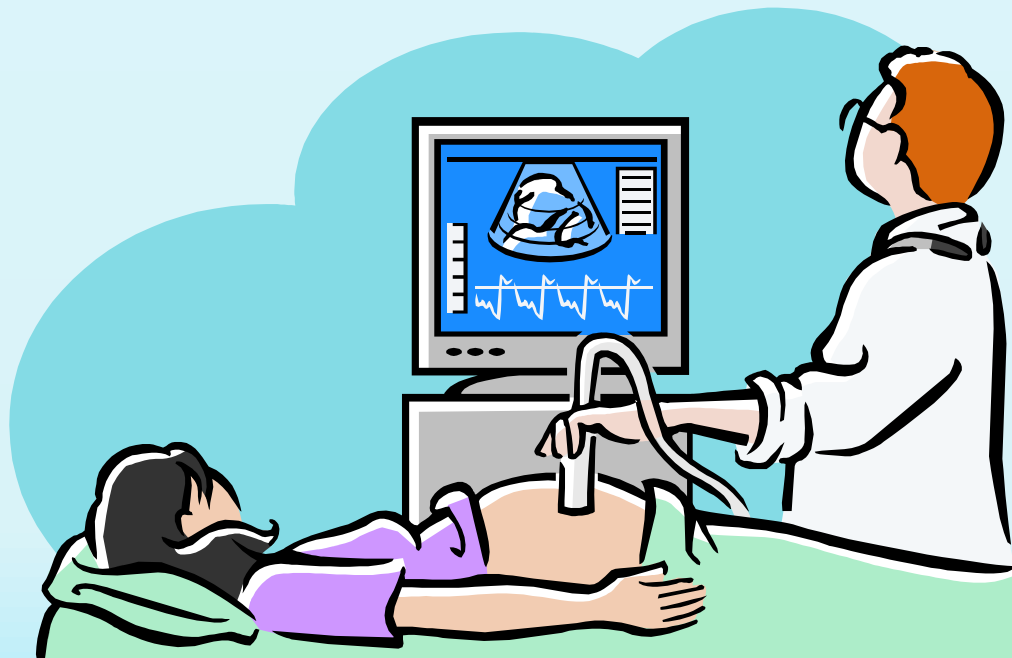


# New Parent Toolkit: 11-Step Guide to Preparing for Maternity Leave

*Follow these steps as you get ready for maternity leave, so you can focus on your newborn once you're home with the little one.*



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Pregnancy is without a doubt one of the most magical times a woman can experience. But for many women, particularly those in the work force, this amazing experience can also be one of the most stressful. There are so many things to plan, organize and worry over. While people's to-do lists differ, **here is a detailed checklist of items to address before you take your maternity leave and welcome your new bundle of joy.**

"Your health and your baby's health are the number one priority," says [Karen Donaldson](#), a women's leadership advocate and VP of North America for Talking Talent, a female-focused consulting company. "Most women today wish to go back to work and resume their current positions. If you play it right, there are a number of ways you can achieve the work-life balance effectively."



**Over the course of this new parent toolkit, we'll provide a detailed checklist of items to address before you take your maternity leave and welcome your new bundle of joy.**

## 1. Plan Your Exit and Re-Entry Strategies Simultaneously

Donaldson suggests having a conversation with your HR department or immediate supervisor that makes it clear you wish to return to your position. "Flip it in your mind, and consider your boss's concerns," she recommends. "Think about solutions you can provide for your company, as well as having your own expectations for maternity leave and subsequent re-entry met. Make suggestions for managing both transitions and maintain a professional image."

## 2. Stay in the Loop

Schedule a weekly or bi-weekly meeting with your employer via telephone. Map out the agendas for these meetings prior to your departure, keeping your existing projects and future projects in mind. If possible, make one meeting each month be in-person at the office. Not only will your co-workers be excited to see you on these occasions, but also your continued presence at work will solidify your place in the company upon your return.



## 3. Find an Ally

You don't have to rally round the water cooler to benefit from the inside scoop at your company. Keep in touch or even go out for coffee with a co-worker you trust on a weekly basis to find out the 411 that might not make it into company emails.

## 4. Take Advantage of Time

It may be hard to imagine now that you might have a change of heart and wish to stay at home with your baby for more time than maternity leave allows for. Legally, you do not have to let your employer know of your final decision about returning to work until two months prior to coming back. This is a very personal choice, influenced by financial, familial and career concerns. If you are able to give yourself the emotional space to consider this option, however, do so without guilt prior to maternity leave and tuck it away for future consideration.



## 5. Build Your Financial Nursery

Federal law assures you time off for unpaid family leave, usually if your company has more than 50 employees. It does not, however, require your employer to pay you for this time off, particularly if you are employed part-time or have been with the company for less than one year. Know ahead of time what type of financial compensation, if any, you can expect from your place of business. Many women save up their paid vacation days, personal days and sick time to utilize as part of their maternity leave.

"You think you're ready and you're not, either emotionally or financially," says financial planning expert and grandpa, [Mark Spinnato](#). And he sees it all the time: expectant parents blindsided by unexpected expenses or a lack of comments. They worked at major corporations that planning for mom's time off from work. "My daughter and her husband were lucky," he allowed new moms and dads to take paid leave for a new baby.

If that's your situation, consider staggering your time off and taking turns. And don't forget to accrue a cash reserve you know you can use during this special time at home."



