

A woman with long blonde hair is smiling and looking down at a baby who is sitting up in a bed. The woman is wearing a light-colored top. The baby is wearing a light-colored onesie. The bed has white linens and a wooden headboard. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange filter.

ATLAS *of* MOTHERHOOD

BACK TO WORK BABY

CONVERSATION  
STARTERS FOR  
COUPLES

*a mini guide*

*For Atlas of Motherhood by Dr. Cassidy Freitas LMFT*



## ATLAS OF MOTHERHOOD

*The Atlas of Motherhood* is a modern resource to help women thrive in their transition to motherhood, inspired by the best mother care and support practices from across the globe. The Atlas of Motherhood takes a fascinating look at what mother care means around the world and ways to improve a mother's well-being and health during pregnancy, birth, postpartum, and beyond by incorporating the best practices from different countries and cultures.

Through an inspiring and intimate collection of conversations with mothers across the world, sharing their experiences of motherhood, accompanied by practical advice, comprehensive guides, and online classes from experts across the globe (all mothers themselves), *The Atlas of Motherhood* focuses on the care of the mother so she can be the happiest and healthiest mother for her child.

Meet mothers and experts all around the world that share their experiences and unique perspectives of maternal care and learn how to incorporate these best practices into your own journey, no matter where you are located in the world. There is something to learn in each country explored.





## INTRO & INSTRUCTIONS

*Hey there!*

I'm Dr. Cassidy and I'm passionate about supporting postpartum parents and couples as they navigate the shift back to work after baby.

This is a huge transition that can come with so many feelings, and I'm really glad you took the step to download this guide

The purpose of this guide is to offer prompts that will support the both of you in having some important conversations before either of you go back to work. The guide is divided into four sections: Preparing the Logistics, Preparing your Relationship, and Preparing Your Emotions and Bonus Tips.

# PREPARING LOGISTICS

01.

First, identify all the household/childcare tasks that need to be addressed during the work week. Everything from laundry, dishes, dinner, groceries, managing appointments, middle of the night parenting, supporting your older kids with their big emotions, planning and prepping for childcare, pick-ups and drop-offs etc. Write them down!

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02.

Next to each task from the previous step, note who addresses this task or carries that role in your family. Write them down!

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03.

How will you divide these roles when one or both of you transition back to work? Discuss with each other how flexible these roles will be. Will they shift depending on the day or week?

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04.

What tasks still need to be addressed before the upcoming transition? (e.g., interviewing potential childcare providers, setting boundaries with work/boss or communicating with family who will be helping with the baby). Write them down and make a plan!

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05.

Identify a time during the week (Sunday afternoon for example) to sit down together and discuss the plans for the upcoming week.

Can you commit to carving out some space every week so that both of you know what to expect? (e.g., will there be a particular day that week when one of you will be coming home late?)

# PREPARING THE RELATIONSHIP

01.

Take some time to reflect on your family of origin (the family you grew up with). How were responsibilities shared (or not shared)? Were these roles discussed? Assumed? Share these reflections with each other.

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02.

Are there differences between how each of your families handled household/childcare responsibilities or how the family was supported logistically and financially? Explore these with each other.

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03.

What messages around gender and family responsibilities have you received? How have these messages particularly impacted you? Share your thoughts with each other.

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04.

What legacies, roles, rules, dynamics from your own family would you like to maintain or change in your family? Explore this together.

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05.

Take into consideration that in our generation there may be more expectations (or necessity) for both parents to work *and* for both parents to be engaged and involved in raising their children. Did you have a strong model for how to navigate both? Discuss your experiences with each other.

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06.

All couples have challenging moments. Consider a topic that can trigger arguments between you and your partner. What's a sticky behavior during tough moments *you can own* that gets in the way of finding resolution or feeling like you're "in this together" sometimes? (e.g., do you get defensive, shut down, feel the need for immediate answers or resolution, yell?) Share this with your partner and identify what you can commit to shifting moving forward.

# PREPARING YOUR EMOTIONS

*Take a moment to write down or mentally check off any of the emotions below that you are feeling about the upcoming transition:*

*Sadness/Grief*

Sadness and Grief are core human emotions. They usually show up to indicate that you've lost something deeply important to you or anticipate this loss.

What was it about the days you were all home together that was so valuable to you? What are creative ways you can continue to experience those things you value most? Share your answers with your partner.

