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BACK TO WORK BLUES

New research reveals the true extent of worry that mothers face when returning to work

- 90% of mothers anxious about returning to work for the first time
- 71% worried about missing their children
- Around half (48%) of mothers concerned about not finding suitable childcare

New researchⁱ from the **Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY)** highlights the emotional burden that mothers face when they return to the workplace after maternity leave.

Nine out of 10 mums (90%) say they felt anxious about returning to work after having a child. While around half of mums (48%) admitted to being very anxious.

The research carried out by **PACEY**, who represent over 30,000 childminders, nannies and nursery workers across England and Wales, showed that mums are troubled by high levels of stress, anxiety and insecurities. 71% worried about the extent that they would miss their children.

56% of mothers were concerned about their working arrangements not being compatible, while 55% agonised over missing key events in their child's life, such as their child taking their first steps or saying their first word.

But the decision as to who would look after their children was a major worry - half of respondents (48%) were anxious that they wouldn't find suitable childcare.

The emotional impact on mothers, and children, during the transition back to work is all too often underestimated, and childcare providers play a vital role in alleviating parents' concerns during this time.

Penny Tassoni, PACEY President and Early Years expert comments: "Our research shows how heightened anxiety is for parents when they return to work and what an incredibly stressful time it is. With the increasing pressure on mothers to achieve the perfect work/life balance, feelings of guilt, anxiety and worry are all-consuming and separation anxiety is increasingly commonplace amongst parents and children. The childcare setting is central to mums successfully returning to work, and getting this right will have a positive impact on both mother and child."

The main incentive to return to work was unsurprisingly money. 75% of mothers were looking forward to contributing to family finances; and 62% wanted more financial independence.

But the thought of money doesn't alleviate concerns. For 83% the ability to work part-time or flexibly would lessen their anxiety, while over half (54%) said finding the right childcare provider would ease their angst.

PACEY is providing the following advice to parents returning to work:

- **Do your research and plan ahead** – Often childcare settings have waiting lists so don't leave it until the last minute to start your search as this will add to your stress. Choose a childcare setting that prioritises settling in. Watch whether other children start their day happily
- **Manage the transition** – don't rush settling in; be conscious it will take time for your child to develop a bond with their new carer. Once you see this bond in place you'll feel more comfortable about leaving your child
- **There doesn't have to be tears** – whilst separation anxiety in children and parents is common, a good-quality childcare setting will have a clear plan for managing the settling in process which should allow for a smooth transition
- **Talk to your childcare provider** – share concerns and issues and keep dialogue flowing, a strong two-way relationship will benefit all of you and provide stability for your child
- **Choose quality** – finding the right childcare will lessen your anxiety about returning to work. A childcare provider who is a member of PACEY is committed to professional standards and delivering high-quality childcare <https://www.pacey.org.uk/parents/what-quality-looks-like/>

PACEY has developed information for parents to help manage the transition back to the workplace including top tips, factsheets and real life case studies. For more information visit www.pacey.org.uk/returntowork

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Notes to editors:

According to ONS data, in 2014, 5.4million women with dependent children were in employment. 74% of women aged 16 to state pension age were working with dependent children.

ⁱ Research conducted amongst 1000 mothers carried out by PACEY August 2015 to February 2016 in association with Netmums