Staying in touch with work while on parental leave

While at home on parental leave, it’s easy to become so immersed in caring for your new baby that work becomes a distant memory. But there may also be times when your new job as a parent feels overwhelming



ion, news and pace of the workplace.

Whether you plan to be home for a couple of months or a year, staying in touch with work can be a good idea for your self-confidence and for your career. Here are some ideas to keep you in the loop at work:

Plan to stay in touch

There is a lot to prepare for before your parental leave, but try to find time to discuss how you can keep in touch with your supervisor and colleagues while you are away. Here are some tips to consider as you plan for your parental leave:

- **If you’re involved in finding your replacement, develop a rapport with them.** Together, you can establish a process such as forwarding pertinent e-mails, documents or phone calls if and when required. Be clear on which issues you feel would warrant contact.
- **Check to make sure any association memberships will remain active** while you are on leave so that you can continue networking.
- Ask a supervisor, office assistant or the human resources department to **add your home e-mail/ mailing address to the company mailing list for announcements or notices.**
- **Find out the dates for your department's regular meetings,** so you can follow up on what happened or receive minutes.

Keeping in contact

Once on parental leave, you'll have to judge how much and how often you'd like to connect with work. Here are some suggestions to think about:

- When the baby is born, **contact close colleagues and your boss if appropriate, and announce the birth.** Let them know if/when you'd enjoy a visit.
- **If you receive cards, flowers or gifts from colleagues or business contacts, send thank-you notes or e-mails.** This will not only show your appreciation, but help you keep you in touch, and is a great opportunity to let your colleagues know if/when you would like to get together for a visit.
- **Once you are up to it, have lunch with co-workers.** This will help you get out of the house and engage in some adult conversations. It’s also a great way to introduce co-workers to the baby and find out what has been happening at work since you've been away.
- **If appropriate, make a special effort to keep in touch with your boss.** Forward or e-mail articles of interest. If it doesn’t interfere, call your boss weekly or biweekly. This will help you keep on top of situations at work, and will also remind your boss that you're committed to the company and returning to work.

Keeping current

As well as maintaining inter-personal relationships, keeping abreast of developments in your field will serve you well when you are ready to return to work. As best you're able:

- **Stay informed of news in your industry by subscribing to pertinent magazines, reading the paper and going online.** When you feel ready, why not sign up for a conference, industry luncheon, or attend a meeting of a relevant industry association. This will keep you networking, keep you up to date in your field and give you practice leaving your child with a caregiver.

- **Maintain or build on your skills.** Consider taking an online course or learning some new software.

- **Attend or call in for a meeting if you feel you should take part.** It'll help you stay connected to important issues at work and maintain a connection with colleagues. If you cannot attend the meeting itself, try planning a follow-up meeting (without baby) with colleagues or your supervisor to keep up with developments.

- **Consider doing a little freelance work.** Looking after a child is demanding and time-consuming. Some parents enjoy the change and mental stimulation of the occasional work contract.

- **Don't underestimate the value of networking with other parents** that you meet in your daily routine with baby.

- **Learn to let go a little.** Work can and does go on without you there. Don't counter this by calling into your organization every hour. Trust that you've properly prepared your replacement and take time to focus on the most important task at hand: being a parent.

Making the transition back to work

A few weeks before you return, plan to meet with your supervisor to discuss your transition back into your job. Find out what meetings and conference calls are planned just prior to your return and suggest that you are interested in attending to ensure that you are up to speed. Ask ahead of time for pertinent meeting notes, client briefings, sales reports, etc.

Even parents who feel entirely fulfilled with their new role as a mother or father can feel a little isolated if the only adults they see are other parents at the park. Keeping in touch with some of your colleagues, a supervisor or other professional contacts can help you maintain both your industry knowledge and self-confidence.