

# Guide to Parental Leave

A LEADER'S GUIDE



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[\\*printable resource](#)

Managing employees through parental leave can seem challenging, but it doesn't have to be! Utilizing this guide shows your commitment to helping working parents through this new and exciting time in their lives.

As you help your employees through the leave process, refer to this guide for helpful tips to aid in a smooth transition and make for happy, heard working parents.

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# Leading Through Leave

This guide provides recommendations for supporting parents through parental leave. As a leader, you play an important role in an employee's successful transition into and out of leave.

Create an environment in which people feel supported and engaged. Expanding a family is a transformative time in a person's life—one that comes with natural risks for turnover and career changes.

Employees who are supported and encouraged to reach their potential are more likely to be productive and committed to a long-term future with the firm.

In terms of your own personal leadership development, the opportunity to manage someone through a leave is really valuable and a way to grow transferable interpersonal and project management skills.

## ENGAGE WITH YOUR EMPLOYEE ABOUT THEIR PLANS FOR LEAVE

Sometimes leaders avoid these conversations because they don't know what to say. Avoiding these important conversations may leave employees worried about their role and career prospects. Be authentic and genuine and trust that doing so will be the right way to go.

### Your Role in 5 Steps

1. Familiarize yourself with the firm's policies and resources.
2. Be available to discuss employee plans.
3. Make suitable arrangements to cover absences.
4. Assist with a smooth return to the workplace.
5. Demonstrate support and sensitivity.

# Company Resources

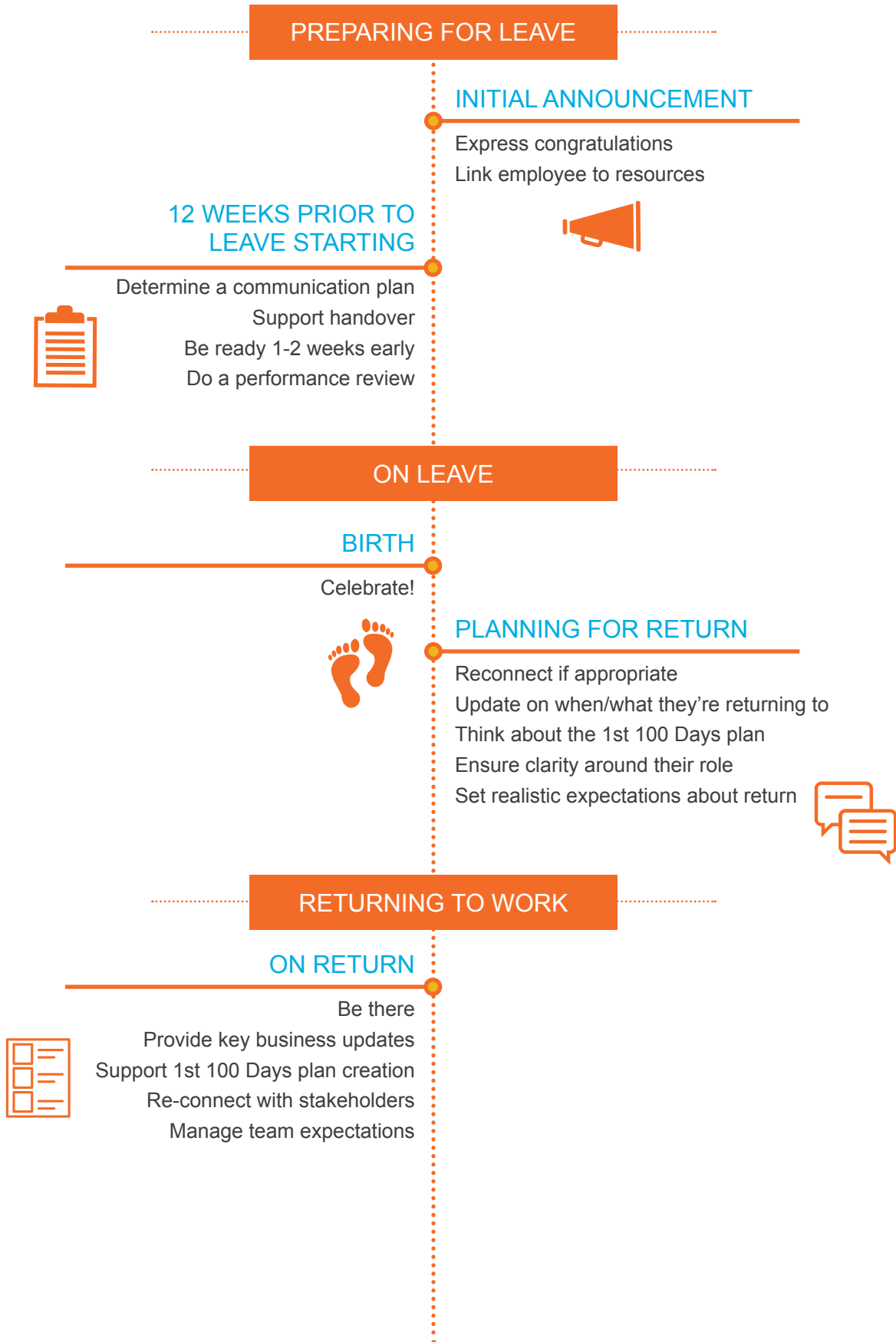
Working parents are important to WSGR. The firm offers paid parental leave\* (12 weeks bonding, plus 8 weeks disability for birth mothers) alongside a comprehensive benefits package.

