



Returning to work *smoothly* after family leave



MINISTRY OF
SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND HEALTH



Ministry of Economic Affairs
and Employment of Finland



Centre for Economic Development,
Transport and the Environment

MiB MOTHERS
IN BUSINESS

Congratulations!

Your life is about to change as you move from family leave to a work environment. You may be returning to the job you had before your family leave, starting a completely new career or heading for studies.

The transition period often includes various uncertainty factors. Many people feel that the threshold for returning to work after a family leave becomes high – especially if there is no job to go back to. Remember that during your family leave, you have gathered many new skills for the working life, and your old competencies have not disappeared, either. What you need now is the courage to head for a new kind of everyday life.

With this guide, we want to support your confidence in your skills and help you find services that will make the transition to working life smoother. The guide will serve as a basis for your thoughts and if necessary, as background material or as a conversation starter at the workplace.

This publication has been compiled, in cooperation with the **ELY Centre's** Returning to work after family leave project, by **Mothers in Business MiB ry**. The aim of the project is to make it easier for parents on family leave to return to work and to develop better services for families at the same time.

In the 2020's, professional life is undergoing constant changes, and the trends of our era include very different life situations as well as new forms of working and studying. When you recognise your own strengths, map your safety network and make use of support opportunities, you will make it through the busy years feeling positive!

Happy reading!

■ *A whole new life*

Going back to work may seem like a big deal. You are facing a new kind of everyday life, maybe for the first time as a job seeker with children, as a working parent or with a new family situation.

For many people, family leave is a time when life slows down. In the middle of joy and love, you may have remembered your own childhood, pondered your role in society and your relationship to parenthood as well as searched for your identity. Many people take a step back from their profession and work identity and may look at them with new eyes when returning to work. Family leave may also involve uncertainty, and often the next career step is not clear after the leave. The future may seem frightening, especially if you have no job to return to or there have been other changes in your life. During family leave, many people feel that they understand better what is important to them in life. Going back to work can also make you experience conflicting feelings. This new phase in your life can make you feel anxious and excited at the same time.

Think about your profession and your other skills for a moment. What kind of things were important to you in your work life? What does work mean to you? What do

you expect going back to work will bring into your life? Would you like to continue in the same job or a similar job as before or maybe do something completely different? When you are far away from work for a while, the distance can make you see things in a different light.

There is no universal plan for going back to work that would fit everybody. Think about it and talk with your spouse, people close to you, maternity clinic employees or career counsellors at the TE Office. The decision is often affected by practical and financial conditions, which is why you should think about it from different angles.

As a parent, you have learnt many new skills that are useful in your professional life. Parenthood has taught you to prioritise, plan, cope with any situation, understand families and people of different ages better as well as tolerate pressure. Remember all the nice things that returning to work will bring: your own time, colleagues and networks, perhaps quieter lunch hours and the eventual benefits of an employment contract.

Find your strength and build your resources



Feeling of capability and strengthening your self-esteem

- List your successes. What are your biggest accomplishments at work and in life overall?
- What kind of important things have you learnt for your work life while on family leave?
- Remember that your skills do not disappear even if you are away from work for a longer period!

Empowerment

- Identify the factors that give you more endurance and energy.
- And what wears you down and makes you tired?
- Reflect on everyday solutions to ensure that your strength and resources remain at the necessary level.

Strengthening your self-awareness

- Clarify your own values. What is important to you in life? Consider what kind of everyday life corresponds to your values and wishes.
- Make a list of your strengths. Take into account both your competences and your personality. In which things do you excel? What kind of things bring you praise? Also ask others what they think your strengths are.
- Reflect on the areas in which you would like to develop your skills.

A positive attitude

- Practice noticing good things. Negative things naturally demand the main part of our attention, and unpleasant events are stored in our memory more effectively than nice ones.
- Keep a diary and write down daily three things you are thankful for, that have gone well or where you have succeeded. It's also a good idea to ask your child about the three nicest things that happened during his/her day.

