

Going Back to Work? Know Your Rights

It's a fact: most parents of new babies will return to work sometime in the first year after their baby is born. This can be a difficult transition for many parents, especially if you don't know your rights as a working parent. The good news is that you do have rights under federal and state laws.

First, it is important to understand your rights in the workplace, especially when it comes to breastfeeding. If you're breastfeeding, your employer must provide you time and a place to pump breast milk. According to the Break Time for Nursing Mothers Law, employers have to give breastfeeding mothers extra time for pumping that's not part of their regular break. They also have to provide a dedicated space. This space must not be a bathroom, but a private area for nursing mothers with seating and electrical outlets.

There may also be other laws in your state covering breastfeeding rights. Make sure to ask your HR department or supervisor for a copy of any policies your company has on breastfeeding, so you fully understand your rights. If you can, start the conversation with your employer about accommodations to pump before you go on maternity leave. This will give your supervisor time to plan and educate your co-workers about pumping breaks.

If your employer is not giving you the time and space to pump, discuss your concerns with your human resources department. Parenting also comes with many new responsibilities, and many returning parents are concerned about facing discrimination or losing ground at work. This type of discrimination is called Family Responsibility Discrimination.

There is no federal law against family discrimination, but laws like the Family and Medical Leave Act and Equal Pay Act do provide some protections. Don't be afraid to talk to your Human Resources department if you have questions or concerns about the laws that relate to you.

Remember, to make the transition back to work smooth, know your rights. Do your homework, prepare, and make sure your employer can accommodate your new role as a working mom.

For more information on federal laws, visit the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission at www.eeoc.gov.