

every  
woman  
WORKBOOK

# RETURNING TO WORK WITH CONFIDENCE



Before, I didn't quite get it. I did not really get how hard it is to succeed at work when you are overwhelmed at home... Being a mother is the most important – and most humbling – job I've ever had.”

SHERYL SANDBERG, COO FACEBOOK<sup>1</sup>



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# About this workbook

**Established in 1999, everywoman advances women in business. Our aim is to ensure women from all over the world fulfil their potential. We produce workbooks on topics that matter most to our members, and we're constantly listening to your views to give you the tools you need to kick-start your career, at a time and place that suits you.**

Returning to work after a period of leave can feel like a huge moment in anyone's career. It might be wrapped up in all sorts of emotions and logistical challenges. The transition might be smooth, owing to an organisation with a robust policy around its treatment of returning mothers or someone recovering from a period of ill health. Or it might be more challenging for various reasons.

This workbook is designed to give you the practical tools to take control of your return to work while being mindful of your emotions, your wellbeing and what you need most from your workplace in terms of support and career growth.

Although this workbook is primarily designed for those returning to the same job after a period of maternity or adoption leave, large portions of it will also be relevant to anyone embarking on a new job after taking time off to be a stay-at-home parent. There are lots of reasons why people take career breaks, however, and this workbook provides tools, around rebuilding self-confidence and network-building, that will resonate with anyone returning to work after a sabbatical, prolonged travel, time off for a passion project or a period of sickness or caring for a loved one.

We'd love to know how you get on. Share your experience with [karenmax@everywoman.com](mailto:karenmax@everywoman.com). Good luck!

*Maxine & Karen*  
and the everywoman team

# You and your mindset

You may have been on maternity leave, a sabbatical or perhaps gone through an extended period of illness or caring. Whatever the reason, and whether you have been away from work for six months or six years, going back into a job is never an easy thing to do.

“

*I THINK EVERY WORKING MOM PROBABLY FEELS THE SAME THING. YOU GO THROUGH BIG CHUNKS OF TIME WHERE YOU'RE JUST THINKING, 'THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE. OH, THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE.' AND THEN YOU JUST KEEP GOING AND KEEP GOING, AND YOU SORT OF DO THE IMPOSSIBLE."*

TINA FEY, ACTOR, PRODUCER, WRITER<sup>ii</sup>

**A**s you count down to your first day back in the office after a long absence, you may be excited and looking forward to rediscovering your 'career self' but you may also be anxious and nervous. It's totally normal to experience conflicting thoughts and emotions – you are not alone. It's important not to brush those feelings and emotions away and instead acknowledge them and be curious about them.

Further on in this section we will invite you to spend some time noting down any doubts or concerns you have about re-entering the business world, or indeed any aspects of your return to professional life that you are particularly looking forward to.



## EXERCISE

### YOU ARE NOT ALONE

To inspire your thinking, we asked women from the everywomanNetwork to share their feelings about returning to work after an absence. Tick any of the comments to which you have particularly strong reactions.

#### On returning after parental leave

<p>“Many women lose career confidence during those months. I’d enjoyed being a stay-at-home mum but children were never going to be my sole reason for living. I loved my job too.”</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>“Maternity leave was a wake-up call in priorities. Work is important, but I learned to make a very clear distinction between who I am and what I do.”</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>“When you’re a returning mother you have to juggle everything. You know you have only so many hours to work, so your output is higher. There’s a lot less chitchat around the coffee machine.”</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>“My career perfectionism extended into motherhood. But being perfect is exhausting. I learned that it was okay to dial down from ten out of ten to seven out of ten. If you don’t give yourself a break, who will?”</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>“Initially, I missed not being around my daughter. But [now] when she sees me heading to the office, she says she is going to grow up and work too. That is really nice.”</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>“I felt huge guilt when I was a stay-at-home mother, for not using my education, for not being out there.”</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>“I don’t get paid incredibly well, but I love what I do. I think it’s good for kids to see both of their parents working.”</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>“It’s important my daughter grows up knowing I’m more than just her mother and that every woman can have a successful career.”</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>“I knew that being in group childcare was going to be a great experience where my daughter would make friends, learn independence and get so many creative experiences. It felt like a win-win.”</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>“During [maternity] leave I really evaluated my values. I ended up changing careers to a field more in line with my earlier studies and compatible with family life. Best decision I ever made.”</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>“Returning to work after my daughter’s birth was daunting at first, but it has done wonders for my self-confidence, knowing I can achieve six impossible things before breakfast!”</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>