An empowering network

- You don't have to be alone, no matter what your family is like. Help is available either from the people close to you, networks and/or society.
- Think about what kind of help and services would help you in your daily life. Find out where to get this kind of help (more information about using networks can be found on page 7 of this guide).
- Remember that asking and applying for help is a crucial part of taking care of yourself!

You can do it!

Making it possible to return to work

There are many options for returning to work, full time work and municipal daycare are not the only alternative. We recommend that you look into Kela family benefits and early childhood education services of your region as early as possible in order to find the best solution for your family. Remember that the parental benefit can be divided so that each parent works part time and cares for the child at home in turns.

When the parental leave ends, the parent can:

- care for the child at home and receive home child-care allowance
- arrange for private daycare and receive home childcare allowance or private childcare allowance
- work a maximum of 30 hours per week and receive flexible care allowance
- obtain municipal daycare for the child.

If a child of less than 3 years of age is cared for at home and the parent works a maximum of 30 hours per week, he/she is entitled to a partial care allowance. Both parents can receive flexible care allowance at the same time. However, they must be absent from work and care for the child at different times or on different days. For more information, see Kela's website www.kela.fi/lapsiperheet.

Going to work – when and where?

You can already start planning for arranging childcare and using family benefits before the child is born. The preparations are also affected by whether you are returning to a previous job or applying for a new job. When it's time to return to a previous job, time limits are defined in legislation. Early childhood education services should be applied for, depending on the municipality, 4 to 12 months in advance through the municipality's web service, or, in the private sector, applying for a service voucher or private childcare allowance.

You can start looking for work or studies for a new profession during your family leave or right after it. When you take control of your own career change, you can increase your feeling of empowerment. A counselling appointment with TE services or entrepreneurship services, for example, is best booked in good time. In the same way, you can apply for many study programs only during certain times of the year. Even if the parent doesn't have a job, the child has the right to early childhood education. Looking for a job also takes time and effort, and a familiar daycare place makes it easier to accept and start a job when you find one.

"It takes a village to raise a child"

Don't hesitate to ask grandparents and friends to help out. Instead of Christmas presents, ask for cleaning and childcare gift vouchers. Arrange regular meetings, for example, between the child and his/her godparent. Build a network with other parents in the same situation, e.g. at family cafés. The personnel at early childhood education services are also there to help you. Community-based childcare saves resources and can also give the child varying and important experiences.

The possibility for both parents to care for the child at home is a unique opportunity and in everyone's interest. In 2020, fathers only used 10 percent of parental leaves. The portion of parental leave to be shared freely is almost always used by mothers, and so is child-raising allowance. A more even distribution of family leave between parents would, however, be useful, promote gender equality, as well as make it easier to share responsibility for chores fairly at home.

It is often assumed that if one parent earns more money than the other, it's not economically sensible for him/her to take parental leave. However, it can be economically reasonable for the parent with better income to take income-based parental leave as the tax percentage decreases according to income. Thus it is advisable to check with the help of Kela's calculators how different family leave models would actually affect the family's income level.

Starting daycare

When your child starts daycare, it's an enormous change that may feel overwhelming to both child and parent. In Finland, early childhood education, i.e. childcare for pre-school children is excellent and controlled. After a familiarisation and getting used to phase, the daycare staff become important adults for the child and a valuable help to the parent in raising the child.

There are many alternatives for daycare. Don't hesitate to ask questions: the maternity clinic will direct you to the right place in your own municipality, and people you know can give you valuable tips. You can contact daycare places and ask to visit them before making a decision and applying for your child.

Additional support for childcare

Respite care

Many cities have a municipal respite care facility that offers childcare for parents who do shiftwork.

Private childcare, other care and home services

Third sector childcare services

The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare arranges trained children's nurses to help at a low threshold for short-time needs in homes. The family acts as employer. Home service can also be ordered from Väestöliitto, the Family Federation of Finland.