You can help support an expectant employee by directing them to the appropriate parent benefits:

- [New Parent Career Coaching](#)  
Coaches can assist employees in preparing for leave and managing the transition.
- [Backup Childcare](#)  
Subsidized care helps bridge coverage when the family's regular care provider is closed/unavailable.
- [Flexible Work](#)  
Talk to your employee about flexible work options, including flexible hours, working from home, reduced schedules, and time to attend doctor's appointments.
- [Maternity Management](#)  
Employees have access to a maternity concierge and a network of practitioners (including OBGYNs, mental health specialists and lactation consultants) to help manage your family planning journey.
- [Lactation Program](#)  
On-site lactation rooms provide a private, comfortable place for new moms to express milk. Nursing moms can also request amenities such as a mini fridge, door-bar security and privacy shades to store/express milk. Nursing mothers traveling on business can ship milk home through Milk Stork.
- [Employee Assistance Program](#)  
An EAP program provides education, information, and counseling to help employees and their family members to manage personal matters.
- [Pre-Tax Programs](#)  
Employees may wish to opt-in or adjust their HSA/FSA elections in order to pay for eligible healthcare and daycare expenses with pre-tax dollars.

\*All leaves need to be reported to CIGNA Leave Solutions and the HR department. The maximum amount of leave time is 26 weeks (20 weeks of maternity leave, maximum of 4 weeks vacation, 2 weeks of unpaid leave). During any portion of the paid leave (20 weeks maternity and 4 weeks vacation, the employee will still accrue vacation time. Benefits will also remain active throughout the leave.

# Timeline



# Pre-Leave

## SHOWING SUPPORT

Create an atmosphere of trust in which an employee feels safe talking to you about parental leave. Express support, good wishes, and confidence in their ability to excel at this new challenge. Leaders who come across as accessible and supportive will be leaders who receive maximum notice and time to prepare.

If you haven't managed a parent through the leave transition before, reach out to HR for support and advice. Review and understand all of the benefits eligible to your employee.

Recognize your employee may have some anxiety about their leave. Convey your support and reassure them that, together, you can make the transition work. Think beyond how their leave is going to impact you and the business. Recognize the employee will have some questions and concerns of their own but may feel uncomfortable raising them.

It's your job to open that conversation. The better you understand their concerns, the better you can provide support. If you don't have these conversations, the employee may misconstrue that as a lack of interest in them or their future career. Under-communication can lead to incorrect assumptions and can cause minor issues to become magnified.



# Pre-Leave

As soon as an employee tells you their family is expecting, you should:

- Offer congratulations.
- Ask if they have any concerns about workload.
- Set up an initial meeting to discuss key dates and expectations.
- Have a preliminary conversation about confidentiality and when they want to tell others.
- Help refer them to company resources.



## Fast Phrases

- Congratulations! That's great news!
- We value your work, but don't hesitate to take your full leave.
- Let me know what I can do to support you.
- I hope you'll take advantage of our coaching program.



