employment taxes and expenses. How long will it be before you can expect to see some income from your business?

Some parents avoid child care entirely by working alternate shifts. Perhaps you can work evenings after your spouse comes home from work. Of course, this arrangement will lead to a reduction in the time you would have together as a couple.

The decision to return to work is a very personal one. Weigh your options and discuss your decision carefully with your partner. When talking with your child, try to focus on the positive aspects of returning to work. Address their feelings honestly and talk about how they can help make this successful. Once you have returned to work, give the new arrangement some time. This change will take some getting used to for you and your family. It may require extra patience and compromise to make it work- values that can enhance your family life in the long run.

Resources

- The Office on Women's Health in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: www.womenshealth.gov
- U.S. Department of Labor: www.dol.gov
- American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy: www.aamft.org

Here when you need us.

Call: 844-207-5465

Online: guidanceresources.com

App: GuidanceNow SM

Web ID: LivingME

©2026 ComPsych ® Corporation. All rights reserved. This information is for educational purposes only. It is always important to consult with the appropriate professional on financial, medical, legal, behavioral or other issues. As you read this information, it is your responsibility to make sure that the facts and ideas apply to your situation.