



leaving home....

Ways to reduce the stress of going back to work by preparing you and your little one for when you are not there all the time.

The thought of going back to work and leaving your most precious jewel in someone else's care is daunting. Until you come to do it, you are unaware of the emotions and the rollercoaster journey you will embark upon.

Many mothers find it tough seeing another person caring for their child. Some get jealous when they see their cherished one respond lovingly to another carer and often dislike themselves for feeling so.

This is very normal – you are a mother with protective and nurturing instincts. There will be times when you have no choice but to hand your child over. Try to balance these times by spending as much time as you can with your child without your child minder being present.

Choosing childcare is an important decision to get right as more than likely this person will be the closest to your little one, shaping your child psychologically, socially and emotionally. This of course depends on whether you are going back to work full-time or part-time but it is still a rather scary thought.

One question many families ask is: when do you start making childcare plans? By all means, do your research early but don't make any decisions or commit to a long-term contract until after you have had the baby. While you may have an expectation of what you believe to be the perfect help, it is highly probable that, post-birth, your ideals will change. What seemed so significant months earlier can suddenly seem absurd.

Who is best to mind your child does depend on the hours you are going to be away from them. Don't rush into it and consider all options of childcare available to you. Options range from having someone in your home, taking your child to using someone else's home, sharing a nanny or using group care.

Financial considerations

The other contributor to what type of care you choose is, of course, the financial costs. In considering this factor, you as a parent need to validate the reason or reasons why you are returning to work – this could be due to financial pressures; you like the stimulation of going back into the workforce for a few hours a week; whether you actually don't want to be a fulltime stay at home mother; or lastly, whether you just need to share the burden of caring for your child with someone so that you can have some free time for yourself.

Are you still breastfeeding your child?

You may decide that it is important to you to continue to fully breastfeed when you go back to work. If this is the case, then you need to consider whether the baby is brought into work for feeding or whether you can go to your baby and be able to have the time to feed.

You will have to consider the time allocated by your employer for enabling you to either go to your baby to feed or express. Remember a part-time job may suddenly become a full-time one, as the time allocated is not included in your working hours.

If you decide that you are going to give up breastfeeding once you return to work then it's a good idea to try and keep the morning and evening feed as breastfeeds. This ensures you then get to nurture your baby in a way no one else can. This physical closeness enables the special bond between mother and child to continue for longer.

Your body will adapt to only feeding twice a day, however if you are going to continue breastfeeding full time then whenever the baby feeds you need to pump.

If you are breastfeeding or formula feeding what will happen when your baby starts solids? Routines are also a factor that you need to look at carefully.

Is there an ideal time to take this step?

Is the age of your child a factor that you should take into account when deciding when to return to work? What age is better to implement this change? Age is only a concern around 10 months as it has been suggested that this is not a good time to introduce the separation from mother and baby. This is the hardest time for a baby both developmentally and also in regards to separation anxiety as the baby is undergoing a lot of change at this stage and so it would be preferable not to add to their anxiety with a change of carer.

Choosing childcare

Even if it is a daycare with a great reputation or a carer with a brilliant CV, impressive references and years of experience, the burning question would be whether or not you feel that they have your child's needs at the top of their list and that they are going to be nurturing to your child. After all, they have very big shoes to fill.

There are lots of aspects to consider when choosing the appropriate care for your child and these are discussed in this article. More often than not though, the decision is based on a 'feeling'. Go with your instinct that the daycare 'feels right' and that you can picture your child being happy there or that you feel comfortable in the company of your chosen in-home carer. The fact that you like a person's voice, their mannerisms, their aura all contributes to your final decision.

Childcare outside your home – things to consider

Who will be looking after your child?

In thinking about group care (daycare), you need to consider whether they offer 'primary care'.

'Primary care' is where one person is responsible for the care of your baby/toddler under the age of two. This enables your child to have an attachment to one person rather than a different person every day. It sounds good, but is very difficult to police or enforce. Some care centres use this primary care model as it best enables your child to bond with one person. Other centres have one person responsible for each task (changing nappies, feeding etc) so your child will deal with a number of different carers each day.

