



Expectant and New parents guide

A practical guide to support ACU staff through
their parenthood journey

Contents page

Acknowledgement of Country	Page 3
A Prayer for Parents	Page 3
Introduction	Page 4
Stage 1 - Preparing for parenthood	Pages 5 – 12
Sharing your news with colleagues	Page 6
Attending appointments while working	Page 6
Pregnancy at work	Page 6
Unplanned cessation of pregnancy or leave	Page 7
Leave offerings	Page 8
Government services and financial assistance	Page 10
External resources for Stage 1	Page 10
Stage 1: Preparing for parenthood – staff checklist	Page 11
Stage 1: Preparing for parenthood – supervisor checklist	Page 12
Stage 2 – Becoming a parent	Pages 13 – 19
During parental leave	Page 14
Caring for baby or child	Page 14
If you feel overwhelmed	Page 14
Keeping in touch days	Page 14
Change in circumstances	Page 15
Registering birth and government Medicare	Page 16
External resources for Stage 2	Page 16
Stage 2: Becoming a parent – staff checklist	Page 18
Stage 2: Becoming a parent – supervisor checklist	Page 19
Stage 3 – Return to work following leave	Page 20 – 28
Preparing for your return following leave	Page 21
Notice of return following leave	Page 21
Request to vary working hours or FTE	Page 22
Flexible work arrangements	Page 22
Creating a work plan	Page 23
Childcare arrangements	Page 23
Salary, leave entitlements and superannuation	Page 24
Other forms of leave	Page 24
Family additions	Page 24
Supporting parents at work	Page 25
Some final words	Page 25
External resources for Stage 3	Page 26
Stage 3: Return to work following leave - staff checklist	Page 27
Stage 3: Return to work following leave – supervisor checklist	Page 28

Acknowledgment of Country

ACU acknowledges and pay our respects to the First Peoples, the traditional custodians of the lands and waterways. We recognise their spiritual and ongoing cultural connection to Country. We respectfully acknowledge Elders past and present and thank them for their wisdom and guidance as we walk in their footsteps.

A Prayer for Parents

Loving God,
You are the giver of all we possess, the source of all of our blessings.
We thank and praise you.

Thank you for the gift of children.

Help us to set boundaries for them,
and yet encourage them to explore.
Give us the strength and courage to treat each day as a fresh start.

May our children come to know you, the one true God,
and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

May your Holy Spirit help them to grow in faith, hope, and love,
so they may know peace, truth, and goodness.

May their ears hear your voice,
May their eyes see your presence in all things.
May their lips proclaim your word.
May their hearts be your dwelling place.
May their hands do works for charity.
May their feet walk in the way of Jesus Christ, your Son and our Lord.

Amen.

Introduction

Congratulations!

What an exciting time this is as you embark on parenthood. Whether your journey will be birth parenting, adoption or foster care, this guide has been developed with you in mind.

This guide and our policies are underpinned by our mission and values that are grounded in our respect for the dignity of all people and the advancement of the common good. The aim is to support you to navigate becoming a parent and achieve balance between work and your family responsibilities.

For those new to parenthood, this guide provides answers to questions you may have – and those you may not have thought of yet. While not exhaustive, it provides relevant information and a range of online resources that will assist you in navigating this new stage of your life.

For those who are already parents, this guide is a live library of information and resources you can tap into for support as needed.

**"The joy of children makes their parents' hearts leap and opens up the future.
Children are the joy of the family and of society"
- Pope Francis 2015**

Stage 1 – Preparing for parenthood

So where do you begin?

There's a lot to consider before a baby or child arrives while you manage work and other commitments.

This section includes relatable topics to assist you with preparing for the baby or child's arrival.

It includes information, tips, online resources and checklists to help you with planning and making informed decisions.



Sharing your news with colleagues

Welcoming a new addition to your family is personal and it's for you to decide the best time to share your news at work. A confidential conversation with your supervisor early on is recommended so they can support you and provide guidance through this initial phase. Each person's experience is different, and communicating openly will ensure your supervisor understands and accommodates your needs, such as applying for leave, appointments and check-ups, and any workplace adjustments that may be required.

Staff tip: If you are applying for parental leave, the [ACU Parental Leave Policy](#) advises that no less than 10 weeks' notice is required or as early as practicable for the adoption/permanent placement of a child. Get to know your parental leave entitlements at the 'Leave offerings' section of this guide.

Attending appointments while working

As part of your preparation for parenthood, you may have to attend medical appointments and health consults; appointments to prepare for adoption and fostering; or be a partner wanting to attend antenatal appointments, which may require time off work.

There are generous leave provisions set out in the [ACU Staff Enterprise Agreement](#) and [ACU Personal Leave Policy](#) that you can utilise. Speak with your supervisor about any upcoming appointments so you can confirm your attendance ahead of time and apply for the applicable leave.