## EXERCISE

### On returning after illness or an extended period of leave

<p>"I went into my period of leave telling myself that I'd be back on my feet in no time. When it didn't quite work out like that, I struggled. Though I desperately wanted to be back at work, having to lie down for weeks on end left my mood low."</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>"I know from experience that it's never straightforward [to recognise that something is off with your mental health or if you're ready to go back to work]. Sometimes you just have this feeling, difficult to articulate, that something simply isn't quite right inside."</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>"My determination to not be seen as 'difficult' meant I hadn't been unequivocal about the implications of not getting the help I required [when I returned to work]."</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>"Conscious of not wanting to become a 'problem employee', I used my workplace 'keep in touch' days to discuss the practical issues of my return. I offered to sort out the admin myself; I wanted to get the things I needed, but without causing any hassle."</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>"I can't help feeling a bit of discrimination. Just because I have been out of the workplace for a few years does not mean I have lost my brain and the ability to do my job. I am explaining in my cover letter that I have kept up to date with my skills by attending courses. I wonder if I'm being too honest."</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>"I was nervous that my skills and knowledge were out of date. [But I realised] many of those [skills] gained during time away from [my] career were transferable."</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>"When experiencing mental health problems, you can become terrified of being 'incapable' and being treated as such doesn't help. Personally, I wanted to be the person I was at work before I was sick."</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>"I am going to need to update my skills in certain areas [so] I am finding it hard applying for positions due to a severe lack of confidence. [When you've had a long time out of the workplace] there are some who instantly assume that you have never worked or are too stupid to be employed anywhere."</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>



## EXERCISE

### IDENTIFYING ANXIETY AREAS

Now, looking at the quotes you have ticked above, write down the areas you are most worried about in one column, then detail the support you would need, professionally and personally, to feel more comfortable in the second.

ANXIETY AREAS	SUPPORT



## POSITIVE THINKING

Returning to work isn't just anxiety inducing, it can also be very exciting and feel like a new start. It's important to look at the positives. As you get ready to return to work, remind yourself why you chose that path in the first place and take time to think back on how you progressed, the friendships you made and the skills you learnt. It's important to find the 'working you' again so dig out your old appraisal forms, look at old event photos, call colleagues and arrange to meet for lunch and a drink. It's important to reconnect with the working you and the people who valued what you did in the workplace.



### EXERCISE

**Write down your positive thoughts and feelings about returning to work. For example:**

"I've always taken a huge amount of satisfaction in a job well done. I'm looking forward to rediscovering that part of me."

"Being back at work will mean I can reacquaint with colleagues and friends over lunch and coffees. I'm looking forward to the social aspect of my working life."

## EXAMINING YOUR ROLES AND RESOURCES

As you approach that first day back in the office you may start to feel as if you're being pulled in all directions. This is totally normal and, once acknowledged, can make it easier to deal with.



