

With tears streaming I pulled the car over to the side of the road, took a deep breath, turned the car around and went back home. Starting a new job seemed like such an exciting prospect but on that first day, leaving my infant son proved to be impossible. I just couldn't do it. For many parents, returning to work after the birth of a baby, whether it 's the first child or the fifth, can be a heart wrenching experience. It may also be a time for soul searching as parents begin to cope with the pain of separation, worries about the baby's care, and questions about the importance of work.

Here are some tips to help parents prepare for returning to work:

Extend Maternity Leave: The Family Leave Act of 1993 allows parents who are employed by companies of 50 or more workers to take up to three months off (unpaid leave): Parents who can extend their maternity leave to the full allowable time period may have an easier time separating from their baby. Becoming attached to a new baby takes time and the early weeks and month(s) can be grueling and exhausting. If parents return to work too early they may only experience the stressful part of parenting a newborn. Well-known pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton states that both parents need "a well-protected period" in which the parents and the baby can learn about each other. If the parents can wait until the baby is 3-4 months old to return to work the baby will be more peaceful, the parents and baby will know each other better and everyone feel more relaxed and rewarded. (Brazelton, 1987)

Practice Leaving the Baby: Invite a relative or hire a baby sitter to stay with your baby and plan to go away for short time perhaps between feedings. This "dress rehearsal" will diminish your feelings of loss and give you the experience you need leaving the baby when it is time to return to work.

Take Care of Yourself. It is important to take care of yourself and to re-cement your relationship to your partner (Brazelton, 1992). Get enough rest, maintain contacts with friends and family, get some exercise and go out. Accept support from grandparents and other relatives.

Take Advantage of Work Place Flexibility: Find out what your work place offers parents of newborns. Is it possible to job share, work the hours the baby sleeps, bring your baby to work, or go to the baby at feeding times? When you are at work save as much of yourself as possible sit when you can, shut off your mind for a while at times, and, at the end of the day, try to leave your work related tension at work. Plan your work day so you have enough energy left over to play with your baby when you get home.

Find Quality Child Care: Find a caregiver who is loving and responsive, who cuddles, rocks, and interacts with baby by smiling, talking, and playing, A quality care giver respects the baby's individuality and recognizes the baby's individual rhythm, She will also be knowledgeable about child development and understand the special needs of each child . She will have a stimulating and safe space to play, and she will offer you developmental information and support.

Returning to work after the birth of a baby can be tough, but preparation and planning can make the transition back to work happier for both parents and baby.

If you would like more information on working parents or information about other parenting topics, contact Ellen McGuire at 1-800-870-7746.

Brazelton, T. Berry: Working and Caring, 1987, Touchpoints, 1992

Raltson, Jeannie: The State of Maternity Leave: Parenting Magazine. July, 2002