

## Daycare & Diapers - Return to Work After Maternity Advice for Managers

By Lyndsay Swinton

Returning to work after maternity is about as much fun as changing an overflowing diaper – dirty work but you’ve got to do it. Instead of talking about the tricky legislation, let’s focus on the human side of returning to work after maternity.

### **Snoozy not Lazy**

The main issue is mum\* is probably exhausted. No-one functions well when they’re tired, so go easy, their spare capacity is probably limited. Your mum that skids in the door at one minute before work starts has probably been up for 3 hours already, and some would argue more committed to her job than people with no family responsibilities. And as she skids back out again, remember she’s off to nursery, then home and has a whole evening of getting baby fed and in bed before it all happens again. I’m exhausted just thinking about it.

\*(As an aside, I’m pro-dad, but for this article, I’ll be talking about mum)

### **Childcare Fees Hurt**

Mum will be getting used to new responsibilities including spending a fortune on childcare. Her net hourly rate would make you weep. Unless granny is close at hand, it’s probably tricky for her to re-arrange childcare, so be wary of last minute “must attend” meetings or other schedule changes. Use technology to your advantage - get mum to dial in to a conference call whilst baby plays (you can always mute out the baby noises).

Mum is often the primary carer, so a sick baby takes priority over work. Get used to it. Mum didn’t make baby sick, so avoid treating her like she did.

### **Flexible Working Arrangements**

It’s a hardcore mum that comes back to work full time from day one. This is one seriously driven lady, keen to maintain her career and needs to be respected for that. Or, you may have agreed a new flexible working pattern, with some days working from home, part-time or condensed hours. Flexible working patterns take more effort to set up and honour but you’re going to retain your mum. Let’s face it, she knows she won’t get such a good deal elsewhere.

## **Post Holiday Blues on Steroids**

Ever had the post holiday blues? Multiply that 10-fold and you'll be getting close to what it feels like to return to work after maternity. A lot of water has passed under the bridge in that time. What was once familiar will have changed, and an induction plan will ease the re-familiarisation process. Arrange catch-up's with colleagues, customers and suppliers and provide an overview of what's happened and happening business wise.

## **In at the Shallow End**

If maternity cover has been provided, be sensitive to the transfer of responsibilities. Allow this to happen over a set period to ensure continuity of service. The job may now be shared between two people, with clear demarcation between shared and individual responsibilities making it easier for all.

## **Crawl, Walk then Run**

Physical and emotional changes may render your new mum a wobbly blob of under-confident jelly. Use your induction plan to rebuild skill and will and your mum's confidence will be on the up. Plan computer course refreshers, allow time for learning new systems or processes and give clear leadership on both old and new tasks.

## **Fair For All**

Resentment can build when others are expected to pick up the slack when mum isn't there. Make sure this is recognised and rewarded appropriately.

## **Mums Only**

Now this one is definitely outside dad's skill-set. Some mums may wish to continue breastfeeding at work. No, baby won't be hanging around in the office until she's hungry, this means mum will need to express milk and will need suitable facilities to do so. This is where all sorts of tricky legislation kicks in, but it's something to consider and be sensitive to.

## **Reap What You Sow**

With all these tricky return to work after maternity management issues, it's tempting to avoid employing women entirely. Attitudes differ, but the wealth of talent, experience and skill you'd be denying your business is vast. Treat your mothers well and they'll mirror it back.

**By Lyndsay Swinton**

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