Supervisor tip: Be proactive and engage with the staff member about their plans. Know what leave provisions are available and offer this information upfront as they may have single or regular appointments to attend. Being supportive will create a positive experience for the staff member's parent journey.

Pregnancy at work

Your individual experience as an expectant parent can require adjustments to your working arrangements to ensure you maintain your wellbeing during conception and/or pregnancy. Discuss your support needs with your supervisor which could include the following options:

- New or changed flexible work arrangements, such as reducing your work fraction, working remotely or a change in start and finish times.
- Personal leave due to pregnancy related illness.

- Adjustments to accommodate any physical hazards or risks that may impact being able to work onsite or remotely which may require workplace adjustments or transfer to another role for the duration of the pregnancy.

More information about support during pregnancy is available in Section 5 of the [ACU Parental Leave Policy](#).

ACU's Employee Assistance Program is available to you and your immediate family members to access at **no cost**. [Acacia EAP](#) provides a 24-hour confidential counselling service and health and wellbeing resources about subjects including [Perinatal Mental Health](#). Contact **Acacia EAP** on **1300 364 273** or online.

Staff tips: If you are applying for parental leave, the [ACU Parental Leave Policy](#) advises that no less than 10 weeks' notice is required or as early as practicable for the adoption/permanent placement of a child. Get to know your parental leave entitlements at the 'Leave offerings' section of this guide.

Invest time in looking after your health and wellbeing throughout your pregnancy or parenthood journey by maintaining a healthy diet, exercising, and spending time with family and friends. Seek independent advice from your medical or health practitioner on a plan that is right for you.

The university is committed to providing a safe and respectful working environment free from discrimination, harassment and bullying, as these behaviours can impact psychological and overall wellbeing. Speak with your supervisor or with People and Capability if you experience unwanted workplace behaviour at any stage of your parenting journey.

Supervisor tip: Establish regular catch ups with your staff member and determine if any support at work, reasonable adjustments or management of hazards at work are needed.

Unplanned cessation of pregnancy or leave

Sometimes things don't go as planned. If you and your partner experience the loss of a child during pregnancy, at the time of the birth or in the period after the birth, leave is available during this difficult time. Every person's experience and needs are different, and you are encouraged to speak confidentially with your supervisor or People and Capability to seek support and guidance.

Leave options in the [ACU Parental Leave Policy](#) and [ACU Compassionate Leave Policy](#) include:
Before commencing parental leave:

- For continuing and fixed term staff - 10 days personal leave in addition to any existing personal leave entitlement; and any existing recreation (annual) leave and/or long service leave.
- For casual or sessional staff - unpaid compassionate leave (pending eligibility).

After parental leave has commenced:

- For continuing and fixed term staff - leave type and number of weeks is set out in the [ACU Staff Enterprise Agreement](#).
- For continuing and fixed term staff - 2 days compassionate leave following the death of a member of an immediate family, household or relative.
- For casual or sessional staff - unpaid compassionate leave (pending eligibility).

Staff tip: It's important to look after yourself during this difficult time and to lean on your family, friends and social groups for support. You can access confidential independent counselling through Acacia EAP, speak to your GP or refer to Services Australia for support with [grief and loss](#). This short video from [Grief Australia](#) may resonate with how you feel right now and lets you know you're not alone.

Supervisor tip: It's important to be supportive during this difficult time, while at the same time respecting that people have different needs and ways of coping with grief. It is recommended you make contact via email or text in the first instance so the staff member can decide the level of support and or contact they'd prefer. Support offered could include:

- Checking on the staff member's wellbeing.
- Reminding them the EAP is available 24-hours a day to provide confidential support if it's needed.
- Providing practical assistance with issues such as leave entitlement queries or managing workload as required.

Leave offerings

In planning your leave, our generous leave provisions outlined in the [ACU Staff Enterprise Agreement](#), [ACU Parental Leave Policy](#) and [ACU Personal Leave Policy](#) should be explored before submitting an application for leave.

Eligibility for parental leave is based on you having responsibility as the primary carer of a child whether you are a birth parent, adopting parent or carer following permanent placement. Leave eligibility is based on your employment type and years of service. Other forms of paid leave may also be taken in conjunction with parental leave.

