wellspirit/Checklist

liz barry
LIFE & CAREER COACH

THE ULTIMATE RETURN TO WORK CHECKLIST

WITH LIZ BARRY
LIFE AND CAREER COACH

Welcome!

This Return to Work Checklist has been created for professional mums in NZ and Australia preparing to return to work from maternity leave or who have recently returned.

Returning to Work is a significant transition that isn't always talked about or adequately planned for. It can often bring feelings of excitement as well as some uncertainty.

This free checklist is thoughtfully crafted to help you pause and reflect as you embark on your new chapter. It combines both reflective questions and planning prompts to help you gauge your preparedness and identify areas where you need extra support.

To make the most of this checklist, here are somet tips to help you along the way:

PRINT THIS CHECKLIST

To maxiimuse the value of this checklist, start by printing a copy. Alternatively, write your answers down in a notebook or directly within the file itself. (Just make sure to save it)

COMPLETE THE CHECKLIST

Set aside a decent amount of time in a quiet space to reflect and answer the questions within this checklist.

SHARE YOUR LEARNINGS AND ACTIONS

What areas do you need to ask for more support in or gain greater clarity? Where do you need more time for reflection or conversations with your partner or Manager?

FIND SUPPORT THROUGH OUR RETURN TO WORK PROGRAMME

To increase your chances of making a smoother transition and set-you up to thrive in both your career and family life. Find out more about our 3 month Return to Work Programme.

This Guide has been developed by:

Liz Barry, Life and Career Coach
Liz has helped thousands of women navigate maternity leave, career breaks and life transitions.

Philippa Sutherland, Founder of Wellspirit
No.1 Career Network supporting profressional women juggling careers and famiilies.

We're so glad you're here.

Wellspirit & Liz Barry X

HOW TO USE THIS CHECKLIST

Each of the following sections addresses a different aspect of your return-to-work journey, from emotional readiness and childcare logistics to career planning and legal rights.

For each statement, colour the score column using a traffic-light system:

Green – you feel confident and prepared in this area.
Amber – you have some ideas in place but would benefit from more thought or support.
Red – this area needs attention; there may be important actions or conversations to have.

Use the Notes/Actions column to capture your reflections, questions, tasks or resources you need. After completing the checklist, review your coloured scores to see where you feel strong and where you might reach out for help, then discuss your findings with a partner, trusted friend or coach.

---

1. Emotional Readiness & Personal Support

How you're feeling about returning to work and who's in your corner.

Statement	Notes/Actions	Score (R/A/G)
I feel positive about returning to work.		
I can manage my emotions and shift unhelpful thoughts.		
I have a supportive network of friends and family.		
My support group includes people from different parts of my life (work, family, other mums).		
I make time for self-care and hobbies.		

Reflection: If any of these statements aren't true for you, write down the emotions that need attention (e.g., anxiety, guilt) and identify at least one person you can confide in. Note any support groups or mentors/coaches you might reach out to.

2 Childcare Support & Logistics

Ensuring your childcare arrangements and daily routines work for you.

Statement	Notes/Actions	Score (R/A/G)
I know my work schedule, commute time, childcare hours, morning and evening routines and know this can work.		
We have decided what type of childcare (daycare, nanny, family, shared-care) we'll use and have a back-up plan.		
We have explored childcare options, aligned on policies and on waiting lists with openings to coincide with my back to work date.		
I know how I will manage childcare arrangements and work when my child is sick and during holiday time,		
I am aware of all childcare benefits and subsidies available to me.		

Reflection: If any of these areas aren't ticked, note what needs to be done (e.g., research childcare options, arrange back-up care, set up an emergency contact list).

3 Values & Identity

Checking that your return aligns with what matters to you.

Statement	Notes/Actions	Score (R/A/G)
My personal values feel aligned with my life right now.		
Returning to work satisfies my work values and motivations and I feel ready to return as a Mother.		
I acknowledge the identity shift of becoming a parent. I am aware of what this can look like for Mums and give myself grace.		

Reflection: List three values that are most important to you and note how your return-to-work plan supports them. Identify any value conflicts you need to discuss with your partner or employer.

4 Confidence & Self-Care

Building confidence in your skills and looking after yourself.