# Informing Stakeholders

Respect an employee's privacy. Some new parents will be hesitant to announce a pregnancy or upcoming leave. Ask the employee to help identify clients and colleagues who may be impacted by their leave.

Together, decide when to share the news. Determine who will be informed of the employee's leave on a proactive or "as needed" basis.

Once you've decided who will handle client-facing functions, guide your employee on how to manage the transition. They should set up a time to introduce new work contacts and set a timeline for transitioning the relationship—first working in tandem before an official handoff.

## Quick Tips

When communicating with clients, communicate coverage plans and express confidence in your team's ability to meet their needs.

When communicating with team members, thank them in advance for their support. Let them know you are sensitive to workload issues and encourage them to come to you with any concerns.



# Coverage Plans

The earlier you can start the conversation about coverage expectations, the better the outcome will be. Give yourself plenty of time to plan the handover. Ask the employee to provide a list of their responsibilities along with recommendations for distributing all essential tasks.

Find out what resources you might have available in terms of coverage, and rewards for employees providing coverage.

Involve the team in coverage plans and foster a positive atmosphere of support.

Think about how you can use this as a development opportunity and allow others on the team to shine. A leave can create space for someone to take on new assignments and carry out more challenging work—even if just for a temporary period. It's always a win when employees can grow their experience and get involved in more aspects of the business.

For the employee going on leave, avoid any new assignments or deadlines in the last month before a leave, and plan for a more complete work transfer two weeks before the anticipated leave date. Be sure the employee is ramping down (not up) as they approach leave.

## TIPS FOR PLANNING AND DELEGATING:

- Think about leave as a development opportunity for other team members.
- Consider what might be postponed until the employee returns.
- Consult other leaders about employees seeking additional responsibilities.



### Fast Phrases

- We'll work together on a coverage plan.
- Let's plan for the unexpected and minimize the chance of any last-minute handoffs.

# Handover Contacts & Clients

This page contains tools to help you and your employee evaluate who will be impacted by their leave and what tasks/roles need to be reallocated. Encourage your employee to use them to help ensure you're both thinking through job responsibilities and stakeholder coverage.

INTERNAL/EXTERNAL CONTACT			RELATIONSHIP	PRIORITY
COMMUNICATION	COVER	INFORMATION	HOW / WHEN?	ON LEAVE?

INTERNAL/EXTERNAL CONTACT			RELATIONSHIP	PRIORITY
COMMUNICATION	COVER	INFORMATION	HOW / WHEN?	ON LEAVE?

INTERNAL/EXTERNAL CONTACT			RELATIONSHIP	PRIORITY
COMMUNICATION	COVER	INFORMATION	HOW / WHEN?	ON LEAVE?

## Handover Roles

TASK	WHO	WHAT	HOW / WHEN?	SUPPORT

# Addressing Team Concerns

Team members will have concerns about resources, capacity, and expectations during their coworker's leave. They may be concerned about how much extra work they're going to take on and whether they'll be recognized or rewarded.

As a manager, part of your role is to manage the anxiety and expectations of not just the employee taking leave, but everyone on the team. Understand the impact on team members and help build consensus around workload and responsibilities while their colleague is out.

Keep a pulse on team sentiment. Help them see the positive development opportunities created by their coworker's leave. Express your expectation that everyone provides a warm attitude of support for the person going on leave.



# Return to Work Intentions

As part of the planning process, you and your employee will need to discuss how long they expect to be out on leave and when they plan to return. This is a good time to discuss options surrounding the employee's return to work. Let them know you're open to conversations around flexible work or a phased return.

Have a performance conversation before the employee goes out on leave. Review the key work they've done so there's an understanding of how they were performing before leave. Do what you can to bolster their confidence and remind them of their value to the firm while also creating an accurate performance record.



## Fast Phrases

- Let's make a rough plan for your first few weeks back at work.
- I'm open to discussions of flexible work or reduced work schedules.
- I value your work and I want you to build your career here. I hope you'll give me every opportunity to help you do that.



# Staying in Touch

An employee has no obligation to stay in touch during their parental leave. However, many employees prefer to maintain some level of connection and accessibility.

