

How to Prepare Your Career for Parenthood



When you decide the time is right to have a baby, you probably realize a lot of changes are coming. But in addition to bringing on the physical and emotional changes everyone talks about, a baby will inevitably affect every aspect of your lifestyle, including your career.

Managing a baby and a career is often referred to as a balancing act, and for good reason -- there's a lot of juggling involved, and women often feel guilt, stress, frustration, and pressure in their attempts to manage both worlds.

So before you start **trying to conceive**, think about what you're going to do about work after you become a mom, and consider the questions you need to ask (of both your partner and your employer), your childcare options, and the financial scenarios of part-time work and staying at home. That way, you can determine the best work-baby set-up for you and your family.



Talk to Your Partner

It may seem premature, but now, before baby, is the best time to start discussing how you envision balancing career and family. The choice between staying at (or working from) home and returning to work outside the home after the baby arrives is a difficult one for a lot of parents.

It's important to get your partner on the same page, says Jennifer Wider, M.D., women's health specialist and author of *The New Mom's Survival Guide*. If your partner thinks you're planning on staying at home, but you want to go back to work, or if you have differing views on childcare (you say French au pair, he says day care), you need to highlight what each of your priorities are. Getting issues out in the open early will give you time to resolve disputes.



Find the Right Balance

If you think you know for sure that you want to become a full-time, stay-at-home mother or, alternatively, stick to your regularly scheduled hectic work schedule, be prepared to change your mind. "Many women expect they'll want to return to work but when the baby comes, they may feel quite differently," says Eva Ritvo, M.D., a Miami Beach, Florida-based psychiatrist. "Motherhood is such a special time that it's difficult to predict in advance how you will feel."

It's not all about your ideals, though; other factors will play a role. Realistically, if both you and your partner work in corporate environments with little or no job flexibility and you both want to continue working, you'll need a substantial amount of outside help with child rearing. You may find that the cost of child care is so high that it's actually more cost-effective for one parent to stop working altogether.

Choose a scenario that feels right for both you and your partner now. "You can always change your mind if it isn't right, and as your child grows, you will likely find that you need to make changes in your life to accommodate that," says Brette Sember, author of *The Practical Pregnancy Planner*.



Consider Child-Care Options

If you've decided you want to go back to work full- or part-time, or even if you choose to be a stay-at-home parent who just wants an afternoon off every now and again, you're going to need some kind of child care.

Consider what type of setup may work for you, whether it's a babysitter, a nanny, day care, a relative, or teaming up with another mom to take turns caring for each other's kids. If you have the support of family and friends, it will be easier. The sooner you know what type of arrangement you'll be comfortable with, the sooner you'll be able to figure out how you can afford it.

Katina Z. Jones, author of *Bottles, Budgets and Birthplans: What You Really Need to Know to Get Ready for Baby*, recommends looking for a caregiver (or multiple caregiver options, so you have a few backups) as early as five months into your **pregnancy**. "This way, you can find an excellent 'village' of people who will help create the space for your child to grow," she explains.



Investigate Options at Work

Gather as much information as you can from your employer about **maternity leave** options and whether there will be any flexibility in working hours when you return. Find out if your employer offers half-time positions or job-shares with other working moms. You may be able to work from home one or two days a week or put in your equivalent hours in a four-day-week.

Coworkers who don't have children sometimes view parents who often need (and get) greater flexibility negatively, particularly if those parents must leave work early or are permitted to work from home, warns Jones. Check your corporate policies ahead of time so you can try to manage expectations.

Discussing these issues with your employer (and partner) sooner rather than later not only gives you the best idea of what you can expect after Baby arrives, it also keeps your boss informed of what your plans are. Keep in mind, though, you don't have to discuss family planning with your manager until it's time to announce your **pregnancy** and nail down your maternity leave.



Crunch the Numbers

Whether you want to continue working post-baby is one thing, but whether you can actually afford to stop working, take

some extra time off, or work part-time is quite another.

Sember suggests creating two budgets -- one with your salary and one without it, or with a reduced rate, to gauge realistic options. You'll be able to see clearly how much money is coming in and how much you'll need to spend in each scenario. Call local day-care facilities or ask a parent you know about the local rates for nannies and babysitters. Just beware: This can be a tough task when you're only in the [trying to conceive](#) phase because you don't know exactly what kinds of expenses the baby will bring, from [diapers](#) to child care.



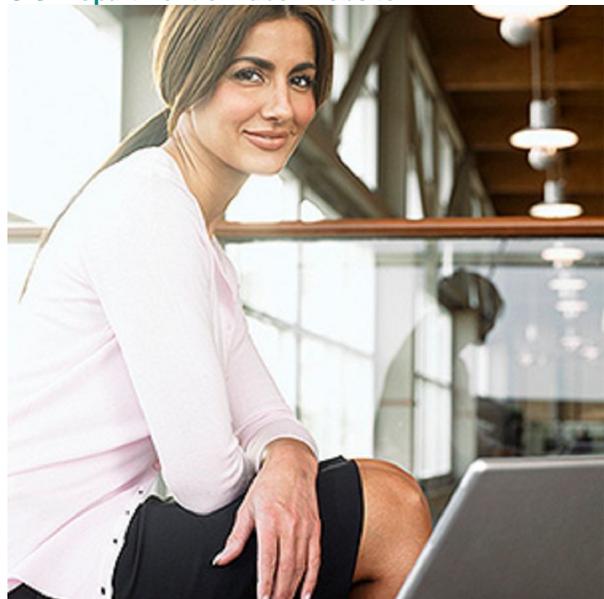
Know Your Rights

Knowing your rights under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), as well your own state family leave law, will help you maximize your time off. You should also check to see if you have a disability policy that will cover you.

The Pregnancy Discrimination Act prohibits employers with 15 or more workers from telling [pregnant women](#) that they cannot continue their job because of pregnancy or that they must take a mandatory leave. The FMLA offers most workers 12 weeks of job-protected unpaid leave related to having a child. Check the U.S. Department of [Labor](#) website to see if you are eligible. The FMLA leave can also be used by for prenatal visits or [bed rest](#).

In addition, some states, like California and New Jersey, offer paid leave for moms or dads, says Portia Wu, Vice President at the National Partnership for Women & Families. "A lot of people may not realize they may get more time under their state law," she says. "Also, they aren't aware that men can take FMLA. Both parents can take leave at same time or you can stagger leave."

[U.S. Department of Labor website](#)



Consider Your Current Job

Although there is probably no such thing as the "perfect" moment to have a baby when it comes to your work, if you're not in a rush to start a family there are some points in your career that may be better than others. For instance, if you know your company will be going through a major transition in the coming year, it may be best to wait until you're more certain of your job security. If you're looking to switch roles or move away from your current company, it's a good idea to

set yourself up with a new position and log in a substantial amount of working hours before becoming **pregnant**. That being said, if you and your partner are ready to have a baby, you shouldn't necessarily let a new job, your financial situation, or any other factors keep you from starting your family.
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