Independent nursery staff

You can look for short-term childcare in portals such as Care, Sitly, and Babysits, or in your location's job groups in Facebook. More information about compensation principles as an employer can be found, for example, at www.palkkaus.fi.

Municipal home service

Municipal home service is a special service based on the social welfare act, to which you are entitled if you can't guarantee child welfare because of, for example, an illness or certain life situations. Ask your health or social services for more information!

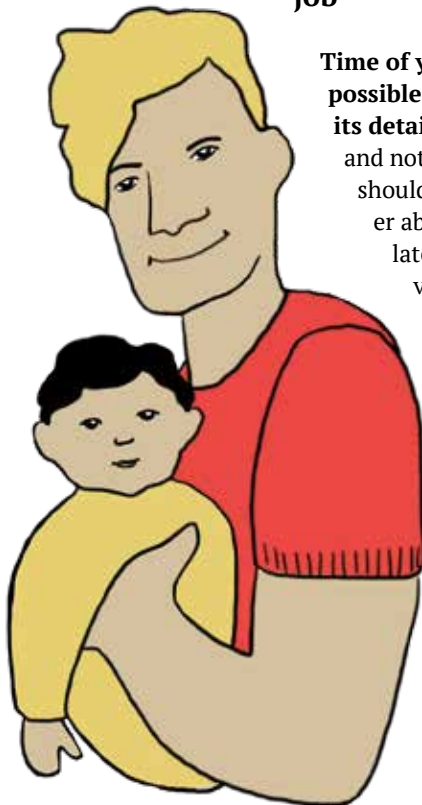
Prepare for getting back to work

The job you return to after parental leave may be familiar, but your everyday life has changed permanently. In addition to practical matters, you may be wondering about your own competence after being away. Have confidence in that your competencies are still there and ready for use.

You can prepare for your return to the job by thinking about

work-related matters in advance. Write notes about your own skills: what tasks or projects are you looking forward to, what skills could be updated, what have you learned during family leave. If you want to use your brain in advance, you can look for something interesting to learn in an internet webinar or go through your old study materials. Go for a coffee with your working friends and talk with them about work-related matters.

Check these things when returning to your previous job



Time of your return to work, possible part time work and its details. Check the times and notification times: you should inform the employer about your return at the latest two months in advance, excluding some exceptions. Provide a written notification by email, for example, both to your manager and to the relevant HR department.

Find out about your rights, check the employment contract and job description. After family leave, an employee has the

Breastfeeding and the mother's return to work

Breastfeeding is also possible for working mothers. It may require some creative solutions, but you don't have to give up breastfeeding because you go back to work, or postpone going back to work because of breastfeeding.

- When a breastfeeding mother returns to work, it's useful to find out how she could pump milk or breastfeed also during the workday. Bring the subject up openly.
- You can breastfeed your child in the daycare facility's premises at the end of the day. Infant formula can also be used if there is no fear of ending the breastfeeding.

legal right to return primarily to his/her own previous work. If that is not possible, the employer has to offer similar work corresponding to the employment contract, or other work. More information is available in the part of the employment contract law (26.1.2001/55) concerning family leave, and from trade unions. Check your employment contract and talk to your manager about your future job description and whether the compensation is up-to-date.

Ask for onboarding. You have the right to onboarding after an absence, as do all employees according to the employment protection law. Ask your manager for sufficient onboarding. It doesn't diminish your competence, but shows instead that you want to get to work right away in the best possible way. During a longer leave, many things may have changed at the workplace, so onboarding is in both

the employer's and the employee's best interest.

Holidays. How many holidays are still unused and should you also take a holiday after the parental leave ends? How does it work when the parents don't have as many holidays as the child? Find out about future holiday times in good time and note that the next season's holidays may have changed from the previous ones. Your own daycare place is not necessarily open during holidays or the summer, and the child has to go to on-call daycare during those times. Private daycare providers don't necessarily have a substitute site.