Leave type	Employment type	Length of completed paid continuous service	Paid leave entitlement	Unpaid leave entitlement	Further unpaid parental leave
Primary Carer	Continuing and fixed term staff	Less than 52 weeks	The greater of 8 weeks or 1 week for each completed calendar month of continuous service at ordinary salary rate	The remainder of the period up to 52 weeks	52 weeks
		52 weeks but less than 104 weeks	12 weeks at ordinary salary rate	40 weeks	52 weeks
		104 or more weeks	36 weeks at ordinary salary rate	16 weeks	52 weeks
Primary Carer	Casual and sessional staff	Engaged on a regular and systematic basis for a period of at least 12 months		52 weeks	52 weeks subject to written approvals
Foster Parent	Continuing and fixed term staff	Upon commencement	6 weeks at half pay on date of placement		
Second Parent	Continuing and fixed term staff	Upon commencement (to be taken within 12 weeks of birth, adoption or placement)	15 days at ordinary salary rate from date of birth, adoption or placement		
Couple	A couple is entitled to one paid leave entitlement, dependant on length of completed paid continuous service. Refer to the ACU Parental Leave Policy .				

Staff tips: To work within a six-week period of your expected birth due date, provide your supervisor with a medical certificate to confirm it is medically safe for you to continue working. Discuss your leave plans with your supervisor **before** submitting a leave application in Staff Connect.

For further information about leave provisions log a general [Service Central](#) enquiry.

To calculate your leave balances at a future date, log into your [Staff Connect](#), select 'Leave', enter a future date and hit the 'Predict' button to view estimated leave balances.

Supervisor tips: Start workforce planning once you know the leave dates. Consider if the work can be absorbed by the existing team or if a backfill is required for the period of the leave. Where possible, fill via an internal expression of interest process. This can be promoted as a staff development opportunity (internal secondment, higher duties allowance, an identified career development goal from a team member's performance plan) before sourcing an external candidate.

Establish how you will stay in contact with the staff member and how this will work (ie. method of contact, contact details and what information will be provided).

Government services and financial assistance

It's important to start looking into Commonwealth government financial assistance and other supports to assist in managing your financial situation prior to birth or adoption. The [Raising kids](#) section of the [Services Australia](#) website is a good starting point.

Staff tip: Log into your MyGov account in [Services Australia](#) to research government services and financial support that you may be entitled to before the baby or child arrives.

External resources for Stage 1

- [Pregnancy Birth and Baby](#): Australian Government [Department of Health and Aged Care](#)
- [Raising kids](#): Site offers services and information to help with the cost of raising a child.
- [BabyCenter](#): Community based, resources on all these associated with parenthood.
- CatholicCare/ CentreCare: Loving care to all members of community. Locations: [Ballarat Diocese](#) | [Brisbane Diocese](#) | [Canberra Archdiocese](#) | [Melbourne Archdiocese](#) | [Parramatta Diocese](#) | [Sydney Archdiocese](#)
- [Gidget Foundation](#): Expectant parents from First Nations Communities.
- [Rainbow Families](#): Organisation supporting LGBTQ+ parents and their children.
- [Indigenous.gov.au](#): Supporting First Nations mothers and babies.
- [Parenting with a disability](#)
- [Raising Children](#): Including adoption, children living with autism or a disability.
- [Birthready](#): Geared for expecting dads and partners, community based.
- [PANDA](#): Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia site for families.
- [Intercountry Adoption Australia](#): Guide to overseas adoption.
- [Grief Australia](#): Providing help and fostering a greater recognition of grief.
- [Raising Children Network](#): New baby (home) checklist and things to consider.

Stage 1: Preparing for parenthood – staff checklist

Print out and tick (if needed) to plan your way through Stage 1

- Read and become familiar with the [ACU Parental Leave Policy](#)
- Educate yourself on leave available to attend appointments [ACU Personal Leave Policy](#)
- If applicable* - consult with my supervisor on any workplace support or adjustments I might need (*where relevant provide medical documentation to support your request*)
- Speak with my GP or another health practitioner for advice on a plan to maintain my own health and wellbeing
- If relevant* - Seek support from the Employee Assistance Program available for me and my immediate family members
- Run a leave calculation prediction in Staff Connect to check my available leave balances
- Submit my parental leave application with at least 10 weeks' notice of the birth or as early as practicable for the adoption/ permanent placement of a child, including certification to support the request
- Prepare a work handover document one to three months prior to leave
- Return work equipment (eg. laptop, mobile phone) to supervisor on last day of work
- Check what government assistance is available to me, including financial assistance
- Contact [Service Central](#) by call, live chat or log a general enquiry for more information

Stage 1: Preparing for parenthood – supervisor checklist

Print out and tick (as needed) for a discussion with your staff member during Stage 1

