



Prepare yourself: Leaving your baby the first time is really hard. But it does get easier.

So how can you become a working-mom success story? Here's advice on the big three: child care, breastfeeding and your work schedule.

Child care: start looking now!

The good news is that the ideal caregiver—a warm, nurturing person who understands baby development and safety issues—can be found in various settings: your home (via a family member or babysitter), someone else's home (a family day-care provider) or a day-care center, says Dianne Stetson, M.S., state technical assistance specialist for the National Infant & Toddler Child Care Initiative at Zero to Three, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit organization that promotes healthy child development. In addition to considering child care that suits your baby's personality, Stetson suggests the following:

1 Research options early. Finding the right person for the job can take longer than you expect—day-care centers and family day-care providers tend to fill up fast, and good sitters are snatched up pronto. "A common mistake parents make is thinking it will only take a few weeks," Stetson says. Leave plenty of time to find the right fit.

Contact Child Care Aware (800-424-2246, childcareaware.org) for information on centers and family day-care providers; see No. 4, below, for tips on finding a nanny. And don't overlook the best resource of all: local moms.

2 Aim low when looking for outside child care. Look for a facility or provider who has a low child-to-caregiver ratio (a maximum of 4-to-1 for infants), as well as a low staff turnover rate. "Babies do best with continuity," Stetson says. "It's ideal if your baby can stay with the same caregiver for a few years."

3 Trust your gut. "Chances are, your baby will do well in a place you'd like to be," Stetson says. Look around: Are babies left unattended in cribs or playpens? Does the setting look (and smell) clean? Once you place your child in day care, pay close attention to her behavior. If she's unusually quiet or withdrawn, there could be a problem. See what she's experiencing firsthand by stopping by unannounced from time to time.

4 To find a nanny, cast a wide net. While agencies typically charge a placement fee ranging anywhere from \$800 to \$5,000, they conduct extensive background checks and interviews—with you and potential sitters—to find the best match. However, not all agencies are created equal; if possible, go with one that belongs to the Association of Premier

DAVID MARTINEZ

Back on the job

Solutions to the working mom's big three: child care, breastfeeding and creating a practical schedule

IS THE END of your maternity leave looming? Are you worried not just about leaving your baby with a stranger, but about actually functioning at work? While the thought of formulating a coherent sentence, much less assuming your previous job responsibilities, may seem overwhelming at first, it is possible to be a happy (albeit harried!) working mom. You can accomplish this by overcoming potential hurdles—such as finding reliable child care and creating a feasible work schedule—early on, according to Laraine Zappert, Ph.D., author of the 2001 book *Getting It Right: How Working Mothers Successfully Take Up the Challenge of Life, Family, and Career*.

Giving yourself the occasional reality check is essential, too. "The biggest misperception among working moms is that everybody else is managing to do it better than you are," Zappert says. "You just have to focus on what works for you and your family."



Looking for Ms. Right? Going back to work is a lot easier when you've got a top-notch child care provider. For more tips on finding the right match, visit fitpregnancy.com/childcare.

Nanny Agencies (theapna.org).

You also can find candidates through online message boards such as craigslist.org, where you can list free postings in a number of cities. Ask candidates about their training, experience and availability to stay late, if necessary. Checking references is a must, as is conducting a background check, including criminal, sexual-offender and child-protective services records. This requires the applicant's written permission—failure to give you an OK is a big red flag.

Once you have a candidate's permission, contact an agency that specializes in conducting background checks, such as USSearch.com or ChildCare Background Research Corp. (childcarebackground.com). Finally, don't forget to check with the IRS and your state taxation department regarding taxes you'll need to pay as an employer.

5 Be clear in your communication. Since your caregiver will become an important part of your child's life, communication beyond the quick hello and goodbye is necessary. Schedule weekly 15-minute chats for the first few months, then monthly meetings to discuss concerns and developmental changes.

Want to keep breastfeeding? Master the pump early on

If you plan to continue to provide breast milk for your baby, you'll need to pump while at work. If you don't have an office, use a vacant conference room, an empty closet or even your car for the 20-minute task. Also heed the following advice from Doraine Bailey, M.A., I.B.C.L.C., of the International Lactation Consultant Association:

1 Get the right pump. A double electric breast pump can express the most milk in the least amount of time, as it pumps both breasts at once. For extra flexibility, buy one that can be operated via battery and electricity. Some even come with adapters for your car.

2 Introduce a bottle when breastfeeding is established. When your baby is about 4 weeks old, start giving her pumped breast milk once a day. If she won't take the bottle from you (some babies balk because they want the real thing), ask your partner or sitter to do it.

3 Adjust your routine. About two weeks before you return to work, begin feeding your baby at the same times you'll be able to pump at work.

4 Store a week's worth or more of milk before returning to work. Milk can safely stay three days in the refrigerator and three to four months in the freezer.

Create a practical work schedule ... for everybody

If you can afford it, consider cutting back to a six-hour workday and/or a three- to four-day workweek and taking a pay cut. Don't think your boss would go for it? "If you've established your value and reputation, it's much more possible than you think," says Pat Katepoo, founder of workoptions.com. To negotiate a flexible schedule, try this:

1 Thoroughly assess your position. Aim to keep the tasks that you enjoy and your boss values highly; delegate responsibilities that offer skill-building opportunities for others.

2 Write a proposal. Schedule a meeting with your boss, then pitch your well-prepared flexible-hours plan with a seriousness that reflects your level of desire for the new arrangement.

3 Suggest a trial of three to six months. This allows your boss to say "yes" while keeping control of your job structure.

4 Make an extra effort. If a co-worker picked up your slack one day when you had to take your child to the pediatrician, return the favor when she needs help. And make every effort not to miss crucial meetings.

Kim Schworm Acosta also wrote "The First Six Weeks" in this issue.



The kids are all right

A study of more than 1,000 mothers and their babies published in *Child Development* found that babies of working moms develop social, language and cognitive skills at the same rate as those who spend more time with their mothers. In fact, working moms spent only about two hours less per day with their babies than stay-at-home moms, who devoted more time to household chores and leisure activities.