## Ask about their desire to:

- Check email or voicemail during leave.
- Be informed of significant team or project events.  
Attend any meetings in person or via phone.
- Attend training or social events.

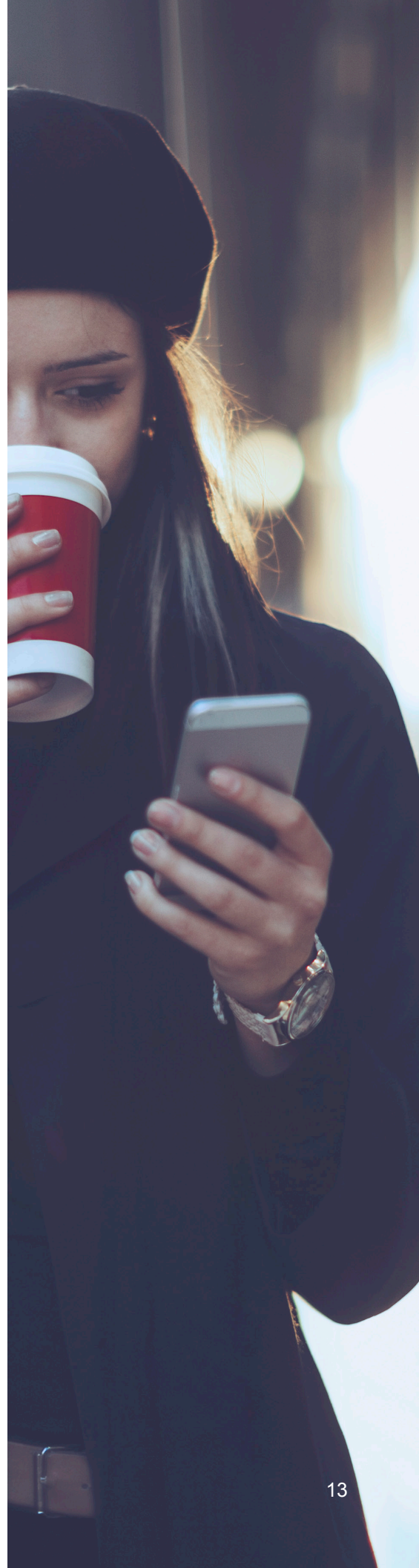
Affirm your expectation that the employee will be on leave, not working from home. Assure them of your support for whatever level of connection they choose, and encourage them to be conservative.

Often times, expectant parents will overestimate their energy and underestimate the demands that come with caring for a new baby.



## Fast Phrases

- Are you interested in staying connected to the team while you're on leave?
- How can we help you do that, while still respecting your time away?
- Let us know if you change your mind at some point. That's okay!



# Pre-Leave Checklist

- ☐ Does the employee need any changes in travel, schedule, workload, extra time for doctor appointments before leave?

## Have you discussed the following with the employee?

- ☐ Coverage for their role while they're away
- ☐ Handing over work
- ☐ Communication plans during leave
  - What do they want to know about?
  - When do they want to be contacted?
  - How do they want to be contacted?
- ☐ Have a performance conversation
- ☐ Know their anticipated return date
- ☐ Talk through their expectations for workload and schedule for when they return
- ☐ Understand what needs to happen regarding business practicalities
  - Email, phones
  - Company equipment
  - Benefits

# During Leave

## CELEBRATE THE NEW ARRIVAL

Your employee will probably reach out to share the good news after the baby arrives. Offer congratulations and ask permission to spread the word with team members and clients. Then encourage the new parent to unplug and focus on their family.

## KEEPING IN TOUCH

Keep employees in the loop according to the communication plan you established before they went out on leave. Let them know it's okay to change their mind. Help reset expectations with the team, if needed.

Include employees on social invites, such as holiday or retirement parties, so they still feel part of the work team. Everyone will have different wants and needs during their leave. You need to find the right fit between fostering a sense of belonging while still respecting an employee's time away.



# During Leave

## PLANNING FOR RETURN

As the employee checks in to confirm their expected return date, have a short conversation around schedule and workload. Express support for flexibility or a phased return to work. Encourage employees to start work mid-week, as this helps ease the transition back.

It's not all business! Remember to express interest in the new baby and family wellbeing. Ask to see pictures. Let the employee know they are welcome to bring baby for a visit or offer to set up a video conference at an upcoming team meeting.