- Organise initial meeting/ conversation with staff member about their leave plans and expected due date (pregnancy) or child adoption/ permanent placement date
- Become familiar with the [ACU Parental Leave Policy](#), [ACU Personal Leave Policy](#) and [ACU Flexible Working Arrangements Policy](#)
- Start workforce planning and consider:
 1. If the work can be absorbed by the team (*assess current team workload and priorities*)
 2. Temporarily backfilling the position through:
 - (i) internal expression of interest process (*promote as a development opportunity*)
 - (ii) recruitment (*internal only opportunity for existing ACU staff or external advertising for candidate sourcing*)
- Consider any support or reasonable workplace adjustments needed during the pregnancy. The [WHS and wellbeing website](#) can provide more information or lodge a [Service Central](#) enquiry for assistance from People and Capability
- Check that present workload/ tasks are manageable and assist where needed to prioritise work
- Set up regular check-in appointments with the staff member.
How are they doing? Do they require dates/ time off to attend appointments? Are there any hazards at work that need to be managed?
- 10 weeks before leave commences, ensure the parental leave application is submitted (with certification) and is approved (*for the adoption/ permanent placement of a child, application to be lodged as early as practicable*)
- The return to work date following parental leave is recorded in the calendar and to schedule contact with the staff member at least one month prior the return date
- Establish how contact/ communication will occur with the staff member while they're on leave (*confirm their preferred method of email, mobile, text message, other*)
- One month before leave commences, meet with the staff member clarify work in train, how the work might be handed over and preparation of a handover document
- One week before leave commences, schedule a time to meet on work handover items, hold a celebratory morning tea, lunch or virtual event with the team to wish them well
- Last day before leave commences, catch up on any final work items and the return of any equipment

Stage 2 – Becoming a parent

How exciting! Your baby or child has arrived and is being welcomed into your family and community.

Becoming a parent is a major life changing event and you should give yourself time to adjust.

However, it can be helpful to stay connected with work in a way that best suits you.

This section of the guide provides you with information to traverse this new chapter of your life and will aid your transition back to the workplace.



During parental leave

There is a lot happening at this stage of your parenting journey, and you should give yourself time to settle into your new routine and enjoy this time with your baby or child. This section provides you with some practical information to assist you with being a new parent and support your transition back into the workplace.

Caring for baby or child

Several external organisations offer information, support and guidance for new parents on breastfeeding and feeding, sleeping and playtime routines. Here's some to get you started:

- [Tresillian](#): Parenting advice and support on breastfeeding, sleeping and settling, post-natal depression and nutrition.
- [Karitane](#): Parenting advice and support on breastfeeding, routines, sleeping and settling, development, adjusting to parenthood.
- [Raising Children Network](#): Parenting website has resources and videos on breastfeeding, bottle feeding, behaviours, sleeping and settling, safety, premature and sick babies, play and learning.

Staff tip: Remember to look after your own health and wellbeing – get some sleep, eat well, take a break, go for a walk. It may feel like a 24-hour cycle at first, but it won't be for too much longer. Speak to your GP or health practitioner if you have any concerns.

If you feel overwhelmed

Your life has changed and for some new parents in ways they weren't prepared for. This can impact your physical and/or mental wellbeing. Remember you aren't alone, and help is available. Options for support you may consider include:

- Your family and friends – reach out and speak with them about what you need or how you are feeling.
- Your GP or other health professional.
- Acacia EAP provided by ACU – three free confidential sessions are available to you and your immediate family to use ([Acacia EAP](#) | [Perinatal Mental Health](#)).
- [Health Direct](#) – offering free health advice, health information, and the location of hospital and health service providers.

Keeping in touch days

Time off from work may pass quickly and before you know it, you are due to return back to work. Parents can find the transition back to work much easier when they stay connected to the workplace.

Keeping in contact with your supervisor and work in general while on parental leave through emails, calls or visits is encouraged and the timing and frequency is up to you. This includes deciding whether you will be checking your work emails for part or all of the parental leave period. You and your supervisor can agree to a regular time each month (for example) for a phone call or coffee catchup or agreeing to important work information to be emailed to your personal email address (if you are not viewing work emails). Where you have agreed on a contact plan before the baby or child arrives, this can be adjusted if needed.

You have the option to access 10 paid 'keeping in touch' days as outlined in the [ACU Parental Leave Policy](#) and [Fair Work Act 2009](#). Keeping in touch days provide the opportunity to stay connected to the workplace by:

- maintaining contact with your supervisor and colleagues
- refreshing skills, attend training or professional development
- keeping up to date with organisational updates or team changes
- undertake discrete work activities
- participating in team planning events or conferences prior to your official return to work.

Additional benefits to you include remaining connected with your professional networks and the life you had prior to baby or child arriving, limiting the potential of feeling isolated at home, and assisting with the transition to work.

Eligible staff (continuing and fixed term) can decide to use the keeping in touch days from the date of the birth, adoption or permanent placement of your baby or child for a period of up to 24 months but not before at least 14 days after the birth, adoption or placement date. Keeping in touch days are taken as a full day (seven hours) and paid at your normal rate of salary. Your supervisor can lodge an application for payment of this day, as a general enquiry through Service Central. For more details about keeping in touch days refer to [ACU Parental Leave Policy](#).

