

Your Tips

These helpful tips were sourced from a national competition held by "Show Mummy the Money" in December 2007.



Toys

Use toy libraries. At the most, it will cost you \$30 - \$60 a year, but your child(ren) will get the use of hundreds of dollars worth of toys over the years. Children get bored with toys very quickly, so you will definitely save on the expense of buying toys that hardly ever get used.

Start a toy swap library with your friends or a local playgroup. It is well known that kids tire quickly of the same toy. If everyone meets once or twice a month to swap, your kids will always have "new" toys. Not to mention that this is also a great reason to "catch up" with fellow mums.

Clothing

Create a spreadsheet listing all the items of clothing held by family members, print it and carry it with you. When you go out shopping, you will know exactly what items of clothing the family members have in their wardrobe. If you need to buy new clothes or see something you like, you can look at your spread sheet and decide if they need it or not. Make sure you list how many of each item is in the cupboard, colours, sizes, and roughly when they will need new items. This will help make the purchasing decision easier and avoid buying too much clothing.

At the start of each season, hold a children's clothes swap party with friends or members from your playgroup or mothers group. Everyone brings washed and ironed second-hand children's clothing their kids have outgrown and swaps it for larger sizes. I have clothed my daughter for free this way for two years and she always looks fantastic. I would estimate it saves me approximately \$500 per year, and she has plenty of new clothes to enjoy and

grow into. Note this will work if there are mums who have older children with clothing they can swap.

Buy clothing basics like T-shirts, jeans, socks, and underwear in larger sizes when on sale. The basics never go out of fashion. All you will need is a couple of hip new pieces from next year's season and you will have your child's wardrobe ready to go for the following year without the hefty cost.

My first child was a girl, then I had a boy. Instead of buying new clothes because I had all pink, I brought a bottle of blue dye from the supermarket and dyed all the singlets, jumpsuits, socks and anything that wasn't too girly. They looked a fantastic Chesty Bond blue.

Buy separates that coordinate. You can make numerous combinations with a few well-matched items. An all in one dress does not give as much mileage as a skirt and top.

If you are "hard" on clothes, buy quality. Buying an \$80 pair of shoes that will last, instead of three pairs of \$35 shoes that don't hold up, saves money in the long run.

Nappies

Use cheaper nappies if staying home. Use more expensive ones when going out! There's a huge difference in quality between the two, but the cheaper ones are sufficient when at home.

The Bills

At the beginning of the year mark all your major bills on a calendar. That way you will know when a large bill is due, such as car registration or insurance. These are bills you don't want to miss paying; the consequences could be far more expensive.

Food

Invest in a yoghurt culture and grow your own fresh yoghurt for next to nothing! Flavour it with in season fruit for delicious, healthy school snacks and breakfast toppings. You can even add a little water and blend it into a tasty drink!

Growing children are always hungry, and wasted food is expensive food. Kids seem to love gimmicks, and since junk food isn't good for them and expensive too, I have a gimmick that my kids love and it's cheap. Buy kebab sticks and make fruit kebabs. Make food interesting and save on wasted leftovers.

Instead of rewarding kids with snacks, chocolates and toys, give them a star chart and once the chart is full, send them off to their grandparent's house for a night of pampering!

Get a better deal

I have started asking the companies I deal with to give me a better deal when the renewal time comes up. For example, home and car insurance, bank mortgage rates, and telephone companies. I explain I am ready to change to another company whose rates/prices are better unless they offer me a deal I can't refuse. You would be surprised what you get by asking. My telephone provider gave me 12 months free caller ID and message bank to stay with them, a paid TV provider gave me two months free to sign up for another 12 months, and my bank gave me 0% on my new credit card for 6 months. The list goes on. It may take a bit of time to research, but it's well worth knowing what the competitors are doing.

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Prepare for re-entry

Prepare now for your possible return to work. To gain some insight on how to get the job you want, on the hours you want, we speak with careers expert Kate Sykes, founder of www.careermums.com.au

If your days as a stay at home Mum are rapidly drawing to a close, the thought of returning to working life after a period of absence can open a Pandora's box of emotions. And little wonder. For many Mums, re-entering the workforce is the first time they are away from their baby since the birth. "Returning to work can be a daunting experience for many parents. We tend to lose our self-confidence and the 'mother guilt' takes a hold. Everyone experiences it", says Kate Skyes, Founder and Director of careermums.com.au, an online business that connects skilled mums with family-friendly employers.