*PARENTS AND CARERS NEED TO RECOGNISE AND EMBRACE THE NEW SKILLS THEY HAVE ACQUIRED: LOOKING AFTER FAMILY, RUNNING A HOME OR CARING FOR A RELATIVE COMBINES MANAGEMENT, BUDGETING AND DIPLOMACY. DESPITE THIS, HOWEVER, MANY PROFESSIONALS LACK CONFIDENCE AND DON'T REALISE THAT THEIR EXPERIENCE IS STILL VALUABLE AND RELEVANT"*

MICHELLE FULLERTON, HEAD OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION, MERRILL LYNCH<sup>iii</sup>



### EXERCISE

**Write down five defining roles that you play in your life and a brief summary of what each involves, eg parent, partner, carer, friend, employee, co-worker. Now think about how each of those roles will be impacted by your return to work. What conversations do you need to start having and with whom?**

KEY ROLE

RETURNING TO WORK IMPACT

WHAT I NEED TO DO



## EXERCISE

KEY ROLE

RETURNING TO WORK IMPACT

WHAT I NEED TO DO

KEY ROLE

RETURNING TO WORK IMPACT

WHAT I NEED TO DO



## EXERCISE

KEY ROLE

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WHAT I NEED TO DO

KEY ROLE

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WHAT I NEED TO DO



## EXERCISE

### SUPPORT SYSTEMS AND RESOURCES

**What does your support system look like? What resources can you draw on? If you're unsure, you might want to tackle this exercise with a partner or friend to brainstorm ideas for how you can build up support.**

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

RESOURCES



### TAKE AWAY

Returning to work can be a culture shock. Reacquaint yourself with the 'working you' by looking back over work material, reconnecting with work friends and detailing the positive side of a return. Now, prepare for the upheaval by looking at areas of your life that will be affected and planning what you need to do ahead of your return to avoid being overwhelmed.



# Building confidence

Many women can get bouts of low confidence when they think about returning to work and even if you are feeling confident about yourself and your abilities as you transition back to office life, it is worthwhile spending some time thinking about the new and improved strengths and skills you take back with you. Returners usually undervalue what they can offer an employer. Be clear on your strengths and skills to increase your confidence and give you energy for your job search.

1

Ask friends and family for feedback on what you're good at and ask them to give examples.

2

Take an online strengths assessment like Clifton StrengthsFinder.

3

Write down at least five achievements and the skills you demonstrated.

4

Update your skills by taking refresher courses, reading about industry issues and following potential employers and industry influencers on LinkedIn and Twitter.

*"I spent a lot of time thinking about the many ways in which motherhood was going to make me an even better employee. I'd faced multiple challenges in the 12 months I'd been off work, and as a result I felt stronger, more decisive and certainly more resilient. Once back at work I found myself to be more assertive, able to better see the bigger picture and much better equipped to deal with situations that might once have stressed or frustrated me."*

EVERYWOMAN MEMBER



## EXERCISE

**Think about three challenging situations you've faced during your time off work. What strengths and skills did you put to work and what was the outcome? It might help to think about some of the core topics on the everywomanNetwork: emotional intelligence, resilience, creativity, dealing with change and stress management.**

SITUATION	STRENGTHS AND SKILLS	OUTCOME

# YOUR PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

Another way to build up your confidence is to draw on the support you can get from your existing network, while looking at ways you can potentially grow it to encompass any new needs you have as a working parent, part-time worker or employee returning from a period of illness.

It's worth thinking about how to start rebuilding visibility with your networks as you approach your return to work. This can include any ideas you have around best use of keeping in touch (KIT) days or industry events you can sign up to.



## EXERCISE

**Think about any informal opportunities you can take to network outside of your KIT days, for example team lunches, office parties, coffees with key stakeholders.**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

**Now think about possible ways you could network digitally - are there any groups you could join on LinkedIn or Facebook? Note them down here.**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

## MANAGING GUILT

If you are returning to work after parental leave or a period of caring, it is quite normal to experience feelings of guilt. A 2017 Pew study found that 43 per cent of full-time working mothers say they don't spend enough time with their children.<sup>iv</sup> But an EY study of American, stay-at-home mothers found 55 per cent feel guilty about not going out to work and contributing to the family finances.<sup>v</sup>

The obvious solution is to not waste time feeling guilty about the choices you've made for the good of your

family and your career. But clearly it isn't always that simple.

