

GOING BACK TO WORK

ATTACHMENT-FOCUSED TIPS FOR
RETURNING TO WORK

savanna means

Women in America are going back to work as early as 6 weeks postpartum. This can put HUGE stress on families. Whatever your circumstance, it's important to **focus on keeping your relationship... aka your attachment, intact with your child.**

Attachment is your child's preeminent need. This is true for all humans. If you're wondering why such an important fact isn't well known in some cultures... it's because we have evolved away from this instinct.

We shouldn't have to re-learn attachment. But, fast-paced cultural evolution has interrupted this once automatic human instinct. Bottom line, by focusing on attachment in any situation... you will support your child to adapt and unfold into their **greatest potential.**

A common misconception about attachment is that it's only about proximity. Breastfeeding, babywearing, bedsharing, and other forms of bonding are wonderful. But, there's more to the story.

HOW our children attach is crucial. Within the parent-child duo, one has to be the dependent and the other in the lead. It's crucial for the relationship that the caregiver(s) remain in the lead. Children must be able to take for granted and relax in their attachment with their caregiver(s).

Attachment instincts *should* unfold within the first six years of life. For the first year, babies attach through the senses. This means that they can only feel attached when their caregivers are in sensory proximity... OR when mimicked, often with smell.

Babies also have an indiscriminate attachment for the first five months of life. Making this the ideal time to build your **attachment village**. This can be with anyone - friends, family, and others who will be caring for your child.

Preparing for the transition:

It's important to accept that this is a HUGE change for your child. As your child's primary attachment, you are your child's whole world. Expect sleep, behavior, and all routines... to get flipped upside down during this transition.

How are you feeling about the transition? Your child will pick up on whatever you are feeling. It's important that you feel confident in the change. If you have any doubts about your childcare choices... it's important to explore why, and ease your anxieties.

It's important that your child attach to their new caregiver, *before* they are left alone with them. **Matchmake your child with their new caregiver whenever possible.**

- If a caregiver is coming into your home, have them start early if you can. This will give your child time to attach to them through their attachment with you. This is matchmaking. In our culture, children are usually greeted by adults getting in their faces... trying to talk to them... touching them... or trying to pick them up. Caregivers should interact with the parent before ever interacting with the child. The child needs to see the one who they are attached to:
 - Make eye contact
 - Smile
 - Interact
 - Laugh with

- And make some sort of physical contact with the new caregiver.

Again, this is matchmaking. Eventually the caregiver can offer to connect with the child by putting a finger in the palm of the child's hand. If the child takes the finger, the caregiver can take that as a welcoming cue to interact.

- If your child will be going to a daycare, ask if you and your child can come visit before your baby's first day. Follow the matchmaking steps above. Whenever your baby meets the daycare caregiver for the first time... it's important your baby sees you interact with the caregiver first. Any amount of time a parent can spend at the daycare before dropping off their child for the first time... will greatly reduce stress.
- It's common for childcare providers to suggest that it's best for the parent to leave quickly... and that the child will be "fine" once the parent is gone. While this may appear to be the case, it's important for you to understand why. When the brain senses a threat, like being separated from its primary attachment(s)... it will put up defenses, maintaining energy only for basic functions. This will make the baby appear calm, when in reality they are in survival mode.

"This is basic functioning. This is what is fooling the researchers, is fooling the paediatricians, is fooling everyone..."

-Dr. Gordon Neufeld

Breastfeeding Parents need to make a plan for their baby to be able to feed while with the caregiver.

Important note: the breastfeeding parent does NOT need to make changes to their feeding relationship to make way for alternatives. Rather, an alternative needs to be added.

Considerations:

- Will the breastfeeding parent be able to pump and store breastmilk at work?
- Does the caregiver or daycare agree to store the breast milk properly?
- If you will not be providing pumped milk to the caregiver or provider have you decided on an alternative?
- If your baby will not take milk from a bottle you can try offering a sippy cup or an open cup.
- If you are still nursing at night and would like to continue after returning to work... this is a great way to maintain supply.
- Offering a long feed upon returning home is a great way to maintain supply... reconnect... and support any emotions that are likely to surface after reconnecting.