Fortunately, most Mums discover they are happy once they make the transition back to work. Kate believes the key to a smooth jump from cleaning a grubby face to working back on the coalface is to secure good childcare, "It makes sense - if your child is happy and enjoying their time away from you, you will be more confident in leaving them for the day".

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triplets", you might want to consider starting out in a part time, temping or contract position to help reduce the initial stress and anxiety. Working part time also offers far greater flexibility than a full time job, so Kate encourages Mums to consider their individual needs. If you are returning to the same employer, discuss your requirements



Kate Sykes, founder of www.careermums.com.au

a few months prior to your return. Ideally you should speak with your employer before starting maternity leave.

It's also important that couples discuss how they will share the responsibilities once Mum starts working again. For example, who

will do drop off and pick up? Who is on kitchen duty each night of the week? It makes it very hard to go back to work if returning home means clocking on to a second job.

Finally, Kate recommends that if you are looking for a new job, you should review your career to date, "Do you have an up to date resume?

If you have been out of the workforce for over a year, do you need to get up to speed on changes in your industry? Have lunch with past work colleagues. And if you are

returning to a previous position consider attending team meetings in the lead up to your return to work. This will help you feel more self-confident."

How you can improve your chances of getting the job you want?

Stay active. Not as in chasing your toddler tornado through the house cleaning up their trail of destruction active. Rather, be clear about what you want to do when you return and continually keep yourself up-to-date on changes and trends associated with your field of expertise. This could include attending trade associations, workshops, events or a refresher course. If getting out and about is difficult, invest in relevant books, magazines, even an online course. Keeping yourself "plugged in" will help you to seamlessly re-enter the work force with

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the expertise and knowledge to secure that fantastic position.

If you know you are going to be out of the work force for a short period of time, make sure you maintain membership with relevant industry/trade associations or professional groups. Continue to attend functions networking yourself amongst potential employers.

Once you know the time is right to return to work, start scoping out jobs on the market. Let friends, ex-work colleagues and associates know you are available and actively looking for something. Communicating your desire to work will help increase the chances of finding that perfect job.

Keep your finger on the pulse. Regularly check to see what positions are available on the job market. Sign up for email job alerts - a service provided by most reputable recruiters and job seeking sites. Make a note of the available positions that you are interested in and ask yourself what skill sets are required for these jobs. Do you need to upgrade your skill set to improve your chances of securing such positions?

When you speak with a potential employer, be clear about your flexibility requirements and demonstrate how your expertise and experience is highly suitable to the job being advertised. Also, know how much you are worth. Unfortunately, many women accept a reduced salary because they are so grateful for the opportunity to return to work. This is not the way to look at it. Your career to date and the challenges of

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parenthood should be acknowledged in your remuneration.

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CareerMums is Australia's only specialist job board, career and candidate board for skilled parents (and other people seeking flexibility) who wish to work from home or return to work. Visit: www.careermums.com.au

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Creating an impressive resume

Resumes can make or break your chance of getting a job interview. Kate says, “I very rarely see a great resume. Remember, this is the document that sells you to a potential employer so if there are grammatical and spelling mistakes, and the layout is poor, your chances of an interview will diminish.” She feels the biggest mistake you can make in your resume is to refer to the time you spent at home as ‘stay-at-home mum’. While it’s

probably the toughest job you’ve ever had, cleaning bottoms, dealing with shopping centre toddler tantrums, and being on bubble call 24 hours a day are not exactly the skills that your potential employer wants to read about over lunch.

Instead, think about any unpaid activities you have been doing and turn these into work speak. For example, raising money for a charity involves communication, business development and marketing skills. If you’ve been doing the bookkeeping for your family business, many employers will be interested in paying for your services. While tuck shop work involves money handling, customer service and the ability to work in a team.

