



# HOW TO...

## support mom when she returns to work after having a baby

Watch the [recording](#) of the Practical Workshop hosted by Sikunye, discussing how to support mom returning to work after having a baby. It's no secret that returning to work after the birth of a child can be very overwhelming for mom. There can be many strong emotions around leaving baby in the care of someone else, fears about coping at work and home, concerns around job security. As a community of support to mom, in this workshop we discussed how you can best care for and encourage mom as she returns to work.

*Returning to work after being home with a new baby is “a transition that's like no other. Everything is changing — from your practical day-to-day schedule, to your new responsibilities as a parent, to your identity in terms of how you've seen yourself your entire adult life. Adding to the pressure, you're making this transition while taking care of a little human who might not be sleeping very well.”*

**Daisy Wademan Dowling**, the founder and CEO of Workparent

Moms work hard! It's a tough job raising kids and that takes a lot of time. A study conducted in 2018 found working moms' clock/work an average of 98 hours per week. That's about the same as working 2.5 full-time jobs. But then we expect moms to work as if they are not mothers, and to parent as if they do not work!

### what is the law for moms returning to work after having a baby?

The Code of Good Practice on the Protection of Employees during Pregnancy and after the birth of a child, protects employees during pregnancy and after the birth of a child.

#### Maternity leave:

- A pregnant mom can take up to 4 continuous months of unpaid maternity leave. She can also see if she qualifies for Maternity UIF <https://ufiling.labour.gov.za/uif/maternity-benefits>
- More specifically, **no employee may return to work for 6 weeks after the birth of her child**, unless a medical practitioner or midwife certifies that you're fit to do so.

This is true for any type of work mom does (work-from-home included) unless she works less than 24 hours a month

### work environment:

- No employer may allow a pregnant employee or an employee who is nursing a child to perform work that is both hazardous to her health or her child's health
- Employers must also make provision for breastfeeding mothers upon their return to work after maternity leave. The Code of Good Practice explicitly states that arrangements should be made for employees who are breastfeeding, and that they are to get thirty-minute breaks twice per day for breastfeeding or expressing milk on each working day for the first six months of the infants' life. A toilet is not a safe or hygienic space to express milk, and a clean and private space for mom to express milk or breastfeed must be made available
- Encourage mom to know her rights with regards to maternity leave and what her workplace policy is for breastfeeding.

### what to encourage mom in when returning to work

- **Encourage mom to practice self-care.** She is responsible for baby's health, food, safety, stimulation, that baby is clothed and goes to sleep well – this is part of responsive nurturing care – mom responds to her baby's needs both physically (like food, bath time, clothes) but also emotionally (soothes baby when crying, talks lovingly to baby, builds baby's brain through reading and talking to baby). If mom does not take care of herself she will not be able to provide this kind of care to her baby, and we see when moms are really struggling/not coping even things like baby's feeding or bathing or putting to sleep just is not done well and baby suffers
- **Encourage mom to have a strong support system around her.** Help mom make a list of who she can reach out to for support, who her friends are at work, and what works for mom to cope – especially when things get stressful
- **Encourage mom to make a plan** of the things that she can do daily to build good habits to look after herself. At the same time to make an "emergency plan" that should something go wrong, who would she contact, what activities must she do etc.
- **Encourage mom to make a plan** of when and how she will spend time with her partner/husband so that work and competing work priorities do not negatively impact home life and the relationship that is vital for baby to thrive



Images taken from: <https://workingmomsthive.com/> - you can send images like these to mom on WhatsApp

- **Support mom through the emotions** that she is feeling. It can be hugely stressful returning to work. Mom could also have separation anxiety of being away from baby, or guilt for leaving baby – keep affirming mom in her actions and feelings towards going back to work
- **Keep checking in with mom** in the days/weeks after returning to work to see how she is coping and keep reminding her to reach out to her support network
- **Pray with mom** – help her to keep her relationship with God strong

### some tips to give mom:

- **Ask for flexibility.** Can you work from home? Or change the hours that you work?
- **Have a backup childcare plan** – figuring out a childcare plan early is important – have this in place before you return to work, so that you can also notify the caregiver/nursery in time. But have a backup plan in case something happens e.g. the nanny is sick, the nursery/day care closes – Know who you will call on in those times. It may be a family member, a friend, a neighbour, grandparent, or an ECD in the neighbourhood, but it is important to write this down and put this on the fridge or somewhere you remember when things go wrong
- **Get into a routine and practice it** – especially a morning routine. Babies do best on the days that things are organised and they know what to expect.
- **Prep for pumping / expressing milk** – we encourage you to breastfeed exclusively for 6months and up to 2years. This is possible when you are prepared. Make sure you have the pump, bottles and a way to store the milk. It is also a good idea to introduce baby to the bottle a few weeks before you return to work so that baby gets used to taking breastmilk from the bottle. Also make a plan for how you will pump at work, and know your rights to 2x 30min breaks to breastfeed or pump in a space that is hygienic and ventilated

- **Prioritise** – plan daily to-do lists and find people to support/delegate things to do because once working, and then coming home to “work” more, you will need to have support as well as know what needs to be done
- **Reach out to others** – talk to other moms, to talk to friends and talk through the challenges you are facing, your fears, and how you are handling being back at work
- **Play with baby every day (even if for 15min)** – you can still bond and play with baby and show responsive caregiving even if just for 15min a day. This is vital for baby's healthy development. So prioritise spending time with baby when you return home – singing, dancing, playing, reading a book, bathing baby...all these things will help you bond with baby and help you to not feel like you are “missing out” on baby growing up.

[See Vroom](#) everyday activity ideas

## If you are an employer – have you considered these things?

*Let's help mom be the kind of mom she wants to be!*

Adapted from:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1IErF4aJzfq60v2wbq5zqZGWp3iXyNSMH/view>

<https://www.whattoexpect.com/first-year/returning-to-work-after-maternity-leave-emotions>

<https://www.whattoexpect.com/first-year/baby-care/balancing-work-and-new-baby/>

<https://hbr.org/2019/08/how-to-return-to-work-after-taking-parental-leave>