Statement	Notes/Actions	Score (R/A/G)
I feel confident in my role as a parent and know where to seek help if needed.		
I know my professional strengths and how they contribute at work.		
I feel in control of my life and can influence its direction.		
I have relaxation techniques (meditation, breathing) I can use when I need a boost.		
I'm getting enough sleep and have a plan to keep up my hobbies and interests.		

Reflection: If confidence is low, list your strengths and achievements at home and work. Identify one relaxation technique or hobby you can use to recharge.

5 Managing the Domestic & Mental Load

Sharing chores, planning meals and maintaining a fair home contract.

Statement	Notes/Actions	Score (R/A/G)
I'm satisfied with how household chores are being managed while I'm on leave.		
I have a plan for getting the chores done and responsibilities when I return to work and have less time available.		
I feel adequately supported in Parenting responsibilities now with e.g. (night time feeding, dinner preparation, bathing, day care pick-ups and sleeping).		
I have a plan to share or get help with my parenting responsibilities when I am back at work e.g. (night time feeding, dinner prep, bathing, day care pick-ups, child appointments and sleeping).		
The "invisible tasks" (appointments, organising childcare) are shared fairly or you have an efficient system to manage this.		
Our home environment supports us (decluttered, organised).		

Reflection: Use the "mental load audit" approach: list all household tasks (visible and invisible) and assign owners. Discuss this with your partner (family or friend) to ensure you have the support you need.

6 Career Planning & Goals

Aligning your career vision with your family life.

Statement	Notes/Actions	Score (R/A/G)
I've considered how my career will fit with family commitments over the next few years.		
I have an idea of how I'd like my career to evolve in the medium to long term.		
I've redefined my "why" for work since becoming a parent.		
I've planned my first weeks back, possibly starting mid-week or with shorter hours.		

Reflection: Write down three things you're looking forward to about being back at work. Note any changes to your goals since becoming a parent and discuss flexible arrangements with your employer if necessary

7 Return-to-Work Planning & Boundaries

Planning the logistics of your return and setting boundaries.

Statement	Notes/Actions	Score (R/A/G)
We've decided on the childcare we need and the working pattern I want .		
I have a plan to rebuild my visibility at work.		
I've thought about how I will manage my work/life boundaries.		
I have mapped out a full return to work plan with my manager.		
My workspace (home or office) is organised and set-up.		
I plan to lean on colleagues, fellow mums, a coach or support group.		

Reflection: List any questions or requests to raise with your employer (e.g., flexible hours, remote work days). Note what boundaries you need to protect your family time.

8 Legal Entitlements & Workplace Rights

Understanding your legal protections and obligations can make your return more secure.

Statement	Notes/Actions	Score (R/A/G)
I understand my rights relating to my role.and parental leave.		
I'm aware of my legal entitlement in the workplace for Mums.		
I know where to seek advice if I face potentialt discrimination.		

Reflection: List any legal entitlements you need to research. Note any external resources or legal contacts you may need.

NEXT STEPS

Identify gaps: Look over your notes and highlight any areas where you left the statement unticked or coloured Amber/Red. These are opportunities to seek support or make a plan.

Discuss & delegate: Talk through your notes with a partner, trusted friend or coach to develop an action plan. Agree who will take which steps.

Create your personal plan: Use this checklist to design the return-to-work journey that's right for you. Adjust it as you go, and remember that small steps lead to big shifts.

Celebrate progress: Returning to work is a big step. Celebrate your progress and recognise that thriving in both your career and your role as a parent is a journey.

FEEL LIKE YOU NEED EXTRA SUPPORT?

Join the Wellspirit & Liz Barry 3 month Return to Work Programme for Professional Mothers across New Zealand and Australia.

Next Programme: Starts November 2025

A community of Mums to support you on your return for advice and support.

- X3 Group coaching sessions with Liz Barry life Coach
- On-line Learning modules – from how to negotiate flexi leave to re-building confidence covering all the topics in this checklist.
- Live Expert Sessions with Parenting, Matrescence, leep experts and more.
- Peer Coaching – get time with the other Mums in the community
- Community - a 24/7 community to ask for and get advice

Check-out the programme here: www.wellspirit.com/return-to-work

Join our next cohort, whether you've just started your maternity leave or already back at work – this is the community that can help you thrive as a Mother and in your career.

Any questions: email us! hello@wellspirit.com