Supervisor tips: You will need to submit the keeping in touch leave day through a Service Central general enquiry for payment. Payment is made at the staff member's nominal salary and for a full day (seven hours). A total of 10 days may be submitted, for a period of up to 24-months from the date of birth, adoption or placement. If the dates were included in the parental leave application, submit these ahead of time.

If you and your staff member have agreed to stay connected, remember to set up regular contact times with the staff member. It is your responsibility to keep them informed of significant workplace announcements (eg. change plans, changes in work distribution, whole-of-

Change in circumstances

Sometimes we may need to vary the leave application submitted. In these situations, you are encouraged to contact your supervisor as soon as practicable (or at least four weeks prior to the planned return to work date) to discuss the change in circumstances so that it can be approved ahead of time.

The change in circumstances may include:

- Varying the return to work date: where an earlier date is being sought, this should be put in writing after discussion with your supervisor to allow approval and adjustment to any backfill arrangements that may be in place.
- Extending parental or other leave: an application should be submitted in [Staff Connect](#) after discussion with your supervisor. Refer to 'Leave offerings' on page 8 of this guide. Remember - you will accrue annual and long service leave, where you are entitled to it, during parental leave.
- Request to vary working hours: if you plan to request a change to working hours or fraction (temporary or permanent) that is different to your substantive work arrangements, a discussion with your supervisor will need to occur in the first instance. Your supervisor will consider the request against the operational needs of the workplace, and approvals will be required. Refer to page 22 of this guide for more details.
- Flexible Work Arrangement - refer to page 22 of this guide for more details.

Staff tip: If you require more information, log a [Service Central](#) general enquiry or phone (07) 3623 7272. If leave is being extended, check your leave balances by running a leave calculation prediction in [Staff Connect](#).

Supervisor tip: You need to reasonably consider any flexible work request following parental leave as the staff member now has family/ carers responsibilities and has a right to request flexible work under the Fair Work Act National Employment Standards. If you have any concerns or questions, contact [Service Central](#) to seek advice **before** finalising any decision.

Registering birth and government Medicare

A gentle reminder to [register baby's birth](#) so you can apply for a baby certificate and government financial assistance (parental leave, dad and partner pay, and newborn supplement). You would have received this information in your birth hospital parent pack. For registration associated with adoption or permanent placement, speak with your service provider.

Baby or child will need to be enrolled with Medicare as soon as possible. Visit [Medicare](#) for further information.

External resources for Stage 2

- [Australian Breastfeeding Association](#) | [Tresillian](#) | [Karitane](#): Parenting advice and support on breastfeeding, sleeping and settling, post-natal depression, nutrition and more.
- [Raising Children Network](#): Parenting site advising on breast and bottle feeding, behaviours, sleeping and settling, safety, premature and sick babies, play and learning;

through pregnancy to teens, adoption and support for parents with children living with autism or a disability.

- ACU's [Acacia EAP](#): Three free confidential sessions for you and your immediate family.
- [Health Direct](#): Offering free health advice, health information, and the location of hospital and health service providers.
- [Single Parenting](#) through pregnancy, birth and baby.
- [BabyCenter](#): Community based, resources on all these associated with parenthood.
- CatholicCare/ CentreCare: Loving care to all members of community. Locations: [Ballarat Diocese](#) | [Brisbane Diocese](#) | [Canberra Archdiocese](#) | [Melbourne Archdiocese](#) | [Parramatta Diocese](#) | [Sydney Archdiocese](#)
- [LGBTQIA+](#) and [Rainbow Families](#): Supporting our LGBTQ+ parents and their children.
- [First Nations](#) and [Indigenous.gov.au](#): Supporting First Nations mothers and babies.
- [Parenting with a disability](#)
- [Kidsafe](#): 24-hour line with registered nurses providing advice.
- [Raising kids](#): Australian Government Services Australia site offering payment and services information, to help with the cost of raising a child.
- [MensLine Australia](#) free telephone and online counselling.
- [BeyondBlue](#): Helping and assisting on one's mental journey.
- Parentline across the country: [NSW](#), [Qld and NT](#), [Vic](#), [ACT](#).
- [PANDA](#): Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia offers support for expecting parents through to growing families.