Napping at Daycare:

It's common for parents to worry about how their baby will fall asleep at daycare. Especially if they are typically nursed to sleep or have a particular way they like to fall asleep.

It makes sense that you should get your child used to falling asleep... in the way the caregiver will be putting them to sleep.

However, this is NOT the case. It's important not to cause extra stress by trying to make this change to your routine at home.

A child will NOT expect to fall asleep in the same way with the new caregiver as they do with their parents. They will build new patterns and routines with their caregiver.

Continuing your usual routine at home will give your child more stability through the transition.

Expectations About How Your Child Will Act:

- It's likely your child will have more night wakes during this transition. It's important to meet this need for connection, and understand it will pass as a new routine is established. A partner or other members of your attachment village can be very helpful during this time. Delegate household tasks, outsource, or let it go, when possible.
- Unfortunately most cultures have a gross misunderstanding about how children should act... especially with each other. Babies and young children are extremely immature and their brains are not capable of sharing... taking turns... or expressing understanding and kindness to others. Expecting these things is very unreasonable. It isn't until age 5-7... or 7-9 for highly sensitive kids... that the brain is developed enough to interact in more socially acceptable ways. Until then, children shouldn't be held responsible for impulsivity and other "bad" behaviors. They are simply not capable of acting any differently.

Tips to ease the transition:

- Build a bond with a comfort item. Since babies attach through the senses in the first year... having a comfort item that they associate with their parent can be immensely helpful. In the weeks leading up to the transition, the parent can wear the item in their shirt or even spill breastmilk on it. Give your child time to attach to the item before the transition begins. Your child

will be able to feel connected to you through your scent on the comfort item.

- Consider any items you can take that will make your child feel connected to their sleep space at home.
- It is worth mentioning again, the best way you can prepare your child for this change... is by engaging their attachment instincts with their new caregiver. Show your child that you feel comfortable with, trust, and are confident in their caregiver.
- Keep the existing routine outside of this transition as intact as possible.
- Focus on as much connection as possible before/after work and on days off.
- Keep activities outside of family connection time to a minimum when possible.
- Offer as much distraction free connection time as possible.
- If families bedshare, continuing during this transition is a wonderful way to offer connection... that is no longer possible during the day. Facing separation for most of the day, and then for the whole night is a tremendous amount of separation for a baby. Cosleeping (same room) or bedsharing (same bed) is a great way to reconnect.
- It's important to **bridge all separation**, never sneak out or leave without saying goodbye. This is startling to babies and children. Instead, bridge separation by focusing on the next connection. "I can't wait to have dinner together after I pick you up." "Let's take a bath together and/or snuggle when we get home tonight."
- Be empathetic to your child, this is a huge change for them. If you are feeling frustrated, acknowledge this feeling. Call on your village of attachment when you can. It's important to take care of your own needs, you can't support your child with an empty tank.

Reconnection After Pick-up:

- As I mentioned earlier, your child's defenses will go up while they are away from you . This is normal and a good thing! Our brain's job is to protect us. You may notice this in younger babies as fussy and cranky behavior.... older children may seem angry (and take it out on you.)
- For the first hour or so after pick-up, prepare to support a lot of emotion as the defenses come down. Again, it's a good thing that the defenses go up to protect them from the vulnerability of being away from their attachment figures. All is well as long as the defenses come down once reunited with the parents. Supporting your child's emotion calmly and completely... will allow them to adapt and come to terms with the change.
- Do your best to stay off your phone and avoid other distractions during this time with your child. Your physical presence isn't enough, you need to be present and mindful.
- Play is a fun way to connect with your child in the evenings. It's important to follow your child's lead, and not make rules or direct the play. Free play is a great way for children to explore the big emotions they are facing. Focusing on making this time special will be a wonderful benefit to your child.

Always remember, you are the only expert on your unique child. You are their advocate. Always follow your intuition, it's there for a reason.