

Dear Mama

Returning to Work While Staying Connected

A gentle guide for mothers navigating the transition
back to work



A gift for you from Suzanne Ducharme MacFarlane, MS CCC-SLP

Dear Mama,

If returning to work feels harder than you expected, you are not failing.

If you feel:

- excited and devastated
- grateful and resentful
- capable and uncertain
- relieved and heartbroken

you are not alone.

You are not losing yourself.



You are becoming.

Motherhood changes us.

And the woman returning to work is not the same woman who left.

This transition is more than logistical.

It is emotional.

Physical.

Neurological.

Relational.

And through it all, you and your baby are learning something new:

How to stay deeply connected while growing.



Why Do I Feel So Different?

There is nothing “wrong” with you. Your body and brain have experienced one of the greatest transformations of your life. As you prepare to return to work, you may notice changes in your emotions, energy, memory and sense of self.

These experiences are common- and they make sense.

🌿 **Hormones-** A steep drop in estrogen and progesterone after birth create changes in the nervous system that can increase hyper vigilance and anxiety.

🌿 **Sleep-** Helping baby find a routine for wake and sleep windows can take a toll on your ability to get the rest you need for recovery from birth itself and for your return to work. This is also impacted by your overall health, and the number of children you have.

🌿 **Stress response-** The hormone changes mentioned above actually change your brain and make you more prone to stress responses; your brain and body are always on alert to protect your baby. Stress and hormones can also disrupt your digestive system, leading to discomfort and challenges getting the nutrition you need for yourself and your baby.

🌿 **Brain function-** Hormone changes and lack of adequate restful sleep combined with sensory overload and lack of mental space can make clear thinking and remembering more difficult. Nervous system dysregulation also makes it harder to access the kind of thinking skills associated with good decision making, executive function and memory.

🌿 **Identity-** Having a baby changes how you see yourself, how you relate to your spouse or partner, and your children. It can also impact how you relate to your own mother/parents and those kinds of changes can be stressful. In addition, parental leave and extended time away from your identity as a working woman can change how you perceive the importance of work and your role in your business or company.

🌿 **The nervous system-** the brain is constantly processing information from your internal and external worlds. Feelings of overwhelm or overload, intense emotions and how you think about yourself as a woman and mother can have a profound impact on how regulated you are. This in turn impacts how you think about your ability to meet all the demands of your new identity.

Pause and Reflect

As you read the previous page...

What surprised you most? _____

What feels most true for you today? _____

One thing I would like to be gentler with myself about is _____

The Good news is:

Regulation begins in the body. With a feeling of safety.

And your body has been through an extraordinary transformation.

Your healing experience may be impacted by many factors:

A challenging pregnancy.

A traumatic birth.

A NICU stay.

Medical challenges of your own.

Pause a moment to reflect on the journey you have been on so far. Place your hand on your heart and take a breath for all that you have experienced already.

The Woman I Was and... The Mother I Am Becoming

You are not meant to return unchanged.

You may be:

More sensitive.

More protective.

More emotional.

More intuitive.

More aware of your limits....

These are not weaknesses.

They are evidence of profound change.



A Moment for YOU:

What parts of me have grown since the birth of this baby? _____

What do I want my child to learn from watching me? _____

Where am I needing more support right now? _____

What do I want to feel when I am with my baby? _____

Your Baby Still Knows You

Mothers often worry:

Will my baby forget me?

Will someone else become more important?

And the answer is:

No.



Your baby knows:

Your smell.

Your heartbeat.

Your voice.

Your rhythm.

Your touch.

Connection is not measured by:

Hours

It is built through:

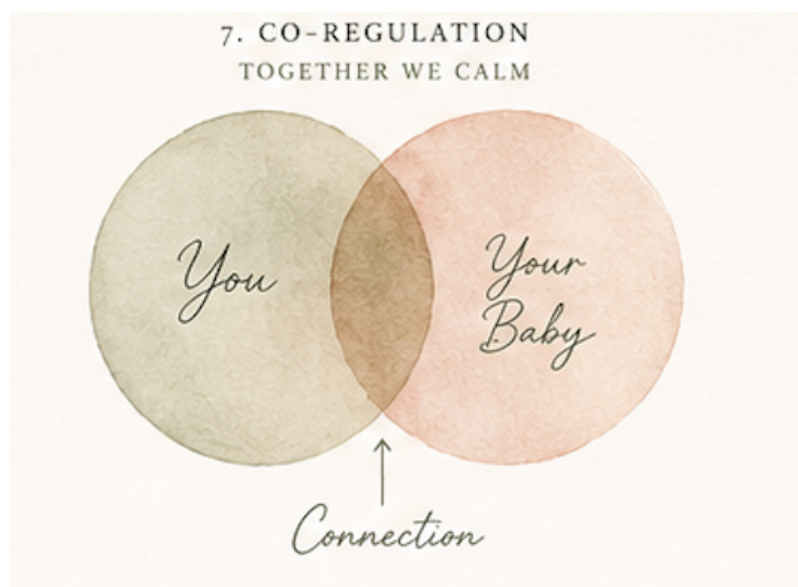
Attunement.

