fact sheet

TIPS FOR RETURNING TO THE WORKPLACE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

covid-19 support

At Gidget Foundation Australia, we have heard many stories from our clients explaining how they feel about returning to the workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is yet again, another change to try and manage. There have been so many changes and uncertainties in the past few months. Along with change comes increases in stress levels and anxieties. This time of re-engaging and heading back to the workplace will no doubt be a challenging time for both employees and employers.

Here are some quotes from our clients:

"My parental leave runs out in August. I'm anxious about how I am going to work on such little sleep and then come home and look after my baby whilst being so tired. I am also in contact with lots of people at my work, what if I get sick and bring it home to my baby"

"I'm due back at work in October and I work in healthcare. So much worry!"

There are a number of reasons that you may be feeling worried about returning to work.

Changing routines: While many people will be comforted to return to some form of normality, there will be others who adapted to the changes and don't want to change back to pre-COVID work arrangements. Some, no doubt, enjoyed the later starts or being able to put a load of washing on or be in casual clothing. Others have not liked the blurring of home and work or have had home schooling to deal with or partners at home with increased relationship strain. So, for those it may be welcomed. It is always hard to return to work as a new mum or dad and leave your baby with someone else, and COVID has added in some extra complexities.

Family: Some have also enjoyed being more involved with their children and will miss that aspect of their day. Our male clients have said they acquired a unique insight into the intricacies of their children's daily lives. Some children missed their friends and extended family, whilst others have loved being home with their parents. Pets will also feel the lack of humans around too! We will all react in different ways to getting back to work. Share the load if you have a partner and call on friends or family if you need extra practical support.

Connections: Some people have missed their work colleagues due to isolation and there may be anxiety about re-connecting and seeing if it feels the same upon their return to work. They might be wondering how to keep the relationship going. Meetings conducted via video platforms became our new normal and now we are curious as to how we will adapt to face to face again and if we feel safe or if it is really necessary? Maybe there isn't as much need for everyone to be in the office at the same time and employers can provide some flexibility with these arrangements in consultation with their employees. But then do we continue to lose connection to our colleagues? There is also discussion about the safety of commuting to work and how to manage anxiety around that whilst yearning for more connection to others. All of these are valid concerns.

Health concerns: Being close to people again, sharing office space and equipment or even working in health care settings will also heighten anxieties. You may worry about bringing home COVID or catching it on the way to work or even being close to someone you know has had it. It is a joint responsibility to ensure your safety. Employers will need to have a 'COVID-19 Safe Plan' and keep lines of communication open with you and offer flexible work arrangements if they can. You can learn what your rights are and

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speak up honestly if you are uncomfortable about work health & safety to ensure you feel safe as you return to work. Continue to prioritise activities that keep you centred and happy, whether they be exercise, eating well, meditation or simply connecting with loved ones.

TIPS:

- Minimise watching, reading or listening to news about COVID-19 that causes you to feel anxious or distressed and seek information only from trusted sources
- Try and use helpful coping strategies that you have used before and put them into practice again as you return to work e.g. getting rest, eating well, time out, exercise and stay in contact with family and friends

- If your child is not enjoying the changes then find ways for them to express their feelings such as play or individual special time with you doing something they enjoy. Every child has his or her own way of expressing emotions. Children will benefit if they are able to express their inner world to you and you can help them by showing them healthy ways to manage change
- It is time to consider how you are going to re-connect with the workplace. So, take your time, talk to those who can offer helpful suggestions and offer support and ease back into it. Review the plan when needed and most importantly, look after yourself! ✿

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Gidget Foundation Australia exists to promote the importance of emotional wellbeing among expectant and new parents, their healthcare providers and the wider community to ensure that those in need receive timely, appropriate and supportive care.