Stage 2: Becoming a parent – staff checklist

Print out and tick (if needed) to plan your way through Stage 2

- I've made contact with my supervisor
- For eligible staff* - I know how to access and use the 10 keeping in touch days
- If needed* - I know who to contact for additional support (refer to the list of external organisations on page 16 of this guide)
- Undertake a leave calculation prediction in Staff Connect to know my leave entitlements and balances
- Do I need to discuss my return to work options with my supervisor for a change in work arrangements, work pattern, leave dates, or return to work date before submitting the written request or form for approval?
- Apply for any government assistance that is available to me, as listed on pages 10 and 16 of this guide
- Register baby's birth and enrol in Medicare
- If needed* - I know what support services I can access
- If needed* - Contact Service Central or log an enquiry for more information

Stage 2: Becoming a parent - supervisor checklist

Print out and tick (as needed) for a discussion with your staff member during Stage 2

- The staff member shared their news (eg. baby has been born); check they are comfortable with you sharing this news with the team including photos
- Keeping in touch days: work with the staff member to schedule the 10 days and submit a Service Central request to have the days paid
- If communication and contact was agreed, set up regular dates/ times to catch up with the staff member through their leave (ie. a call, email, coffee catchup, inviting them onsite to attend a team lunch or morning tea)
- Communicate with the staff member about important organization wide or team announcements (such as change plans or a redirection of work priorities)
- Be familiar with [ACU Parental Leave Policy](#), [ACU Personal Leave Policy](#) and [ACU Flexible Working Arrangements Policy](#). Staff member may request a provision associated with their family responsibilities (*contact People and Capability Business Partner or People and Capability Services Team for advice*)
- Consider any reasonable request from the staff member to change a return to work date or extend parental leave
- Keep a calendar record of the return to work date, and one month prior commence return to work discussions and preparation

Stage 3 – Return to work following leave

You probably can't believe the time has passed so quickly!

This is the time when you introduce work back into your life after parental leave and will be seeking to find balance as a working parent.

This section of the guide provides information and resources to assist you with navigating being back at work and parenthood.



Preparing for your return following leave

Resuming work after such a momentous change in your life and a substantial period of time off, is a big adjustment and may feel daunting. This will look and feel different for each person, as priorities and commitments have shifted. Planning ahead and having discussions with your supervisor about what your return will look like will assist in supporting a smoother transition. This section provides guidance to assist your return to work.

Notice of return following leave

You are required to provide formal notice of your return date or intention not to return, a minimum of four weeks prior to your intended return date. Start with a conversation with your supervisor, that also covers any changes to your working arrangements or patterns, such as temporary changes to part time hours or flexible work arrangements. Following a conversation, the request also needs to be provided in writing. You may have already specified this date in your initial leave application, but you will need to notify if there are any changes to your original plan.

If you intend to resign at the end of your leave, you will need to discuss this with your supervisor as soon as possible, provide sufficient notice (“notice period” as stated in your employment contract) and submit an Employee Separation Form through Staff Connect. For further details about resignation and notice periods, refer to [ACU Notice of Resignation or Retirement Policy](#).

Staff tip: A primary carer returning from leave after the birth, adoption or fostering of a baby or child is entitled to return to their substantive position that they held (including location) prior to commencing this period of leave. Refer to the [ACU Staff Enterprise Agreement](#).

Supervisor tips: Confirm the staff member’s official return date no later than four weeks before the date. If you haven’t received this request, follow this up with your staff member.

Consider the following items when planning for their first day back at work:

- physical workspace is ready (computer, technology, access card, equipment)
- block out time in the calendar to spend with them on day one
- organise a welcome back morning tea with the team
- schedule regular calendar catchups
- assign a buddy/ transition work handover
- plan workload and item prioritisation.

Request to vary working hours or FTE

Upon the completion of leave, you have a right to return to the substantive position you held prior to commencing the leave as long as the period of leave does not exceed 104 weeks. You can return to the same hours and FTE you were previously working and if so, no action is required.

Alternatively, you may request to vary your working hours or FTE on a temporary or permanent basis. A discussion with your supervisor will need to occur in the first instance, and your supervisor will consider the request against the operational needs of the work area before approval is sought. A Request to Vary Form would be submitted through Staff Connect by your supervisor.

Flexible work arrangement

The [ACU Flexible Working Arrangements Policy](#) provides information about a staff member's right to request flexible work arrangements if they:

- need to care for a child who is school age or younger;
- have a child under the age of 18 who has a disability;
- are a carer;
- are a parent or have responsibility for care of a child following return from leave relating to the birth, adoption or foster of a child, or other.

You may request a flexible work arrangement when returning from parental leave that includes the following options:

- Variation to hours being worked.
- Change to the location of work (such as remote or working from home).
- Compressed working hours over a weekly or fortnightly pay period.
- Change in start or finish times to balance childcare arrangements.

All applications should detail the reason for the request and the duration being requested. The university has an obligation to consider the request and to provide the decision in writing, within 21 days. A request may only be refused on reasonable business grounds and these reasons are to be detailed in writing. For further details staff should refer to the [ACU Flexible Working Arrangements Policy](#).

Staff tip: Discuss your plans with your supervisor as soon as practicable **before** lodging a Flexible Work Arrangement form. These arrangements are typically for a period of up to 12 months at a time.

