

Stay at home or return to work *After the birth of your baby*

When parents are making the choice about whether a mother should return to work after the birth of a baby, it can be a stressful time. Mothers who have taken maternity leave, fully intending to return to work, often find after their baby is born that they don't want to leave him/her with a childminder or at a nursery.

According to the Women and Equality Unit, one third of women taking paid maternity leave don't return to work as they are unable to work suitable hours. While the 1996 Maternity Rights Study found that 67% of mothers returned to work within 10-11 months of childbirth, and of those returning to work, 53% switched to working part-time.

The pull to stay at home can be great – yet the pull to return to work can be great too, not the least because of the financial pressures many young parents feel. Staying at home suits some women, while it would cause others great frustration not to get back to work, at least for a few hours a week. Neither option is 'easy'; both choices have their drawbacks. Circumstances vary from one family to another, and there is no set 'tick list' that can be brought into effect while making the decision.

So how is the choice to be made and what factors should be taken into consideration?

- ▶ Try to decide what is best for all the family - your partner, your baby or child/ren, and not forgetting *you*. Don't be swayed by what other people are doing, or what other people think.
- ▶ Make some 'For' and 'Against' lists, one for each member of the family.
- ▶ Work out your finances. You may really want to stay at home, so you need to decide whether you can make ends meet. Ask yourself whether you can do without some of the things that you previously thought of as necessities.
- ▶ Ask yourself whether you will feel a great sense of loss if you don't go back to your job.
- ▶ Talk to other people who have made the decision before you. Find out what's good about going back, and what's not so good.
- ▶ Don't rush in to the decision, if you can help it.
- ▶ Find out some facts – such as types of childcare options; whether you could have part-time hours; whether you could take time off when your child is ill; how your career will be affected if you don't go back immediately.

►Decide in advance on the division of labour in the home – including who is going to get up on those disturbed nights.

►Be prepared to feel guilty – whatever your decision! Guilt is an inevitable symptom of motherhood. Try not to give in to it - once you've made your choice, try to make it work. And if it isn't working – you can always change your mind!

For further help about staying at home with your baby/child, contact Full Time Mothers, an organisation that aims to enhance the status and self esteem of mothers at home.

PO Box 43690, London SE22 9WN.

Website: www.fulltimemothers.org

If your decision is to return to work, contact Working Families for further help on sorting out your work/life balance.

1-3 Berry Street

London

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Tel: 020 7253 7243

Email: office@workingfamilies.org.uk

Website: www.workingfamilies.org.uk

The Daycare Trust can offer advice on childcare issues and help you decide what type of childcare might suit your circumstances.

21 St George's Road

London

SE1 6ES

Tel: 020 7840 3350

Email: info@daycaretrust.org.uk

You may also like to read *How to Succeed as a Working Parent* by Steve Chalke (Parentalk/Hodder & Stoughton, £7.99).