## 6. Run the Numbers

Keep a thorough account of your current monthly expenses and make a decision about how long you can comfortably stay at home after the birth, based on the financial compensation you can expect at this time. Are there any expenditures you can give up that will afford you added time at home? Take into account new expenses you will incur, including diapers, baby clothes and changes to your health insurance premium.



## 7.

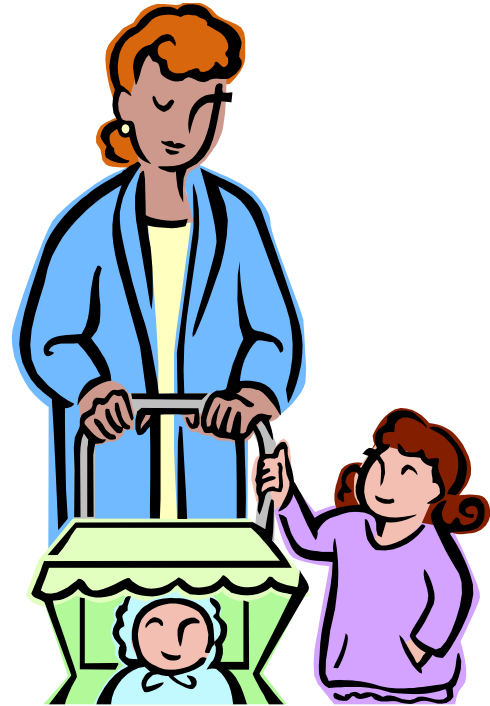
### Keep Your Health Insurance Company Up to Speed

Insurance providers typically cover a newborn for the first month of life under a parent's policy. Assuming your health insurance is provided through your employer, let your insurance company know you are expecting as soon as you are able, in order to determine the next steps for adding your newborn to your existing policy. Let your insurance company know about the baby's arrival within 31 days of birth. The additional health insurance costs may or may not be covered by your employer. Check with your provider to determine if your baby will be added as an individual to your plan, or if you need to change to a family plan after birth. Keep a paper trail and follow up in order to avoid a lapse in coverage.



## 8. Consider Employing a Nanny

No matter what lifestyle you envision for yourself as a new mommy, [child care](#) needs will be a part of it. No one can take your place, but there are wonderful professionals available who can help you with your baby. Think about the type of person you wish to put into this role, including the personality and background that feels most suitable to you. Take into account the amount of time you will need your nanny to work each week and the compensation package you can offer. Many of the guidelines you currently use in the workforce, when you are either hiring staff or seeking employment for yourself, come into play when considering the caregiver you will choose. Take experience, interests and special skills into account, as well as other strengths and weaknesses that are meaningful to you.



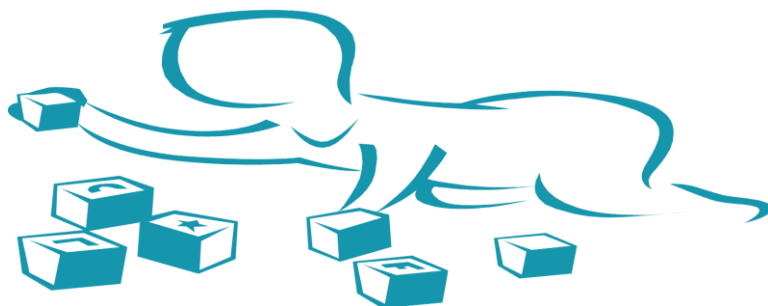
## 9. Look into Nanny-sharing

This is the time to decide if you will hire a nanny on your own or consider nanny-sharing, a co-op with another local family. While more economical, nanny-sharing works best when the children being cared for are of similar age, live nearby and both families' child-rearing philosophies are in sync.



## 10. Think about Daycare

Child care centers may feel like a more viable child care option for you. Ask for recommendations from people you trust about local daycare centers and find out what the teacher-to-child ratio is, as well as the center's philosophies on discipline, naps and feeding schedules. Ask out about the staff's qualifications and licensing and make sure you have free access to check out their premises at any time. If you have concerns about your own work schedule, find a daycare center that is flexible about pick-up and drop-off times.



## 11. Don't Fret Over School Waiting Lists

For many expectant parents, thoughts about nursery school and every educational step--all the way up to college--loom large. But all of this anxiety may be a waste of energy, according to [Laura Gauld](#), head of the Hyde-Woodstock School in Connecticut. As Gauld says, "While waiting lists for schools do vary based on geography, don't panic that your child will lose their place in line if you don't map out their entire educational future prior to their first steps. The most important thing for you to concern yourself with right now is bonding with your baby."

Whether you are having your first baby or your fifth, remember that no one is better qualified than you are to be your child's mother. No matter if you are taking a week or two for yourself before delivery or if you are waiting until your due date to start maternity leave, build in time to rest, read, breathe and enjoy life. The most amazing adventure is about to unfold for you, and while becoming a working mom may be challenging (and exhausting!), it can also be rewarding, interesting and meaningful.

To learn more about preparing for your new baby, visit [care.com/preparing-for-a-new-baby](http://care.com/preparing-for-a-new-baby)

For information about finding the right day care for your new child, visit [care.com/day-care-resources](http://care.com/day-care-resources)

Looking for advice on finding and interviewing babysitters or nannies? Visit [care.com/babysitter-and-nanny-hiring-resources](http://care.com/babysitter-and-nanny-hiring-resources)

Looking for resources to share with employees? Download our [New Parent Toolkit: Finding and Budgeting for Child Care](#)

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