Look for positive role models – examples of working women in situations like yours who respect work-life balance and understand the struggles. You might also consider finding an understanding mentor who can spend one-to-one time with you as you transition back to work and start rebuilding your career. You can't do everything yourself, so consider the ways in which you can delegate – both in and outside work.



*LOOKING AT HOW YOU SPEND THE TIME  
IS OFTEN THE BEST ANTIDOTE FOR GUILT.  
WHEN WE SEE WHERE OUR TIME ACTUALLY  
GOES, WE CAN MAKE BETTER CHOICES”*

LAURA VANDERKAM, AUTHOR<sup>vi</sup>



### TAKE AWAY

Remember that your skills won't have deserted you in your time away – in fact, you may well have picked up new ones. It's also important to manage any guilt you feel about time spent away from external responsibilities.

# Back at your desk

The first few days and weeks back in the office are predictably tough for many returners. The more you can plan and visualise the process, the better prepared you will feel physically, mentally and emotionally for the transition. The following pointers are a guide to get you thinking about some of the areas that lie within your control.

1

## YOUR NEW SITUATION

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### a) Your childcare situation

Whatever your particular situation with regards to childcare, think carefully about how you would ideally like that first day back at the office to play out. What plans can you and your partner or support network put in place now to ensure it goes as smoothly as possible? Consider the following story from an everywomanNetwork member:

*“That first time you drop your child off at childcare is absolutely heart wrenching. I took the advice of a best friend and staggered my little boy’s induction into nursery, starting with a few hours here and there from around two weeks before my return date, and gradually building up to a whole day. This meant that by first day back in the office, we had a morning routine, the tears – both his and mine – had gone, and I could arrive at my desk feeling professional and ready to focus, rather than worrying about how he was doing.”*





## EXERCISE

**In the space below, note down some ideas for how you can make your first day back at work easier for yourself with regards to leaving your child; eg think about who you can talk to, who might be able to help, ideal timings, and your coping mechanisms should you start to feel overwhelmed.**

## b) Your health situation

If you are returning to work or starting a new position after an illness of any description, or while grappling with an ongoing illness, you will inevitably face challenges. Before you take up your position, think through any reasonable adjustments you could ask of your employer, and what processes you could put in place to make the transition easier. Two everywomanNetwork members share their thoughts.

*“I dreaded the conversation but thankfully my line manager was supportive. There were inevitable hitches getting the right equipment, but my boss had my back. It was such a relief to finally be able to concentrate on giving my best to the job, rather than waste time and effort trying to ‘overcome’ my disability.”*

*“[My boss and I] decided that my return would be phased: reduced hours would mean that I wouldn’t have the added pressure of travelling in peak times and I’d still have lots of time to attend physiotherapy or just rest up. In the early days, my time in the office was really just about catching up with what was going on, and there were regular chats with my manager to discuss if I was doing too much.”*



### EXERCISE

**In the space below, note down some ideas for how you can make your transition back to work easier for yourself with regards to your health. Think about who you can talk to, what practical measures could help, what you and your support network can do to aid your wellbeing.**

# RETURNING TO A NEW WORKSPACE

Re-entering an altered or newly located workplace after an absence can be especially difficult, without that consistency and stability to lean on. Employees should make sure they have an accommodating work space, proper information about the new area, and be afforded some flexibility while getting accustomed to a new commute, while any company changes should have been introduced gradually. Hot-desking is a routine practice now, but can be challenging for those returning to work, who may be used to having their own desk.

There are ways to manage this, such as

asking to be involved in the hot-desking process – ‘hoteling’ and ‘zoning’ are ways of allowing people to reserve desks in advance and designating areas where team members can work together. Working from home could also be an option.

It’s a good idea to do a ‘recce’ of a new workplace before you return. If you can do a rehearsal of the journey so you don’t feel stressed and confused on your first day. If you drive, check out the parking situations and, if you go by public transport, scope out your journey – and make sure you have a plan B just in case there are problems.