*Anger/Resentment*

Anger often shows up as a secondary emotion, with the goal of protecting us from our more vulnerable experiences. This is a common emotion that can pop up during the transition of going back to work as it can be more difficult to express something like, "you're going back to work and I'm scared" or "you are going back to work and I don't feel like I'm equipped to do this on my own." These are very vulnerable, difficult things to say out loud and so instead of expressing those more vulnerable feelings, it often results in anger, snapping at one another, or getting defensive.

Take a moment to consider what might be under the Anger or Resentment and share that with your partner. Here are a few examples to get you started: feeling worried, sad, powerless, hurt, alone, unappreciated, guilt, ill-equipped.

*Fear/Anxiety*

You may fear that you are missing out on your baby's milestones or special moments when you return to work. There may be a lot of fear around the idea of leaving your baby in the care of someone else or being home alone with your baby.

Take a moment to share your greatest worry with your partner. When tapping into your Anxiety, where do you feel it in your body? What is within your control or agency in this situation? Noticing when we are Anxious by tuning into the signals from our body, labeling the feeling, and identifying areas that you have agency over can begin to help soothe this worrying part of you.

# PREPARING YOUR EMOTIONS

*Take a moment to write down or mentally check off any of the emotions below that you are feeling about the upcoming transition:*

Joy/Relief

You might have some relief or even feel excited about going back to work and re-connecting with that part of your identity. **THIS IS WONDERFUL!** This means you find value in the work that you do or have appreciation for this part of who you are. You have an opportunity here to model to your children that they too one day can have passions outside of parenthood.

Take a moment to share the part of you that is excited for what's to come with your partner, and identify how this may actually benefit your children.

*Sometimes, following the feeling of relief or excitement about one or both of you transitioning back to work...guilt or shame can creep in. If that's something you resonate with, read on.*

Guilt/Shame

Guilt can be incredibly painful. It changes our inner dialogue, and how we connect, relate, and ask for help from others.

When “guilt” turns into shame, our self-talk may sound like:

- “What's wrong with me?”
- “I'm such a bad parent/partner.”
- “I'm so selfish.”
- “There is something wrong with me.”
- “I'm letting my partner down.”

Want to know the antidote to shame? *Self-compassion and connection.*

Let's bring your shame/guilt out of the shadow and into the light by sharing these feelings with your partner. If you're in the listening role here, just listen and reflect what you hear and check in to see if you understood their experience.

Opening up to the people who have earned the right to witness our vulnerability is the strongest antidote to shame. Shame can't fester in the face of honest and supportive connection.

# BONUS TIPS

01.

Before one or both of you transition back to work have some “practice days” where you prep the baby supplies and drop off baby with childcare for a few hours or the parent who will be going back to work leaves for a few hours.

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02.

*Set boundaries with work ahead of time.* Let your boss or colleagues/clients know what your hours will be and the times you’ll be available so that you can be fully present at work, as well as fully present when you’re home. This includes things like setting end-of-day, work-from home, and remote availability boundaries.

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03.

Create a “coming home” ritual where you check-in with each other before coming home. During this check-in you identify what Brene Brown calls the “family gap plan.” It’s a plan to check in with your partner and share how you are doing that day.

You may say to your partner, “I’m operating at 10% today,” and your partner may say, “I’m operating at 60%.” Neither of you are operating at 100%, but the person with the higher percentage may take on more that day to support the person who is operating only at 10%.

It is important to recognise that it isn’t going to be the same every single day, but it’s about having the conversation up front about where you are at and what you need each day before you all reunite.



## BONUS TIPS

04.

Identify lactation support ideally BEFORE baby is born or before you go back to work. Trying to figure out how to pump and the logistics of feeding your baby while working, can be incredibly stressful when you're already postpartum and sleep deprived.

Talk with your employer before you go on leave about where you can pump in the office, and speak with a lactation consultant early on during your pregnancy to understand your rights/plans.

05.

*Create a plan for childcare as early on as possible.* As soon as you can, put a plan in place. Knowing who'll be looking after your baby and what your days will look like, can reduce stress significantly because you won't be spending those last few weeks trying to figure out not only the logistics of childcare, but your confidence and comfort in the decision.

06.

*Set up support.* If you'll be home with baby identify people who you feel comfortable with who can come over to support you when needed (and promise yourself you will reach out and not just white-knuckle through it!) If you're transitioning back to work talk to co-workers or friends who have been through it.

07.

Remember you're in this together. *You've got this.* But if you're struggling...here's a list of resources to find support in your area.

- *Postpartum Support International* - a directory of providers (therapists, marriage counselors, support groups) that specialize in postpartum in your area.
- *Psychology Today* - search for therapists by insurance in your area.
- *Open Path Collective* - a directory of therapists who offer low fee counseling in your area.



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