A direction for your career - what did I want to do?

If you don't have a job to return to or you want a new direction, try to think of the situation as a blank canvas and a sea of possibilities. All the more often, work careers are paths with many turns. Sum up your life experience and voluntary work with elective duties. Everything is useful. What kinds of dreams do you have? Would you like to study more theoretical things or focus on practical work? How much does the salary or the employment situation in the field mean? What kind of work would correspond to your values or fit nicely into your changed life situation? Could you be an entrepreneur?

Career counselling and finding out about study possibilities

Using the TE Office's website you can identify your skills and capacities for professional life. **The AVO career counselling program** and **Noodi.Me** are useful tools for measuring your interest in a change as part of the employment relationship. Build networks with professionals in different fields and visit educational establishments' and companies' websites and social media. Create a profile in the professional networking site LinkedIn.com and investigate the career paths of professionals in different fields.

Different study possibilities

You can also study as an adult. Development is a life-long process. A voluntary change of career is a growing trend in professional life. Thanks to credit transfer policies, you don't have to study the same things several times. You can browse different training options in the **Opintopolku web service** and in the labor training of the TE Office. Sometimes a complete change of career is not needed, but instead you can specialise inside your own field, participate in additional training or choose another area of expertise. Check open university studies that can help you gain insight into different fields. You can get into the university via path studies in an open university.

If you are employed, the employer can support your studies and offer additional training options in the form of, for example, additional training for a fee or training completed in part during work hours.

A study form suitable for a parent can often be **multi-mode studying** that combines online and classroom teaching. This is already favoured in most trainings, but it requires the ability to study independently and use information technology. **Apprenticeship** is a contract between the workplace, student and

establishment, where the student completes a basic or partial degree at his/her own workplace. Sometimes it's good to develop basic working life skills before actually studying for a degree or applying for jobs. In this case, you may consider the TE Office's courses, studying the Finnish language or studies in adult education centres, for example.

Subsistence during career change periods

If you are over 25 years old and unemployed, you may be able to apply



for full-time studies to get a diploma or complete previously interrupted diploma studies as voluntary studies while receiving unemployment benefits. Ask the responsible person at the TE Office for additional information by leaving a contact request through the E-services.

When you take an unpaid study leave from an employment relationship that has lasted at least one year, you may also be entitled to adult education allowance if you have a working history of at least eight years in total. In this case, your income is often better than with student benefits. You will find more information about this in the employment fund's website. Kela's education grant, housing supplement and state guarantee for student loans are also available when changing careers. You can estimate your student grant with the calculator on Kela's website.

Sometimes, studies include a mandatory thesis or internship that can also be paid.

Entrepreneurship appeals to more people

Entrepreneurship can be a chance to build a flexible functioning combination of work and family life according to your own schedules. It's often demanding in a way different from being employed, but it's possible to make it work even in hectic everyday situations. A career related to your own passion can be rewarding in a new way.

You can be an entrepreneur in many different ways: instead of your own trade name or limited liability company, you can become a light entrepreneur or work in a cooperative. When you work as a franchising entrepreneur, someone else has already created the company's business concept and products. You can also buy a previously founded company or start a business with another person.

Could you compile your skills into a package that would be easy to buy, or make your own products? Who would be your customers? Help is available for developing your own business con-

cept and running a business. The Suomi.fi service contains a lot of information about founding a company and working as an entrepreneur. You can also get support from your own area's TE Office. In addition, you can apply, for example, for a start-up grant or entrepreneurship training. My Enterprise Finland is a free service from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland for planning a company's business.

If you got interested in entrepreneurship as a career option, there is a lot of information available for entrepreneurs starting out.