## AT YOUR NEW DESK

Even with flexiworking, it’s likely you will spend a lot of time in your new office environment and this can have a big effect on your attitude, which can in turn have an impact on your health and happiness. It’s worth taking a little time to get your work environment just as you like it:

### 1 Keep organised

Having an organised desk will make it more welcoming so make sure you have chargers for your devices at work and use a document management system to avoid piles of papers on your desk. Treat yourself to a new water bottle, recyclable coffee cup and notebook for that ‘new term, new pencil case’ feeling.

### 2 Functional and comfortable

Make sure your office works for you – choose a chair with lumbar support or bring a

small cushion to augment the chair that you’ve been given. Make sure that your computer screen is at least 20in away and use a larger font to keep from straining the eyes. Also remember to keep your wrists as straight as possible to avoid getting carpal tunnel syndrome. One way to monitor the health of your hands is by getting wrist guards.

### 3 Make it personal

If you have a dedicated desk, bringing a couple of personal things will make your space feel more welcoming. A photo or a plant will be cheering and a lamp on your desk will give off a warm light, making fluorescent light less harsh.

### 4 Hot or cold

Temperature regulation is always a problem in offices and, while it’s unlikely you can do anything about the air con, you can have

some control over the temperature at your desk. Keep a fan to turn on if it gets a little warm and have a cardigan to hand in case it gets a little chilly.

### 5 Take frequent breaks

According to the WHO, sitting for eight to 12 hours a day increases your chances of getting type 2 diabetes by 90 per cent, even if you exercise daily. Getting up from your chair and walking around at least once an hour is imperative. Put your feet up, do simple stretches and make sure you keep the blood flowing. It’s also important to give your eyes a rest too as staring at a monitor can damage your vision. Get into good vision habits with your return to work by blinking more often and practising the 20/20 rule – every 20 minutes, look at something 20ft away for 20 seconds.

## YOUR REINDUCTION

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It will inevitably take some time for you to get back into the flow of a working day. There might be new faces, new IT systems and new processes to get to grips with. If your leave cover is handing over to you, spend some time defining how you'd like this to be managed.

Think about how you best learn (by taking your own notes, through detailed notes provided by the trainer, by practical demonstration) and what pace is going to work best for you. Don't be afraid to ask for regular breaks or request repetition or clarification if you need it.



### EXERCISE

**In the space below, note down what steps you can take to make your reinduction/handover work for you.**

For example, meeting up with my replacement on my final KIT day to define how I'd like the handover to work; negotiating a phased return to work so that I can build up my energy levels to full capacity; requesting training from HR on new systems; heading offsite for regular breaks.

## YOUR TO-DO LIST

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Whether you've been out of the workplace because you've been caring for a child, recuperating from illness or caring for an elderly parent, you will probably have concerns about how you'll manage your physical and mental energy levels back in the workplace. Even if you've taken time out to travel or just have some time off, you might wonder how you'll manage when

you're back in the thrust of the daily commute, and using your brain in a different way.

Whatever your situation and the circumstances around your return to the workplace, you would be wise to take a mindful approach to your extracurricular schedule during those first few weeks back in the office. An everywomanNetwork member says:

*"I deliberately avoided making any other evening plans or seeing friends, aware that I'd need a lot of rest time. The only exception was that I took up yoga, which ticked both the exercise and mindfulness boxes."*

Many mothers report that their productivity levels are at their highest following their return to work – that they are more adept at planning, and waste less time getting stressed or caught up in office politics. Equally, if you have been away from the job for any other reason, you might find that you are able to see things with fresh eyes and be able to apply this clarity to better prioritisation and time management.