If looking at primary care in a centre, you need to remember that staff members do have time off so there will be someone different looking after your child. Also consider the ratio of carer to children; nowadays it is more likely to be 1 to 5 rather than 1 to 4.

Your child's routine

If your child's routine is different from the carer's thoughts or routine within a group situation – does this mean that yes they will continue to keep your routine going or will they integrate the child into theirs? A lot of centres will say they are flexible so you need to expand on this and determine what they mean by "flexible".

If the carer is unable to change to your routine due to their centre policy or if the carer is working from her own home and cares for other children, then it would be advisable to change your child's routine to fit in with the new routine as early as possible. Do this in 15-minute increments over a period of time so that when you are ready to go back to work, your baby/toddler is in the routine that is going to work for both you and your carer. How long it takes depends on you and your child but it is better to do it in small stepping-stones rather than at the last minute.

Some daycares/carers have a diary so that when you pick up your child you can actually see what they have done for the day. It is also good to have a diary for keeping tab of what they eat, how they sleep, wet and soiled nappies and, more importantly, if they are having any form of medication or if they have had an accident.

If you are setting up a diary then write a little story about your child's likes and dislikes and also the routine that you want them to stay in – also an emergency contact sheet with all the important numbers on.

Sickness

You need to know what will happen if your child is sick – can they still go to the carer's? If the carer is sick, what is the back up support? How will you cope with this if your child must stay home? You will be entitled to take sick leave from your employment to care for a dependant who is unwell. Do you have family you can call on if your work commitments

Continued overleaf...

leaving home...

make staying home for a couple of days difficult? How does the centre/carer deal with teething and other child illnesses?

Immunisations are an important consideration, especially if you are looking at group care as most places do not like accepting babies/toddlers if they haven't started with their immunisations, although legally they are not allowed to do this. However, they are legally allowed to ask you not to bring the child in if there is an outbreak of a particular disease until the outbreak is over

Your child's essentials

What supplies do you need to take to the daycare centre or carer's home? For example: nappies, clothes, wipes, nappy sacks, creams and toys. Some carers encourage mothers to bring something that they have worn especially in the early days as this can help settle a child that is missing their mother. If they have a favourite cuddly toy, ensure that you have more than one so that you can change them on a regular basis and they also have that to snuggle with.

If your child is a toddler then a good way to help the transition is to have a bag "just like Mummy has to go to work" as toddlers like to mimic their parents.

Location

Location is also another aspect to think about. You need to decide whether you want the child closer to your work or your home. Both have advantages so it does become a personal decision and again how you feed your child will have an impact on this.

Environment

Another important consideration is the noise volume where you are going to leave your child. If your child is used to one to one and in a quiet environment then they will adapt more quickly to the same situation in care. Also if there are other children in the carer's home then see what happens with how many drop offs the carer has to do in a day or how often she takes the children out and also if they allow the other children to hold or carry the babies. Do they have animals – this is important if your child has never seen a dog or cat.

Carer terms

You need to know what the cancellation policy is and how

many weeks notice you need to give and also whether there is a deposit to be paid at the beginning and whether this is refundable if you take your child out of their care.

Carefully check the company's contract before signing on for home care providers. Know exactly what are you committing to.

Do your research

When doing your research use the Internet as a tool as there are great websites that will answer many of your questions. Check out:

www.kiwifamilies.co.nz/Topics/Education/Early+Childhood-Education/Choosing+a+Service.html

www.minedu.govt.nz

www.ece.govt.nz

In-home childcare – things to consider

The person you need is...

Do you dream of finding the 'practically perfect in every way' Mary Poppins or the firm but fair Nanny McFee to look after your child? Before you can find the 'perfect' person for your little one you need, first, to understand the different types of in-home care and their appropriateness for your needs.