The following can help you to find a new direction:

- the AVO career counselling program asiointi.mol.fi/avo/
- www.noodi.me

Training opportunities

- The www.opintopolku.fi online service offers an extensive information package on different training forms and possibilities
- The www.koulutus.fi website helps you to find professional courses and adult education. It contains a listing of starting labour-force trainings.

For free ICT training, see

- www.fitech.io/fi
- www.amkoodari.fi
- www.digikyvykkyys.fi
- www.mooc.fi

More information about entrepreneurship

- oma.yrityssuomi.fi
- www.yrittajat.fi
- www.yrittajanaiset.fi

Information about start-up grants to support starting a business:

- www.te-palvelut.fi

A toolbox for working life

Parenthood can uproot your identity, and momentarily you may feel that sleepless nights are destroying your intelligence and energy. You are skilled and smart, however, even if you had a long break from professional life. Life between home, daycare and studies or work will find its course, once the basics are there.

Applying for work as a parent

Many people apply for their first job as a parent or during family leave! Now is a good time to consider what your career dreams are. What is the first realistic step you can take? Build networks with other working people and look for inspiration. Apply for jobs you are interested in and focus on application quality. Bring up your motivation and study the field you want independently. A career is never really finished, so progress peacefully towards your goals.

When you apply for work, you don't have to talk about your family situation, and the employer is not allowed to ask about it in a job interview. This also applies to your family plans and an possible pregnancy. If it feels natural, you can mention you are a parent, because you probably don't want a job where parenthood is not seen as positive. Even after mentioning this, you don't have to answer questions about, for example, the child's age or custody arrange-

ments. If you want, you can already ask about the working place's family-friendly policies during the application phase.

Support in a new situation from the TE Office

In addition to the unemployed, the TE Office helps new applicants to fine-tune their job seeking skills **with career and job search training** and **career counseling** that are also arranged via a remote connection.

When you participate in **job search training**, you usually receive unemployment benefit. In addition to that, you may get expenditure allowance from either an unemployment fund, an expert from the TE Office or Kela. The job search training may include conversations about your own skills with the counsellor, as well as being assisted to write a job application and a CV.

Career training is a discretionary support service from the TE Office, focused on returning to work or entrepreneurship. Its content can be customized for different target groups. Career training is meant for people who have no professional training, consider a career change, plan to return to work or are thinking about entrepreneurship. The training is mainly group-based and can contain a short familiarisation with the job tasks at the workplace.

Career counselling is a support service from the TE Office, focused on career selection, changing careers or developing one's skills. You can obtain psychologist services remotely to support your career choices through career counselling offered by the TE Office.

If you want to invest more, also private recruiting training services are available to help with the job search. If you are a member of a trade union or a suborganisation, check the career counselling, recruiting and training possibilities of the union. They are often free of charge for trade union members.

Compile job search tools independently

During the family leave, make sure that you have **an up-to-date CV (curriculum vitae)**. The CV should contain your basic information, training and work history with titles and job descriptions. In addition, you can mention hobbies adding to professional competence, language skills, voluntary work or elective offices or, for example, estimates of the skills in the special tools of your field.

To accompany the CV, you need a **job application**. You can create a template and edit it separately for each job you apply for. Include the contact information of **references** from previous workplaces that you have confirmed.

Stand out with your application! **Video applications** are getting more common,

and they are a good way to show your personality and stand out from the crowd of applicants. Another option is to make a visually attractive application with, for example, the **Canva.com program**, which is a free program found on the internet. Have someone else read your application, as you may get good tips. However, remember that the application's and CV's content is more important than their appearance.

Most open jobs are available on the TE Office website mol.fi. An open application is used when there is no actual job posting, but instead a person approaches an interesting employer on his/her own initiative. Also take into account so called hidden jobs, i.e. jobs that are not yet open but for which the need has been identified. You can ask people you know and your networks about hidden jobs. Make use of the job search channels in social media, such as **LinkedIn** or your own profession's Facebook groups. Nowadays, a significant part of job openings are filled in some other way than by responding to a job ad.