Repair.

Presence.

Love.

The simple act of holding your baby and looking into each other's eyes can bring comfort and profound peace. These small moments can remind you of who you are to your baby.



A Moment to reflect...



A moment for you:

What am I afraid I will lose by returning to work? _____

What strengths has motherhood awakened in me? _____

What does my baby need most from me? _____

What do I need most from myself? _____

WHAT IS CO-REGULATION? How we interact with and impact the nervous system of another person. It can be spouse-spouse, parent-child, even boss-worker.

When mothers feel:

Anxious.

Overwhelmed.

Guilty.

Disconnected.

Babies feel:

Changes in tone.

Pace.

Breathing.

Energy.

This is NOT:

To create guilt.

It is to create hope.

Because:

When mothers regulate,

babies feel safer too.

The nervous system is not a solo act.

Mother and baby are constantly influencing one another.

Regulation grows in relationship.

Supporting your nervous system

Not perfection. Not more hustle. Small moments.

BREATHE- Your breath can activate a sense of safety. Use it often.

Long exhale breathing: Make your outbreath as slow and long as possible.



Inhale 4

Exhale 8

Repeat.

MOVE

Walk.

Stretch.

Dance with your baby.

Gentle movement calms the nervous system.

CONNECT

Hold your baby skin to skin.

Sit quietly together.

Make eye contact.

You regulate each other.

RESTORE

Learn to say: Not now.

Ask for help.

Lower expectations.

Cultivate time alone, even for just a few minutes per day.

Make time for friends and support network, but on your terms.

Engage in spiritual practice, if that is supportive to you.

Meditate, journal, listen to music and get fresh air as much as possible.

Rest is productive. Rest is imperative, especially when physical and mental demands increase with the return to work.

Today's Intention:

Today I will care for myself by _____



A moment to reflect:

What does rest look like for you? _____

What increases your feelings of safety and comfort? _____

When I notice I am overwhelmed, I will:

- **Breathe**
- **Go outside**
- **Ask for help**
- **Drink water**
- **Call someone**
- **Take a break**
- **Other**

When You Need More Support

You do not have to navigate this alone.

Support might look like:

Friends

Family

Therapists

Support groups

Lactation support

Medical providers

Mindfulness practices

Movement

Parent coaching

And perhaps most importantly:

Someone who reminds you:

You are doing better than you think.

Pause and reflect:

Who gives me support in my tough moments? Who sees the whole picture of who I am as a mother? _____

Where am I longing for more support? _____

Making the Return to Work

Many mothers fear the transition back to work.

The hours. The commute.

The time away from baby. Daycare drop off.

Navigating breast-feeding or pumping at work.

The attitude of the boss or co-workers.

It can feel like a lot.

But there are things you can do.

Getting Ready to return to work

Before my first day, I will:

- Pack your bag and baby's bag the night before.
- Plan for meals, snacks and hydration.
- Do a dry run before your first day. Catch the glitches before they happen and adjust.
- Give yourself extra time.
- Know your workplace rights.
- Practice your regulation strategies.
- Remember that anticipation is often harder than the transition itself and that my baby and I are learning together.

From my heart to yours....

For more than 30 years, I've had the privilege of walking alongside babies, children, and the people who love them.

Throughout my career as a speech-language pathologist, infant feeding specialist, craniosacral therapist, and certified infant massage educator, I've come to believe something simple but profound:

Development unfolds through relationship.

I believe babies are communicating long before they have words.

And parents grow in confidence when someone helps them understand what their baby has been saying all along.

If this guide reminded you to slow down, breathe and trust yourself just a little more... then it has already done exactly what I hoped it would.

You are not meant to navigate this season alone.

Warmly,

Suzanne Ducharme MacFarlane, MS, CCC-SLP

Suzanne

Continue the Conversation

Whether you are navigating feeding, communication, regulation, or simply hoping to feel more connected during this season of your life, I would be honored to walk alongside you.

 www.Suzanne-Ducharme.com

 Suzanne.Ducharme44@gmail.com

Thank you for allowing me to be a part of your story.