Supervisor tip: Under the [Fair Work Act](#) staff can apply for flexible work arrangements following a return from parental leave. You must provide the decision in writing **within 21** days of the request **and** the request may only be refused on reasonable business grounds. Contact Service Central with any questions **before** finalising a decision.

Creating a work plan

To prepare for your smooth transition from leave to work, you can discuss a work plan with your supervisor. This plan will record your return date and may include any of the following:

- A temporary or permanent request to vary hours or FTE.
- Flexible work arrangements including remote working (working from home), change in work patterns, staggered start/ finish times or change in work location.
- Gaining access to team or other online work sites (if access was temporarily changed or removed whilst on leave).
- Access to required work equipment (if these were handed in prior to the leave, such as laptop or work phone).
- Access to any physical spaces such as feeding rooms and parent facilities.
- Confirmation of work duties that will be resumed including any handover work items, student or research management load (if an academic staff member), setting realistic performance expectations and goals, work travel expectations, career and development planning, promotion planning (if an academic staff member) and any upskilling or training to return to role.
- If a job share work arrangement could be feasible.

Supervisor tip: If a return to work plan is requested, you will need to consider a range of factors that could include:

- Workload and work priorities.
- How to accommodate reasonable adjustments at work.
- Planning for regular breaks during the work day to access feeding rooms.

Childcare arrangements

Resuming work might mean you need to consider childcare arrangements and have these in place before your return. Childcare arrangements will be personal and specific to your own circumstances. Where you need to consider external childcare providers or centres, you are encouraged to make enquiries with them about enrolment or waitlists as soon as practicable.

If you're not across what providers or centres are in your area, the sites listed below are a useful starting point or consider contacting your local council or health care provider.

- [MyGov](#): Finding childcare.
- [Services Australia](#): Childcare providers.
- [Starting Blocks](#): First step into childhood education and care.

You may also qualify for government assistance with the financial cost of childcare ('[childcare subsidy](#)'). Visit [Services Australia](#) using your MyGov account, to enquire further.

Staff tip: In this digital age it's often possible to stay connected with your baby/ child while at work. Ask your childcare provider or centre if you can get updates via a call or an app during your breaks, that will help keep you up to date as to how your baby or child's day is going.

Salary, leave entitlements and superannuation

You will find that your salary (and superannuation contributions) remained the same while you were on leave unless a university-wide enterprise agreement salary increase was applied or you were due for a salary level increment during the period of approved paid leave, which means a salary increase. Additionally, you also continued to accrue leave entitlements (for example recreation or long service leave).

Leave taken at half pay, periods of unpaid leave, and any variances to work hours or FTE upon returning to work, will have an impact on your salary, superannuation contributions and leave entitlements. Log into your Staff Connect to check both your nominal salary rate (via your pay remittance) and leave balances, log a Service Central enquiry or phone for further information. **It is advisable that you make your own enquiries with your superannuation fund or personal financial advisor/accountant for financial advice or prior to make any changes.**

Other forms of leave

There might be occasions when you need to take time off work to:

- care and support a member of the immediate family or household due to unexpected personal illness or injury;
- care for a child on a pupil-free day (school term dates) up to four days per calendar year;
- care for a child or grandchild during the six-month period of date of birth, adoption of fostering; and/or taking care of the grandchild due to unexpected illness, injury or emergency.

Leave associated with these caring responsibilities, is set out in Section 3 of the [ACU Staff Enterprise Agreement](#) and [ACU Personal Leave Policy](#).

Family additions

If you are extending your family through pregnancy, adoption, permanent placement or fostering, another period of leave may be required. Refer to Stage 1 of this guide for 'Leave offerings' or the [ACU Staff Enterprise Agreement](#) for paid and unpaid leave entitlement provisions based on years of service. If you have fallen pregnant while still on leave, you are not required to return to work to be eligible for a new period of parental leave. Reach out to Service Central for more information.

Supporting parents at work

Here are a range of services you might consider accessing to assist you resume work.

- Parent and feeding room locations:
 - Ballarat | Building 106, adjacent to Forbes Student Centre
 - Brisbane | Building 206, Ground Floor, Room 07
 - Canberra | Blackfriars Building, Ground Floor, Room 05
 - Melbourne | The Mary Glowrey Building, Ground Floor near concierge
 - North Sydney | James Carol Building, Level 3, Room 18
 - Strathfield | Between Building 612 & 613.
- Support for Academic Staff: [Childcare Support for Academic Staff Policy](#) and [Research Awards for Academic Staff following Parental Leave Policy](#) and [Procedure](#).
- [Working Parents Workplace Group](#): Online group for parents across ACU.
- [Employee Assistance Program](#): Free counselling and support services as listed on page 7 of this guide.
- [Campus Ministry](#): Embracing peoples of all faiths and traditions.
- [ACU Medical Centres](#): Based in Brisbane, Melbourne and North Sydney offering high-quality healthcare services to staff, students and the local community.
- [Sport Facilities and Gyms](#): Sporting and gym facilities you can access or sign up to as part of your personal health routine.
- Professional Learning and Development: [ACU Staff Learning Hub](#) and [ACU LinkedIn Learning](#).