Check these things when you start a new job

Starting a new job is exciting for many people.



Remember that the employer hired you because he/she believes in your skills!

The right first impression. Be on time and dress appropriately.

Create new networks, take care of old ones. Keep in touch with your important networks. Get to know your new colleagues to the extent you choose.

Listen, ask questions, learn. There are no stupid questions. Asking questions shows that you are interested and willing to learn.

Make sure to sign an employment contract. It is recommended to use a written employment contract. An employment contract is valid indefinitely or for a defined time period. Temporary employment can only be used by the employer with grounds, so don't hesitate to ask for the reason in an unclear situation. The employment contract may contain a probationary period of no more than six months.

Ensure that your employment contract defines the following: Salary, working place, start and end dates of the contract (unless valid indefinitely), primary tasks and the collective agreement applicable to the work that defines the employment terms.

Find out about the practices when your child is sick:

1. You must inform the employer about the temporary childcare leave and its estimated duration as soon as possi-

ble. Find out whether your employer needs a sick leave certificate or whether your own notification is enough.

2. Check whether your employer needs a certificate about the child's other custodian working while you are on temporary childcare leave with a sick child.

Don't hesitate to ask about the practices the workplace has to support combining work and other life areas: flexible working hours, remote work possibilities, influencing holiday timing etc.

Part-time work

Working less hours can add flexibility to everyday life.

Partial parental leave means shortening working times to combine work and family life. The right to partial parental leave is based on the Employment Contracts Act. Either one of the parents can obtain partial parental leave after the childcare allowance period until the child's second school year ends.

You can receive support from Kela if you work for a maximum of 30 hours per week:

- flexible care allowance for a child less than 3 years old
- for the parent of a child in 1 or 2 grade, it is a partial childcare allowance

The employer and employee always have to agree on partial parental leave.

Taking care of yourself through the busy years

Give yourself time to change

Even positive changes consume energy. Allow some time for fine-tuning new routines and getting used to them. During the weeks or months after returning to work, you can leave out things to do that are not absolutely necessary.

A new kind of everyday life may seem hard to both the parents and the child. It's also not uncommon that the child may be teary, for example, when you leave him/her at daycare, even after an exciting start. At the same time, you may feel you are always in the wrong place, both at work and at home. Remember that all kinds of feelings are allowed and you will get through everything. Also invest in happy moments together and remember the importance of recuperation for both children and adults. Pay attention to successes.

Don't be afraid to find your own solutions

Every family's situation is unique, so there is no single model to fit everyday life for all. Consider what kind of daily life is good for your own family. As a family, you can talk about the routines and timing solutions that would support

a good everyday life in your family. What is important and what do you want to focus on? And what is less meaningful and what are you ready to give up?

Take care of sufficient recuperation

After going back to work you may feel that you are racing against the clock. In spite of this, you should make sure that you have time to take care of yourself and your wellbeing. Your own ability to cope is the basis for both parenting and working. By taking care of yourself you can give your best to others as well. Try to get enough rest. Note that you need to recuperate not only on weekends, but also on weekday nights and during the workday. During the work day, take breaks to detach yourself from work and do a few relaxing and restoring deep breathing exercises.. Think about what kind of activities would help you recuperate on weekday nights. This can mean spending time alone or doing something nice with the family.

