

# How to plan your return to work before going on maternity leave

It's mother's day this week, so we thought it timely to shine a spotlight on all the amazing mums and mums to be out there by talking about an important issue for all working mums - maternity leave. More specifically, how best to prepare for maternity leave to ensure your return to work is a breeze.

The act of juggling family and career is never easy but there are a few things you can do to make sure when the time comes, your transition back to work is as smooth as it can be.

‘It's never too early to think about how you plan to get back to work after your baby is born, and the more proactive you can be about planning ahead with your manager, the better.’

Mel Barrett, director at Tandem Partners knows all about the challenges of combining work and family. The mother of three returned to her role after six months' maternity leave and says it's important to plan ahead to ensure your return to work is as stress-free as possible.

“It's never too early to think about how you plan to get back to work after your baby is born, and the more proactive you can be about planning ahead with your manager, the better.”

Barrett says the first step is being clear about your intentions and expectations upon returning to work, even though it may be tempting to wait and see.

- **Research different job arrangements.** Before you apply for maternity leave, it's a good idea to understand what your company offers and what your leave entitlements are, so you are prepared for discussing all your options with your employer. Look into the different types of job arrangements that are available and decide which scenario will work best for you.

With Australian mothers returning to work in growing numbers, many organisations are getting better at offering support and flexibility for working mothers, and indeed working fathers, Barrett says.

“There are a range of work styles you might not have thought of before. One of the best tips I received when I had my first child was to consider going back to work earlier but making my transition a staggered one by building up my days as I got used to juggling everything,” Barrett says.

Job arrangements to consider might include:

- [Part-time](#)
  - Job-sharing
  - [Working from home](#)
  - Compressing or adjusting your hours
  - Staggering your return to work
- **Focus on the role.** The key, Barrett says, is to get on the front foot. “Go to your employer with a short-list of scenarios that might work for you, your manager, your team and the workplace. If you can focus on how you plan to achieve some of your key tasks and any issues that might crop up in your early months back, it shows you’re willing to do what it takes to ensure the job continues smoothly.”

Barrett cautions that any discussion about returning to work after maternity leave should be focused on the role and how you will perform it in practice, rather than on how much flexibility or support you’ll need.

In your discussion, highlight:

- The benefits of your proposed working arrangement
  - How you will handle any challenges, such as a sick child
  - How key tasks will be carried out in practice.
- **Love your work.** Barrett says although it’s tempting to not think about work while you’re on maternity leave, it’s important to stay in touch with your colleagues if you want your return to be as seamless as possible. There are many ways you can stay engaged, such as asking for remote access, keeping abreast of industry current affairs, or simply catching up with colleagues for a coffee.

Even if you’re not planning to return to the same job, maternity leave can be an opportunity to refresh your skills. Before you head out on maternity leave you might want to do some research about online courses on offer or professional associations you can join.

- **Be kind to yourself.** It's difficult to predict how you will feel about work once your baby is born so consider all options and be flexible in case things don't go as you expect.

"Above all, be kind to yourself," says Beck Melville, positive psychology practitioner and mother of two. "Practising self-compassion is a useful tool at any point, but especially when you're going through big life changes, such as becoming a parent."

"There's no right way or wrong way," Melville says. "It's about working out what's right for you. And remember, looking after your own wellbeing will have a positive effect on those around you, both at work and at home."