As the employee's return date approaches, refresh yourself on the individual's strengths and areas of development and the value they will bring on their return. Where did you miss their contributions the most?

Think about what's changed in the team or at the firm. Your employee might need extra time for training or relationship-building in their first few weeks back. Think about what will help them be effective more quickly when they get back to work.

Meet with team members who have been providing coverage to review and recognize the work they've been doing. Ask about what they've learned and liked about their temporary roles. Talk to your team about their preferences and expectations for when their coworker returns.



# On Return

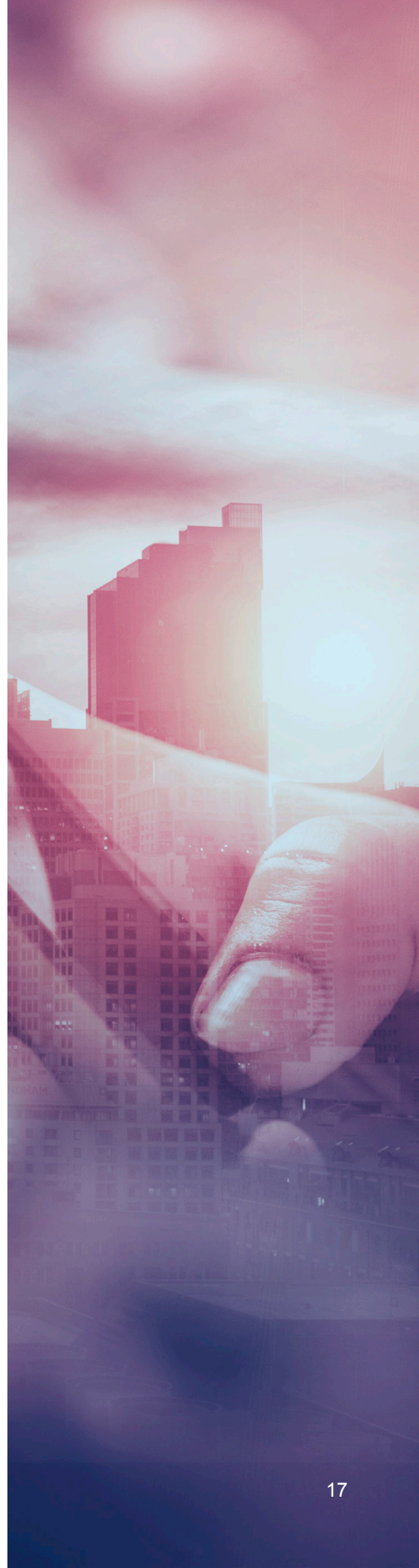
## FIRST DAYS AND WEEKS

Make sure there is someone to greet them on their first day back. Consider a personal lunch and convey a sincere welcome. This can be a difficult transition for many people, so acknowledge the presence of mixed emotions.

Set aside time to discuss transition plans in the first few days back. Ask employees how you can help them be successful... then follow through! Invite ongoing discussion around tasks and work schedules.

## AREAS FOR DISCUSSION:

- Updates on the team, the business, etc.
- Clarity around the employee's role
- Expectations and objectives for the first 100 days
- Work schedule—is it viable for the business and sustainable for the employee?
- Boundaries the employee needs in terms of meetings, work schedule, communication
- Revisit previous performance/ development goals. Are these still valid? How will they achieve them?



# On Return

Keep team members and other stakeholders informed of transition plans. Be aware that team members are sometimes reluctant to transition client accounts or choice assignments back to the returning employee. Let your employee know you're available to help facilitate, if needed.

Model and encourage healthy work-life habits for the whole office. This helps avoid resentment from team members who don't have kids.

Be aware of how your own work-life decisions may impact team members. Shore up employee confidence in their own development potential. Let them know there are many different ways to be successful leaders in the firm.



## Fast Phrases

- How are you feeling?
- Let me know what I can do to support you.
- I hope you'll continue to use our coaching program.

# On Return

## TEAM DYNAMICS

Notice team dynamics during reintegration. Be attentive and look out for biases and assumptions that are coming out. Address them with individuals.