Give yourself a break

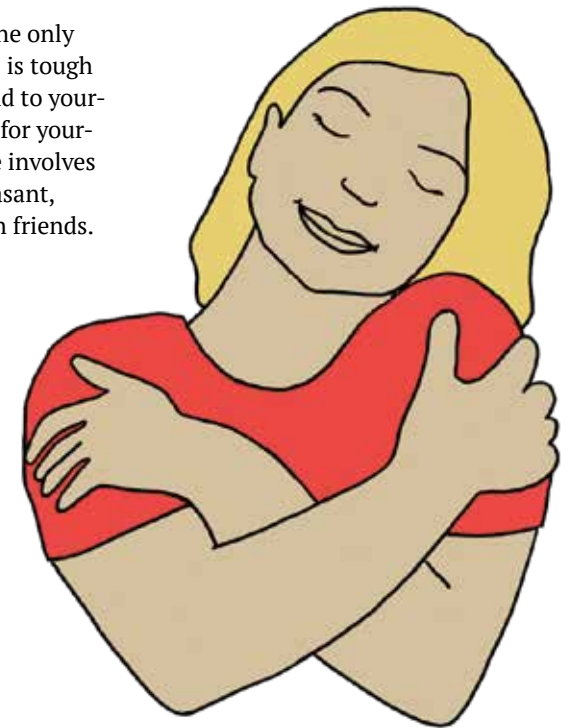
A new kind of daily life can also bring up worries, uncertainty or fears. How will I

cope? How will my child cope? What if something happens? Worrying is quite normal, and even unpleasant feelings are part of being human. It's OK to feel anxious about returning to work. Writing or talking to people close to you may help you process feelings and thoughts. If worrying thoughts fill your mind, talk about them at the maternity clinic, in occupational healthcare and at the health centre.

Please notice that you are not the only one who feels that everyday life is tough after going back to work! Be kind to yourself and take some time to care for yourself. See to it that your daily life involves something meaningful and pleasant, such as hobbies or meeting with friends.

Make your everyday life as pleasant, interesting and satisfying as possible. You are allowed to enjoy life and stop to cherish happy moments!

More tips for taking care of yourself and your mental wellbeing can be found on Mieli ry's pages: www.mieli.fi.



Checklist for a smoother daily life

- Share the responsibilities at home. Also children can participate according to their age.
- Make sure that your child has clothing appropriate for each season and every weather both at home and in daycare. Your daycare provider can also give tips about necessary clothing and accessories.
- Mark the clothing etc. with the child's name.
- Keep snacks and meals handy in the fridge and freezer.
- Plan your own lunches as well, whether it's taking a lunch box from home or eating at the workplace's cafeteria.
- Make a meal list for one week and cook larger amounts at a time.
- Use a family calendar and write everybody's activities in it.
- Identify the central goals of your own work. Reflect what kind of workday makes you feel good afterwards. When do you feel and know that you have succeeded? What is the reason if work doesn't seem to progress well?
- Outline the regular week of your dreams. Consider what it looks like and how you feel during the week.
- During the first weeks after returning to work, allow some time to get used to the new kind of daily life.
- Calculate a budget that includes salary and benefits, taxes and new payments, such as daycare fees.
- Could the trip to work be your "me" time?
 - Cycle or walk at least part of the way.
 - Listen to podcasts, music or audiobooks or try mindfulness applications.
- Ask about flexibility at work: could you shorten the working week, use flexible hours or wish for a certain shift?
- Remember to take care of your relationship with your partner. Talk to each other and spend some quality time together.
 - Väestöliitto's (Family Federation of Finland) website contains good advice and material to support starting conversations and increase understanding in various family situations.
 - Your own maternity clinic can give tips and referrals to a psychologist, for example.

NOTES

This publication has been compiled in cooperation with

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The Returning to work after family leave project

The returning to work after family leave project was organized during 2019 – 2020 in ten different municipalities across Finland. The project was organized in collaboration between Uusimaa ELY-Center, The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. The goal was to ease the path from family leave back to working life, while at the same time developing better services for families. The project will continue in 2021 – 2022 in new municipalities across Finland.

The second part of the project is organized by Uusimaa ELY-Center and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment.

The training consists of free of charge group and individual sessions. In this training, you get to focus on yourself and reflect on the life and plans after family leave together with professionals and other parents in the same situation, regardless of whether you are returning to work or wondering what to do next.

More information at our website:
www.perhevapaaltatyohon.fi

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