



# RETURNING TO WORK

A Guide To Returning To Work And Working Again

Scottish  
**COT DEATH**  
Trust

## Returning to work:

For many parents, returning to work following the death of their baby can be a particularly anxious time. While it may be the case that some parents feel ready to return, some may return purely due to financial constraints or pressure from their employer. For lots of parents it may be a particularly difficult step as they may feel like it's their first step back to their old life and it is normal for parents to feel like by doing so they are leaving their baby behind. Whatever the reason for returning to work is, it is a daunting milestone for most.

How long parents take off work following their bereavement varies greatly from person to person and indeed job to job. Some parents crave the normality and routine that work brings during a time where they may feel a lack of control. What makes the question of how long parents should have off work following the death of a baby so complicated is that for some getting back to work is healing and routine helps whereas others do not feel capable of working for a long time. It is important therefore to understand that there is no right or wrong, grief is a very personal journey, it is not rigid and reactions vary for every person. Fortunately in our research we found that the majority of parents felt like they had adequate time off following their loss, with most of our mums still being on maternity leave. This may indeed alleviate some of the pressure to return for women as they are not expected to return to work before their period of maternity leave ends. However, not everyone will be ready at the end of this and some additional leave may be required. There are however gender differences - dads often feel a lot more pressure to return to work sooner, and in some cases, before they are entirely ready. Unfortunately, how much paid or unpaid compassionate leave parents are granted is at their employer's discretion. It must be noted that when employers are supportive when managing grief in the workplace and offer their employees more support, it builds better relations and our research suggested that parents who had had periods of significant absence following their return to work felt that this could have been avoided had they received more time off initially.

Additional leave following returning to work is something that a lot of parents may need. While returning to work may be what is best at that time, grief changes over time and triggers such as special dates (birthdays, anniversaries etc) may leave parents unable to focus in the work place. As stated before, returning to work too soon may also leave some unresolved grief that may lead to additional time off work being required further down the road. Although returning to work is daunting there may be some things that will help ease the transition.

While parents may feel ready to return to work, they may not feel like they can take it all on at once. It may be useful for parents to ask their employers to adopt a more flexible approach in their return. A phased return, reduced hours or where possible reduced responsibilities.

Communication seems to play a vital role in a positive transition back into the workplace. Although it may be the furthest thing from parents' minds in the early days, keeping employers up to date with how you are may help make your transition back to work easier. If you are finding it too difficult to manage to speak to your employer directly at this time, it is often helpful to ask a family member, friend or perhaps a colleague with whom you have a good relationship with to keep your employer in the loop. Included in this pack is a resource which you may want to hand to your employer which details some of the procedures that follow a cot death and offers a little insight into how it may affect parents in relation to work.

When you return to work you may feel worried about how colleagues are going to act around you and what they are going to say. It is important that you communicate with your manager what is going to make returning to work easiest for you, this can include what you want your manager to communicate with colleagues on the event surrounding your loss which can be very distressing to talk about and whether or not you want to talk about your baby at work. Everyone will feel differently about this and so sending out a clear message may help diffuse any awkwardness. People will often not know how you are feeling and so may not want to mention your baby, worried it will upset you. Others may want to mention your baby straight away as they do not want you to think they are ignoring or being dismissive of your loss. Therefore, setting out what you feel comfortable talking about at work will help your colleagues know what to say to you and you may feel less anxious about your initial return. Prior to your official first day back it may be helpful for you to arrange a visit to your workplace, this will allow you to get most of the first meetings and conversations out of the way without the responsibilities of work. During the first days back at work it is important for parents to be easy on themselves and not set themselves unrealistic goals. Being honest with your employer about aspects of your job that you are perhaps struggling with may be useful. There will be good days and bad days, grief is ever changing and the enormity of your loss can hit at unexpected times.

Parents who go on to have subsequent children or whose baby had older siblings may find themselves very anxious about what is considered normal childhood ailments. When your child is sick it may provoke fears that could be viewed as irrational, but which are common for parents when their child has died. While people who have never suffered such a loss may find it difficult to understand, it is best to be honest with your employer about how you may feel. Subsequent pregnancies are also a time which may provoke extra anxieties in parents and you may be invited to attend additional antenatal appointments to help ease these fears, again this is something we would suggest explaining to your employer as although you are legally entitled to time off work to attend these appointments you may find it difficult to explain to your employer why you are being seen more frequently.

Returning to work and working again, for many parents is healing, and while it may be difficult readjusting and settling back in, the benefits for most parents of returning to work can help them while dealing with their loss. While returning to work may not be a choice for many parents but a necessity the Trust are always here to support. We can offer parents counselling at any stage so if you are finding your job or returning to your job or even beginning a new employment difficult it could be helpful to seek support through this avenue. We can also sign post you to the right services and information if you have any questions regarding your treatment at work or legal entitlements. Also, if you are considering entering new employment following a break from work, the Trust may be able to advise you on how to explain your work gap in a sensitive manner and in a way you feel comfortable with.



## Contact us

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