Set a positive tone with your team, emphasizing new opportunities and resources that are available with their colleague back in place. You may need to spend time building team buy-in around department roles and goals.

## BUILDING CONFIDENCE

This is a critical time for you to ensure your employee feels that you are invested in them and their future with the firm.

Express confidence in their abilities and help employees understand you are available to offer support and assistance. Focus on providing reassurance and positive feedback. This is the time to notice and acknowledge early wins.



# Avoiding Assumptions

Employees are often anxious about taking a break for parental leave. As a leader, you need to find the right balance between being supportive and being overprotective and making assumptions about what you think people need. The best way to do that is by having a conversation.

Here are some common assumptions or stereotypes people might hold about someone returning from leave:

- They seem confident and comfortable, so I guess they have this transition under control.
- They've had one child, so they're probably going to have another in a few years.
- People are not as committed to their career after having kids.
- I've had kids. So, I know what it's like for someone else.
- It can't be that hard to rearrange childcare.
- People on flexible work arrangements are less productive.
- The rest of us are going to have to pick up their slack.



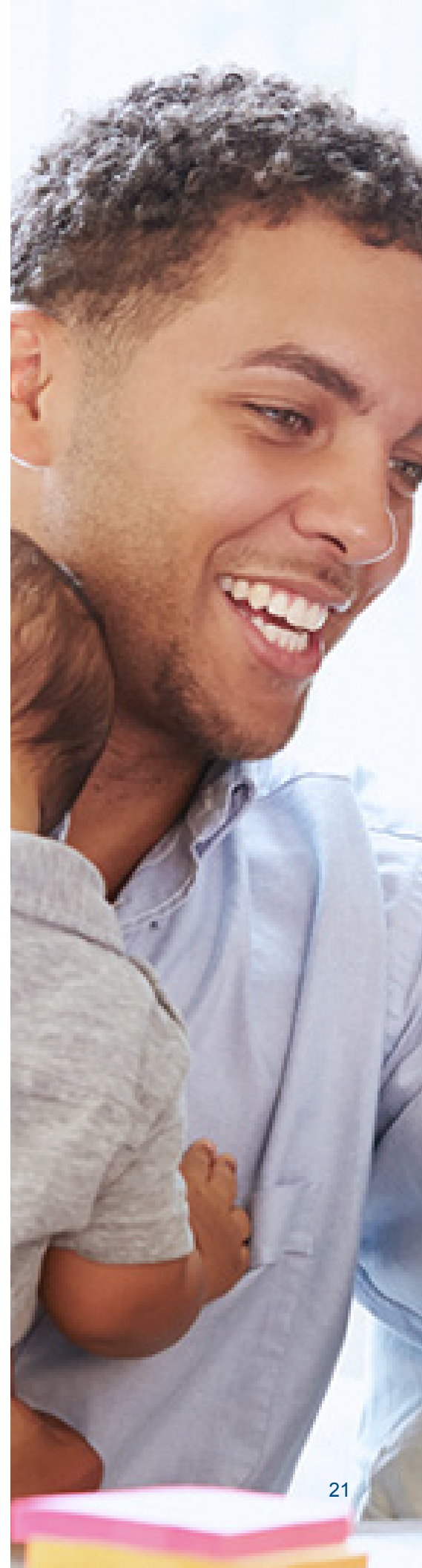
# Avoiding Assumptions

Here are some common concerns people might have when returning from leave:

- People will think I'm not as committed.
- I'll lose my client accounts to a coworker.
- I'm not adding as much value as I was before.
- My team members resent the time I took away.
- My career will be hurt if I can't ...travel  
...stay late on short notice ...attend after-hours events.
- Who do I disappoint? My team or my family?

As a manager, think about what might be driving your team members' hopes and fears. But try to do that without projecting your own assumptions, values, and experiences onto them. Open a conversation and then make sure you spend sufficient time listening to their expectations, wants, and preferences.

With the right information you can provide support that is tailored to their needs. With facts from the employee—not your own assumptions—you can make better, more informed decisions for (and with) your entire team.



# Career Conversations

Talk to the employee about their goals and expectations. They may be worried about losing career opportunities and put undue pressure on themselves to prove they can still deliver.

Help them manage their own self-expectations, but don't hold them back unless you have specific concerns about their performance.

