

6 best practices for when mom returns from maternity leave

According to the Department of Labor, women make up 47% of the workforce. So it's essential to keep in mind the policies you have in place for when moms return from maternity leave. While it's now becoming more common for dads to be granted paternity leave as well, for the sake of this article, we're referring to women returning from maternity leave after giving birth or adopting.

This can be an exciting, stressful, and emotional time whether she's new to motherhood or adding more kids to the family. Since you might not know the full emotional and personal aspect of her parenting experience, you want to, at the minimum, ensure that you provide an environment for her to prosper in her role as a new mother and successful employee.

Meet with her before she returns

One of the best things you can do to prepare your maternity leave employees for a successful return is to meet with her before she comes back to the office. This can be done virtually, via phone or in person.

During this meeting, you can devise a plan, so she knows what to expect when she returns. Having this communication in advance can help to reduce the potential stress and anxiety surrounding how work will be upon her return.

In devising a plan, also be sure to discuss any concerns she has. If this is her first time going through maternity leave or her first time doing so with your company, she likely has many questions. The more you can address them, the more comfortable she'll feel during her maternity leave and upon her return to work.

Meet with her on her first day back

Along with meeting before her maternity leave ends, you also want to be present on the day she returns to work. The first day back from maternity leave can come with a range of emotions for a new mom, so providing support can give her just what she needs to make it through this big day.

Have a one on one conversation, take her to lunch, or order her favorite meal. These are all ways that you can make her first day back a little more special.

Also, talk about any concerns she might have. Be sure that you're both on the same page about how things will progress moving forward.

Consider flexible scheduling

Many new moms make plans to return to work after maternity leave yet don't for various reasons. One of them being scheduling. If you can provide any flexibility in scheduling after maternity leave, it's often a welcome treat for new moms.

Consider allowing for part-time work, telecommuting, or flexible scheduling, such as working more hours 4 days per week and getting one day off.

Also, consider starting moms back from maternity leave with a lighter load and ramping it up over time. This is obviously, depending on her preferences as well. If she wants to jump right back in full time in the office with her average load, that's fine. But having some flexibility, depending on what she wants and needs during this time, can mean the world to a mom when returning from maternity leave.

Provide a nice place to pump

Not all moms returning from maternity leave will be pumping their milk, but many do. You want to be clear that you support and encourage her pumping while at work.

Have a nice area available for her to do so if possible, if she doesn't have a private office. Be sure that she knows when she's able to pump or if there's flexibility in her day to do so as she needs to. If she can pump peacefully with no stress surrounding the process, it will take a load off of her shoulders.

Share resources

Think about any resources you can make available to her when she returns from maternity leave related to parenthood or those that can make life easier in general.

If there's a nearby organization for parents or another colleague you suggest that she connect with, put her in contact so she can reach out if need be. If you have company benefits such as a discounted gym membership with yoga classes or discounted meal delivery services, provide her with that information.

If the HR office has additional benefits or services specifically for new parents or working parents, share them with her. Any little bit helps new parents.

Practice empathy after her maternity leave

Above all else, when your employee returns from maternity leave practice empathy. While you don't have to feel sorry for her or treat her with kid gloves, understand that she's a woman who just went through a significant life experience, and she is now trying to reacclimate herself to being at work.

By practicing empathy, you can help her to reduce her mom guilt. If she has to pump during a meeting, leave work early because there was an issue with the sitter or if she asks to work from home because her child is sick, don't treat her like a problem employee.

Instead, understand that she is juggling two important things in her life - her career and her family. It's part of your responsibility to help her do both by providing a supportive company culture that respects its employees' personal responsibilities.

Returning from maternity leave is a new beginning

When your employees return from maternity leave, it's a new beginning for her.

Not all new mothers will want or need the same level of support and flexibility when returning to work. As long as you keep the lines of communication open every step of the way and practice empathy during this transition, you're providing her with the best support that you can.