Professional Nanny

In short, this is a person with qualifications from a registered Nanny school. Ideally look for a minimum of three years' experience. This person is there to give support and take guidance from you as to how you wish to raise your child.

Nanny

A non-professional nanny is a person without qualifications and may or may not have experience. It is important to follow up references to discern their level of expertise. On one level, a nanny could be a mature person with 30 years experience or a young girl fresh off the plane looking for accommodation with the afterthought of helping out as a nanny or a housekeeper. It can be a bit of a gamble so do your research thoroughly.

Nanny/housekeeper

This person is unlikely to have qualifications as a nanny but will be willing to perform housekeeping duties.

Mother's Help

This is a person who is often young, unqualified and hired to help with sundry tasks as well as baby-sit.

Au Pair

An au pair is a visitor from a foreign country who comes to formally study the culture and language. Depending upon what type of au pair you require then the hours and rates can vary.

Check out the website www.aupairlink.co.nz.

Their experience will differ from one person to another so you need to be very clear with the level of experience you require.

Baby Sitter

In many countries there are legal requirements governing the age and hours of a baby sitter.

Where to look for your in-home carer

How you decide to go about finding an in-home carer is a personal choice and some people prefer to use agencies in the belief that the correct checks and screening will be done and that the agency will match you with a nanny to avoid interviewing of potential nannies.

Remember that agencies are only as good as the people operating them and humans make mistakes. However agencies filter the applications quickly and save you time and angst. An agency can also serve as a sounding block and can guide you in defining your needs.

If you use an agency to hire someone, you still need to check some of their references and talk to their ex-employers. When doing this you do need to read between the lines as some ex-employers may in one breath be raving about their nanny and then bad mouthing her in the next. It's a good idea to find out when talking to their ex employers what they feel are the applicant's strengths and weaknesses.

Make sure you familiarize yourself with the agency's terms – fees, your and the carer's rights, the trial period and the obligations of the agency.

Other families seek word-of-mouth recommendations. Keep in mind that recommendations from friends can be tricky as you run the risk of offending your friends if the relationship between you and the carer doesn't work out. Also, we all parent differently and sometimes our friends parenting ideas are different so what works for their family may not work for yours.

Choosing your in-home carer

First impressions

It is important to remember that the person you choose to come into your home is going to become 'part of the family' and so the most important factor is that you can imagine them fitting in and everyone in the household getting along – that you 'click' with them. If you can't see it happening then end the interview and move on.

It is a good idea to have an employment agreement between you and your nanny or carer. This can be as basic or as detailed as you want and ideally should be drafted or approved by a suitably qualified person. Consider notice periods, trial periods, hours of work, list of conditions (e.g. no physical discipline, no unapproved visitors in the home, no cell phones whilst driving, no speeding, no photography except for the family on the family's camera...), confidentiality.

Continued overleaf...



Interviewing your in-home carer

If you are going to have a person come into your home to care for your child, the following questions are important to cover in an interview (some of these are also relevant to group care):

Gaining an insight into how they would care for your child

- What is their philosophy regarding children?
- What is their philosophy regarding routines?
- How would they calm a crying baby/child?
- How would they suggest weaning a baby?
- Your child's social activities – what would they choose family friends (that you as a family choose and select) versus their nanny network?
- How they plan a day?
- Their interaction with the baby/child – how do they see this role? (get them to explain a full day)
- How they discipline?
- Food planning and management
- Food hygiene and cooking abilities
- Educational role – how they do this and interact this in a play role? How would they enhance your child's learning opportunities?
- Do they have initiative and would know what to do in an emergency?

Finding out more about them

- What is their timekeeping like?
- Do they smoke?
- Use of the English language – can they read a menu? (important if you are going to have an au pair care for your baby/child)
- What are their interests?
- What are their religious beliefs?
- Do they have any dietary needs?
- What are their expectations of the job?
- What hours are they prepared to work?

- Will they be available for babysitting?
- Are they prepared to stay overnight?
- Will they need to travel to work and how far?

Setting out your expectations

It is also important to clearly explain your expectations of your child's carer and assess the interviewee's reaction.

