

Common Feelings That Arise When Returning From Maternity Leave - You're Not Alone!

A gentle guide to support you in noticing the feelings which arise when returning from maternity leave and the signs that you might need further support.

Hi! I'm Sarah, a mother and therapist who understands what it's like to return to work after mat leave. In fact, I decided not to return to my full time job and I went through a lot of anxiety handing my notice in.

I decided to launch my private practice which was extremely daunting at the time, but I was desperate to find a balance between still looking after my little girl and working part-time.

It was the best decision I ever made, and I now support other mothers going through their motherhood journey.



Guilt - Feeling bad that you might miss your child's 'firsts'. That **your maternity leave hasn't been what you expected** or you've returned to work earlier than planned. Where did the time go? **Everyone will assume that I've had a great time** - all of those coffee dates with friends...if only they knew!

Anxiety - Anxious about **what childcare might look like**, particularly if your child is starting a new nursery and **what the settling in period might be like for both child and yourself**. This can also involve being anxious about breastfeeding and being able to transition at work. For example 'will I be able to pump in a private place?'

Resentment - This could be towards your work establishment/employers, your partner or even yourself - the fact that **you're due back to your role but you don't really want to be there**. You might be in a situation where you can't return to work due to finances, which **makes you question your situation**.



Worry - How am I going to do it all? How will my child cope when I'm not there? What if they're sick and I have to leave work? How will this impact everything? **The worry never seems to end!**

Lack of confidence - Will I still have the skills to return to my role? **How will I remember what I was doing before when I struggle with brain fog** since having my baby? Will my colleagues understand that everything is different for me now? Will there be people I don't know?

Lack of energy - How will I make sure I have enough sleep to be able to manage at work? **How will I cope on the days that I'm feeling sleep deprived?** What if my employers think that I can't 'hack' it?



Lack of trust and doubt in others – How will I know my child is safe being cared for by others? **I'm so used to doing it myself and I like to be in control of things.** How can I trust that everything will be okay?

Sadness – Feeling sad and grieving the loss that you **won't be spending as much time with your child** and that everything is changing. Where did the time go? Or **maybe you're feeling guilty that you don't feel sad** about returning to work?

Panic and overwhelm – How will I make sure I have everything ready in time? How will I juggle household chores and parenting? **This is so overwhelming!**



Excitement and relief – In particular for adult conversations, **finding your sense of self again**, a new routine which can bring new opportunities and financial relief. **Phew! No more long days with my child and I can breathe again!** How did I ever manage before?

Empowerment – Feeling **strong, confident and capable** with balancing numerous roles and responsibilities. An **eagerness to return and ‘prove’ yourself** to other colleagues and yourself that you can do it.

Identity shift – Reconnecting with your professional identity and enjoying using those skills again. **Feeling overall positive about finding yourself again** and putting more time into self care.



But Why. Do These Feelings Occur? I'm Excited But So Anxious!

A major life shift! – Not only have you just been through a major life shift the past 9 months – 1 year with your baby (all the hormones, physical and mental demands that motherhood brings) but now you're about to go through another huge change! **It can be a really uncertain time, and it's okay to feel different feelings simultaneously.** It takes time to adjust to a new routine, especially as a family – it affects everyone!

Unrealistic Expectations – The belief and **pressure from yourself and others that you should seamlessly go back to normal** or that you should somehow choose between your career and being a 'good mother'. How can I be successful at both? **What will others think of me?** What if I fail? There is just so much pressure!



Parental bonds – Especially if you've been the primary caregiver or you're a single parent, the bond between you and your child is like no other. There can be a lot of **anxiety with attachment and transitioning through this new period** for both you and your child, which is completely normal and understandable! Or **maybe you haven't bonded with your child in the way that you wanted to** and this is impacting your feelings about returning to work?

And How Can I Cope Through This New Period?

Talking matters! Sharing your feelings with your partner, friends, employer, colleagues and extended family **can be a great start to releasing some pressure in some way.** The more understanding and validation from others, the more you're likely to positively transition into your new routine.



Find a therapist (and one that get's it! - hello!) 😊 I understand the importance of finding a therapist that suits you, and **I often hear the significance of being a mother myself**, and how it almost immediately creates that safety net of someone who understands. There's **a relief in knowing that you're not going to be judged in any way**, that empathy will be felt and an unconditional positive regard for you will be held.

I'm looking forward to hearing from you, when you're ready. **Ps - you don't have to be actively returning from maternity leave to seek support from me!**

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