*If these skills are something you'd like to put to the test ahead of your return to work, the following everywoman resources are available for you (see 'Further reading').*

**Is multitasking making you less productive?**

**Time management: 3 new ways to think about your productivity**

**5 minutes to better time-management skills**





## EXERCISE

**Take a look at your schedule around the time you return to work and consider what you can source help with or remove altogether. Use the space below to make notes.**

## YOUR CAREER PLAN

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Many women, and indeed men, fear that they'll be sidelined when they return to work after a long absence – either passed over for opportunities because they've been out of the loop, or suffer from low visibility, perhaps due to part-time hours, flexitime or work-from-home arrangements.

If you had a career plan before you went on leave, dig it out now and evaluate if anything has changed. Refine your plan and share this with your boss once you've been back in action for a few weeks and have a better idea of organisational shifts and the types of opportunities that might be coming.

### Action points

1

Review and refine your career plan or create a career plan from scratch if you don't have one (see 'Further reading' for a career plan template).

2

Create a personal advisory board of colleagues who you can hold informal chats with to develop your understanding of organisational shifts and upcoming opportunities.

3

Hold a conversation with your boss to discuss the types of stretch assignments or opportunities you could be given.



## EXERCISE

**Note any additional action points related to your career development and increasing or maintaining your organisational visibility.**

## YOUR WELLBEING

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As you navigate the challenges of returning to work following a period of absence, it's absolutely essential you monitor and value your wellbeing.

With modern life ever-more hectic, in 2008, the UK government

published a report on the challenges we would face and how they would affect our wellbeing.

The resultant report, "The Foresight Project On Mental Capital and Wellbeing", set out 'five ways to wellbeing' that still hold true today.

1

**CONNECT**

Building meaningful relationships with family, friends, colleagues, neighbours and individuals from your local community.

2

**BE ACTIVE**

Taking gentle exercise on a regular and sustainable basis.

3

**TAKE NOTICE**

Paying attention to your thoughts and feelings.

4

**KEEP LEARNING**

Seizing opportunities for mental stimulation - reading a new book, seeking out training, learning a new skill.

5

**GIVE**

Doing something nice for others, for example volunteering, being a mentor, or making time for a friend.

— “ —

*IT'S REALLY IMPORTANT FOR US TO REALISE THAT THERE'S A TRADE-OFF BETWEEN A LIFE OF WELLBEING AND A LIFE OF PRODUCTIVITY... THREE BABY STEPS THAT ANYBODY CAN TAKE, RIGHT NOW, THAT CAN IMPROVE THEIR LIVES DRAMATICALLY RANGE FROM FIVE MINUTES OF MEDITATION, TO MAKING A GRATITUDE LIST, AND DROPPING INCOMPLETE PROJECTS."*

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON, AUTHOR, BUSINESSWOMAN<sup>vii</sup>



## EXERCISE

### THE FIVE WAYS TO WELLBEING

Being mindful of not overloading yourself is important. Use the space below to jot down your ideas for how you can maintain your wellbeing during your transition back to professional life.

1

CONNECT

2

BE ACTIVE

3

TAKE NOTICE

4

KEEP LEARNING

5

GIVE

## ASKING FOR FLEXIBILITY

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Flexible working is becoming increasingly normal – not just for returning mothers, but for anyone (male or female) wanting to strike a better balance between work and home. In fact, this is the main driver for 56 per cent of everywomanNetwork members who've embarked on a request for flexibility.

Approaching your boss and asking for flexible work might be a daunting prospect, particularly if there is no precedent in your organisation or an existing HR policy you can follow – you might be concerned about the impact it could have on your career and reputation or the implications of the answer being no. Follow our seven-step process for your best chance of success.

### 1 Do your research

Find out what legislation affects your rights to flexible working where you live. Once you know where the law stands, research your own company policy regarding flexible working. If there are any flexi-workers in your business, ask them how their role works and how they went about creating a successful application.

### 2 Audit your life

Take a long look at your situation and make a list of everyone involved who'll be affected if you change to flexible working: family, colleagues, friends perhaps? Also ask yourself what other elements of your life will be affected if you make the change. Health? Hobbies? Money? Now it's time to visualise – start by writing down your ideal working scenario so it's crystal clear. What does flexible working really mean in your case?