- What are their duties – what you expect and what they are willing to do?
- What hours you would like them to work?
- Do you have certain words that you don't want to be used around your children i.e. 'ta' for thank you, 'loo' for toilet etc
- The use of taking photos etc of their children – whether this is acceptable or not
- Mobile phone and Internet usage
- Clothes sense
- Perfume usage

Ask yourself...

- What do I think of their personality and how they present themselves?
- Do I feel confident that this person would be nurturing and kind to my child, whether I am there or not?
- Can I see myself working alongside this person?
- Do I think that they would respect me and follow my instructions even when none of the family is around?
- Do I want them in my space – and close to my child – on a regular basis?
- Could this person replace me if I was incapacitated?
- Is this person inclusive, able to respect my partner, other family members, including the pets?

Preparing your family for the changes ahead

Once you have decided upon and organized the type of care for your needs, the next plan is to start integrating that into your family's life before the big workday comes around.

Start with dropping off your child or have the in-home carer come over for a short period of time and on the first few occasions stay with the carer until you feel that your child is happy. In the beginning you will be paying the carer for a full day but only utilizing a third of that and over time increase to a full day. It's a good idea to start doing this a few weeks before you go back to work especially if you have never left your child with anyone else before.

When the time is right, then leave. Always say goodbye to your child. This is sometimes the harder way but it is important that they know that you are leaving and that you will be back. Once you make the decision to go then go – don't hover or keep looking back – this, if picked up by the child, will only make it harder and most babies or toddlers have a little cry when the parent leaves. More often than not this is short-lived and they are happy and laughing with the carer by the time you get into the car.

Is it working out?

Communication between you and your carer is extremely important. If you find that you have concerns, discuss them openly and try to remedy the situation. Ultimately, despite any perceived upheaval to your child, if you are not happy with who is looking after your baby/toddler then change. After all, you know what is best for your little one. A trial period is important to enable you to terminate an employee. It is better to have a couple of changes than a situation where both you and your baby/toddler are unhappy.

If you find you have made the wrong choice, don't be afraid to admit it. Tell the person as soon as possible that it hasn't worked out and arrange to terminate their employment. If you do not like them, it is most likely your child won't either. If the trial period has passed, you might need advice on terminating the employment if the carer does not wish to leave.

Parents are humans and it's okay to get it wrong. Often applicants and interviewers behave differently during interviews or perhaps what seemed in theory to be suitable proved impractical in reality.

Try not to fall into the trap of thinking now is not the right time to change your carer because you're busy. Do what is best for everyone involved and start again.

There's no magic formula

It is important to dedicate your time to finding the right kind of care for your child and in good time. Good research, selection and preparation are key to successfully moving on to this next stage of your and

your child's life. If you do this, it will ease some of the stress that you will feel when you are eventually faced with leaving your child in someone else's care. It will be easier for you to be more effective during your time away from your child as you will feel confident that they are happy and being cared for by someone who is caring, competent and most importantly who 'feels right' to you.

Emergency/important phone numbers

HOME ADDRESS: (plus directions)

PHONE NUMBER:

PARENTS:

Mother: work direct
work main
mobile

Father: work direct
work main
mobile

MEDICAL: (include all numbers and address)
Emergency Number

Paediatrician: GP
Dentist
Poison centre
Hospital

FAMILY: (include all numbers and address)

FRIENDS: (include all numbers and address)

GENERAL: Plumber
Electricity
Water

Dorothy Waide



Dorothy Waide, Karitane Nurse, is often labelled as a 'baby whisperer' or 'baby guru'. These names have followed her around the world as she has supported many young families with her practical help and sound advice on caring for newborn babies and toddlers. Dorothy gained her reputation for her uncanny ability to calm even the most fractious baby or child. After spending the last two decades living with some of the world's richest and well-known families, this down-to-earth Kiwi has returned home to share her knowledge with New Zealand families through her company, Babywithin. www.babyhelp.co.nz.