Some final words

Remember to be kind and patient with yourself, and to not place too much pressure to get the balance of work and parenthood right from day one. For many people, it takes time to find the groove that works best, and we may have to accept that the best laid plans may need to change to meet present needs. Set realistic work expectations for yourself and with your colleagues, for example letting them know if you are finishing early to collect your loved one from care so you can wrap up work for the day, or what days you work so you don't miss out on team meetings or lunch catchups.

You're not alone in this and seeking support from your supervisor, health professionals, family, friends and close colleagues can be helpful. *"It takes a village to raise a child"* (African proverb)

And from us here at ACU, remember to enjoy every moment of your parenthood journey.

External resources for Stage 3

- Finding childcare providers: [MyGov](#) | [Services Australia](#) | [Starting Blocks](#)
- [Health Direct](#): Offering free advice and information.
- [Single Parenting](#) through pregnancy, birth and baby.
- [BabyCenter](#): Community based, resources on all these associated with parenthood.
- CatholicCare/ CentreCare: Loving care to all members of community. Locations: [Ballarat Diocese](#) | [Brisbane Diocese](#) | [Canberra Archdiocese](#) | [Melbourne Archdiocese](#) | [Parramatta Diocese](#) | [Sydney Archdiocese](#)
- [LGBTQIA+](#) and [Rainbow Families](#): Supporting our LGBTQ+ parents and their children.
- [First Nations](#) and [Indigenous.gov.au](#): Supporting First Nations mothers and babies.
- [Parenting with a disability](#)
- [Kidsafe](#): 24-hour line with registered nurses providing advice.
- [Raising kids](#): Australian Government Services Australia site offering payment and services information, to help with the cost of raising a child.
- Helping and assisting on one's mental journey: [BeyondBlue](#) | [MensLine Australia](#)
- Parentline across the country: [NSW](#), [Qld and NT](#), [Vic](#), [ACT](#).
- [Relationships Australia](#): A leader in support services for families, individuals and communities.
- [Raising Children](#): Including teens, children living with autism or a disability.
- [Moneysmart](#): Free tools, tips and guidance in managing finances.
- [MetLife 360 Health Hub](#): Working with UniSuper to support member health and happiness.

Stage 3: Return to work following leave – staff checklist

Print out and tick (if needed) to plan your way through Stage 3

- I advised and submitted notification of my return to work date
- I've decided to resign, discussed this with my supervisor and have lodged an Employee Separation Form through Staff Connect
- If applicable* - I lodged a Request to Vary form for working hours or FTE
- If applicable* - My application for Flexible Work Arrangements in Staff Connect was completed
- If applicable* - I've consulted with my supervisor about a return from leave work plan
- Child care arrangements are coordinated/ arranged before resuming work
- I've considered speaking with my GP about a plan to maintain my health and wellbeing
- I've checked out government financial assistance (eg. the child care subsidy on page 23 of this guide)
- I've familiarised myself with available leave provisions, current leave balances and salary information and read the [ACU Personal Leave Policy](#) and [ACU Compassionate Leave Policy](#)
Where relevant – Seek independent financial or superannuation advice
- I know where to find the parent/ feeding room on campus
- I'm informed about the support services available at work,
- If needed* - Contact Service Central or log an enquiry for more information

Stage 3: Return to work following leave – supervisor checklist

Print out and tick (as needed) for a discussion with your staff member during Stage 3

- One month before leave ends: return date is received in writing OR resignation date with an Employee Separation Form is to be approved
- Review a request to vary working hours or FTE (Request to Vary Form), if received
- Review a request for flexible work arrangements (Flexible Work Arrangements Form) and ensure the decision is shared in writing within 21 days of the request, if received
- If applicable* - Coordinate a return from leave work plan
- Be familiar with [ACU Parental Leave Policy](#), [ACU Personal Leave Policy](#) and [ACU Flexible Working Arrangements Policy](#). Staff member may request a provision associated with their family responsibilities. If you require support or advice lodge a Service Central request for assistance from People and Capability
- Two weeks before leave ends: plan for the staff members first day back (including orientation, access card, reinstate system access if needed)
- One to two weeks before the leave ends: plan a period of work handover between the returning staff member and staff who covered the work (schedule calendar invites, block out calendar times)
- First day back at work: return any work technology and equipment, hold a welcome back morning tea, lunch or virtual event
- Ongoing: schedule regular calendar catchups to check on their transition to resuming work and provide assistance where required
- Where *applicable* - offer support services to the staff member (a full list is available on page 25 of this guide)