### 3 Map out what you want to say

Be clear about what it is you're asking for and how you intend to make it work. Now it's time for the real negotiations to start. You might feel a little nervous or emotional when it comes to the conversation itself. Get everything down on paper ahead of the meeting; that way you won't forget anything vital and can state your case as clearly as possible.

There are two ways to ask for flexible working – statutory and non-statutory request. In the case of the former, a single request needs to be made in writing, and the employer needs to complete the whole process (including dealing with any appeal) within three months. Employees asking for a statutory request need to have worked for an employer continuously for at least 26 weeks at the date on which the application is made. A non-statutory request has no set procedure, but it is advisable to make it in writing for clarification.

#### **4 Listen carefully**

Your boss might have a list of concerns and questions. Listen carefully to what they say – and prepare for their reactions by doing your homework in advance. Write down the advantages and disadvantages of you switching to flexible hours for your boss and colleagues as well as yourself. Have clear and objective answers ready. It might be useful to role play the meeting with your mentor in advance.

#### **5 Don't expect an answer straight away**

Not all negotiations are finalised in one meeting. If you find yourself getting emotional during discussions with your boss then ask for a little time out to think about the issues raised. It's perfectly acceptable for you to suggest a follow-up meeting to go over part two of your business case.

#### **6 Consider trade-offs**

You want to spend less time in the office, which may concern your boss initially, but you can use this as an opportunity to put others forward. If you have a great deputy, big them up and list all the ways they'd make a great success of stepping up when needed. Perhaps there's someone more junior in your team who has big ambitions – put their name forward for extra responsibilities.

#### **7 Aim for a good compromise**

Although negotiating a life change is a personal situation for you, it's not personal for the business, so be as objective as you can and be willing to consider other solutions put forward by your company or boss. A lot of these conversations result in a compromise that benefits both parties, so it's important to keep an open mind.

Bear in mind that if an employer agrees to a flexible working request, it'll mean a permanent change to the contract, although both parties can agree a trial period. You should not be paid less pro rata, or given fewer holidays or other benefits if you work different hours to those you were working before. If worse terms and conditions are offered because of the new arrangement, a claim to an employment tribunal may be made, including a discrimination claim.

## CONCLUSION

You received the outcome you wanted

If you receive the outcome you wanted, congratulations! However, it doesn't end there. Now is the time to set boundaries for yourself, your colleagues and your family. You don't want to put yourself in a situation where you're working full-time for part-time pay – so organise your time wisely and consider how your objectives should change to account for your reduced hours. It's important to keep your skills and knowledge updated, to stay in contact with mentors and to maintain an open mind. One day you might want to step back into a full-time version of your role.

You did not receive the outcome you were hoping for

If you did not receive the outcome you were hoping for, seek as much feedback as possible. Ask those involved in making the decision what it would have taken for the answer to be a yes, if there are any compromises that could be reached now, or whether they're open to a new application in the future.



### TAKE AWAY

It can help to take your reintroduction slowly and methodically. Consider whether part-time or flexible working might suit you best for now and think about how to make the workplace as accommodating as possible.



# Your personal action plan



**1** What are your primary concerns around returning to work and what resources and support will you draw on between now and then to make the transition as smooth as possible?



**2** What are the key benefits for you around returning to work and how can you keep these front and centre of your mind as you plan your transition?



**3** Thinking about the skills and strengths you've developed and drawn on during your career break, how will these benefit your role and your employer?



4

In which areas do you need to prepare before you head back to work? Eg, confidence-boosting exercises, KIT days where you could outline the type of handover you'd like, discussions with your boss about a phased return or flexible working.



5

How would your first few weeks in the office pan out ideally? What steps can you take to help realise this vision?



6

What conversations might you need to have with your boss either before your return to work or during your first month back in the office? Eg, reinduction planning, handover, career planning, flexible working options.



7

Which of the 'Five ways to wellbeing' can you commit to putting in place as you embark on this new phase of your career?