Make sure you carefully research job ads and take note of the skills that employers are looking for. If you need to improve your

abilities and confidence, look at doing a short course. Finally, don’t include your date of birth, marital status or number of children. This information is irrelevant. An impressive resume demonstrates how your skills and experience match the requirements of the advertised job.

The interview process – its been a while

Getting a job interview after being out of work for a while is both exciting and frightening at the same time. Kate recommends, “If you are feeling nervous, start focusing on some simple tasks that will prepare you for the interview”. Google the employer’s name and prepare some questions for them about their business activities. Read the job description again – be clear on how

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your skills match the requirements of the role. Always talk positively about yourself. Try talking about yourself in the mirror and see how many nice things you can say about yourself – although you might want to do this with the door and blinds closed. Get a new outfit - looking good and feeling good about yourself go hand in hand.

Job interviews are a two way street. Kate says, “Make sure you interview the prospective employer about their flexible workplace policies, career advancement opportunities, and how they measure and compensate performance”. After all, the job interview is also to find out whether you want to work for the company. If the interview is unsuccessful, ask for feedback. You may receive some useful tips for your next interview.

Riding the emotional roller coaster

Returning to work can be a very emotional time for many parents. Leaving your child for the first time can be heartbreaking. Kate admits, “I cried at work for a few days. The reality check came when I called my childcare

to ask how my son was coping. He was having a great time and showing no signs of distress. We will all go through this, no matter how tough you are. Make sure you can call on friends and colleagues who have been through it already”. Call the childcare as many times as you want to ask about your child. It’s a good idea to start child care a few weeks before you return to work so you can be on call if there are any settling in problems to deal with.

Alternative options – working from home

“Working from home is something most of us would love to do”, says Kate. Being able to structure work around your family is so appealing. The question is, ‘Are you the right type of person to work from home?’ If you

are organised, motivated, strict with your time and can resist the potential distraction of household chores, working from home just might be for you. On the flip-side, working from home can

be lonely and you may find yourself craving the social interaction that comes with being in the workplace. Attending a team meeting each week or regularly visiting your clients might solve this problem.

Working from home may also appear to be a solution to the issue of childcare, however, heed a warning from Kate based on her own experience, “This is not the answer if you are expected to be on call during the day. Toddlers will want your attention no matter what you are doing”. Finally, if working from the nest is for you, make sure your home office is set up with a computer, broadband, phone, and fax.

Prepare to return to your position before you leave it

Negotiating a flexible return to work makes the Supermum juggling act that much easier. Any time is a good time to sound out your employer about the possibilities – even if you have just fallen pregnant. The trick is to be proactive. Have a think about all the tasks you perform. Could your role be done part-time or in a job share role? What about working from

LINKS

Refresh yourself

Your analysis of the available jobs and their relevant requirements will tell you whether you need to do a short course to “refresh your skills”. The following associations and organisations can help with career advice and short courses:

- NSW TAFE www.tafensw.edu.au
- VIC TAFE www.tafe.vic.gov.au
- QLD TAFE www.tafe.qld.gov.au
- SA TAFE www.tafe.sa.gov.au
- Canberra Institute of Technology www.cit.act.edu.au

Helpful resources include: Equal Opportunity for Women Agency www.eowa.gov.au

You can also approach recruitment firms that specialise in flexible roles such as Flex Professionals, Dare Two Share, and Priorities.

If you are registered with Centrelink (www.centrelink.gov.au), you can ask to be referred to a Job Network Agency that specialises in assisting women to return to the workplace. Australian Association of Career Counselors www.aacc.org.au

home for some of the week?

Prepare your case in advance and remember to consider how your suggestions will impact on colleagues and the business. Have a chat with your manager and nut out an agreement. If you agree to a part-time position, don’t fall in to the trap of working on your days off. Part-time work means that you are paid on a pro-rata basis so there’s no reason to feel guilty. And with the national skills shortage kicking in, now is a great time to strike a deal for flexibility.

Ultimately, there is no right or wrong solution to coping with your return to work. The most important thing is to carefully consider your personal circumstances and then go about finding the fabulous, flexible, fulfilling job that was just made for you

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