You don't want your employees to make career decisions in a vacuum, and you shouldn't either. Avoid projecting unconscious biases about new parents. Don't assume they won't want the same responsibilities.

Avoid judgment about "right or wrong reasons" regarding requests for flexible work arrangements or taking their career at a different pace. Let people know there are many career paths at the firm and many ways to reach their goals.

Use good judgment about the timing and extent of future development discussions. Avoid pressure to plan their entire career right when they come back.

## Fast Phrases

- Are you getting the right kind of work? In the appropriate amount?
- My door is open. Let me know about any challenges you're having.
- I value your work and I want you to build your career here. I hope you'll give me every opportunity to help you do that.



# Support for New Mothers

A breastfeeding mother will need breaks to pump/express breast milk every three to four hours for about 20 minutes each session.

## Show support by:

- Offering flexibility in scheduling meetings. Assist with coverage of job responsibilities.
- Ask how to help make breastfeeding easier at the firm.
- Be sensitive to the privacy of a new mother's choices.
- Encourage team members to create a supportive work environment for breastfeeding mothers.



# 30 Day Review

At the 30-day point, gather feedback from the team and other stakeholders about how the integration is going. Book a meeting with the employee to discuss what is going well and what could be going better. Ask what further support they might need to overcome any challenges.

Consider the first month since your team member has returned. Consider these questions and reflect on your next steps:

**1. What has gone well or better than you expected?**

**2. Why do you think this is the case?**

**3. What hasn't gone well?**

**4. What changes can you make to address the challenges you (or they) face?**

**5. What would you do differently next time?**

# 1st 100 Days Plan

Here's a guide to what you, as a manager, should be thinking about as an employee returns from leave. Use it to plan your actions or goals for the employee's first 100 days back at work. They should be creating a similar plan, with both of you in alignment.

## CONSIDER:

### Awareness of context

Spend time before the employee returns assessing the current situation: What's changed while they were out, who's excelling in certain roles, how might team members be feeling about handing back work?

Your employee can provide a fresh set of eyes after being on leave. Their impressions can be valuable, so ask for their insight.

Think about what is going well within the team and which needs are not being met. Consult with the returning employee, your team members, and other stakeholders to help you develop a complete assessment.

## GOALS/ACTIONS:

# 1st 100 Days Plan

## CONSIDER:

### Transition plan

Schedule a meeting with the returning employee in their first few days back.

Areas for discussion:

- Updates on the team, the business, etc.
- Clarity around the employee's role
- Your expectations
- Revisit previous performance/ development goals that were agreed. Are these still valid?  
How will they achieve them?

Agree on a plan of how you will communicate over the next 3 months and schedule one-to-one meetings at least monthly. Use these meetings to give and receive feedback around what's going well, what the employee has achieved, and where they may need further support.

Consider these areas for discussion:

- Work schedule—is it viable for the business and sustainable for the employee?
- Boundaries the employee needs in terms of meetings, work schedule, communication

## COMMON PITFALLS AT THIS TIME INCLUDE:

- Assuming that things are the same for the business or the employee.
- Setting unrealistic expectations on the return to work.
- Basing your actions on the wrong assumptions.
- Not asking enough questions and not listening enough.

## GOALS/ACTIONS:

# 1st 100 Days Plan

## CONSIDER:

### Building confidence

**Help the employee reconnect with key stakeholders.** Expect they'll need time to reconnect with former colleagues and meet any new ones.

Stay on the lookout for early wins and ways the employee is making a meaningful impact. Recognize good work in order to build their confidence and reinforce their value to the firm.

Talk to your team member about their goals and expectations. They may put undue pressure on themselves to prove they can still deliver. Help them set realistic expectations, but don't hold them back based on your own assumptions.

## GOALS/ACTIONS:

## CONSIDER:

### What's next?

Initiate a career conversation. Does the employee have a clear idea of what they want their next steps to look like? Or do they need more time to settle back into working life before thinking about the next phase?

- What is the best timing for them to think about the future?
- What do they need to do to position themselves for the next step?
- What can you do to support their career goals?

## GOALS/ACTIONS:

# Ongoing Support

The first year of a child's life can be a big transition for new parents. Continue to check-in, be patient, and offer your support.

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