# Your 4 questions

Answer the questions below to receive your CPD certification



1 What percentage of working mothers feel guilty about time spent away from their children?

- 43%
- 32%
- 51%
- 95%

2 When reviewing and refining your career plan you should do which of the following?

- Create a personal advisory board
- Have a conversation with your boss
- Start from scratch
- Talk to your team

3 What are the five ways to wellbeing?

- Connect, refocus, ask for advice, take time out, give
- Be active, refocus, meditate, keep learning, take notice
- Keep learning, give, meditate, take notice, refocus
- Connect, be active, take notice, keep learning, give

4 Which of the following are part of the seven-step process to asking for flexible working?

- Do your research
- Discuss with your team
- Audit your life
- Consider trade-offs

# everywoman Experts

everywoman creates resources on topics that matter most to our network members. We draw on member surveys and the latest thinking from the academic and business worlds, as well our own experiences as we navigate our careers. Each workbook offers practical advice, enabling tangible actions for your daily working lives.



MAXINE BENSON, MBE  
& KAREN GILL, MBE

Co-founders of everywoman, Karen and Max have spoken to thousands of women about the challenges they face at work. Through their own experiences of starting a business, they uncovered a real need for a network where female entrepreneurs and businesswomen could interact and share experiences. The everywomanNetwork, which launched in 2013, serves as a truly global tool to enable members the world over to realise their ambitions through online membership.

#### EVERYWOMAN WORKBOOK TEAM

Pippa Isbell, everywoman expert

Lysanne Currie, editor

Kate Farrow, head of partnerships

Denise McQuaid, commercial and strategy director

Any topics you'd like to see covered on the everywomanNetwork?

We'd love to hear from you: [contact@everywoman.com](mailto:contact@everywoman.com)

# Further reading

## everywoman workbooks

*Career planning workbook*

<https://www.everywoman.com/my-development/workbooks/career-planning>

*Boost your self-confidence workbook*

<https://www.everywoman.com/my-development/workbooks/boost-your-self-confidence-0>

*Time Management workbook*

<https://www.everywoman.com/my-development/workbooks/time-management>

*60 minutes to wellbeing workbook*

<https://www.everywoman.com/my-development/workbooks/60-minutes-wellbeing>

*Time management: 3 new ways to think about your productivity*

<https://www.everywoman.com/my-development/learning-areas/articles/time-management-3-new-ways-think-about-your-productivity>

*Is multitasking making you less productive?*

<https://www.everywoman.com/my-development/learning-areas/articles/multitasking-making-you-less-productive>

*5 minutes to better time-management skills*

<https://www.everywoman.com/my-development/learning-areas/articles/5-minutes-better-time-management-skills>

## websites

You can find additional support and advice on returning to work after an illness at [macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk), [mind.org.uk](http://mind.org.uk) and [nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk](http://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk).

These are UK websites but the advice may be useful to you wherever you live. In addition, investigate whether there is a regional organisation which can supply more local help.

## Endnotes

- i <https://www.mother.ly/work/the-best-life-advice-from-our-favorite-working-momsfrom-michelle-obama-to-victoria-beckham>
- ii [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/23-times-tina-fey-hilariously-summed-up-parenting\\_us\\_591a7d9de4b0809be15797ea](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/23-times-tina-fey-hilariously-summed-up-parenting_us_591a7d9de4b0809be15797ea)
- iii <https://www.theguardian.com/careers/careers-blog/returning-work-after-children-advice-guide>
- iv <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/08/most-dads-say-they-spend-too-little-time-with-their-children-about-a-quarter-live-apart-from-them/>
- v *What Moms Choose: The working mother report* (Ernst & Young for the Working Mother Research Institute, 2011)
- vi <https://abcnews.go.com/Lifestyle/secrets-handling-mommy-guilt/story?id=33287146>
- vii <http://www.lifehacker.co.uk/2014/06/04/arianna-huffington>

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