

New Idea

Life + Style

Antonia Kidman - Working mum manual

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My mother always worked. She was a part-time nurse educator. Mum has a very strong work ethic and it's rubbed off on her children.

I never felt I missed out on anything because she worked. My father was a very involved dad and together they managed to balance careers and children. If one couldn't make the school sports carnival, the other would.

In the school holidays we'd go to camps, they'd take time off, my grandmother would step in and we'd sometimes spend the day with them at their work. It was great fun, especially as Mum worked at a hospital where there was always plenty to do.

And, like her, I've managed to continue working throughout my adult life. Luckily I've had flexible, supportive employers and I've never had an extended period of time outside the paid workforce.

It's a balancing act

I've always managed to stay connected and keep my hand in - which is fortunate because while paid work's a necessity, I also draw huge personal satisfaction from it. It's essential to my wellbeing and I'm very grateful that I can balance my career and young family.

Many parents do take time out from their careers when they have children, but the longer the period off, the harder it is to re-enter. Money, lifestyle, adult company and maintaining a career impel parents to return to work.

But it can be difficult. With more than half the Australian workforce comprising women, and females tending to be the primary carers of young children, it's an issue affecting many.

Kate Sykes, the founder of <http://www.careermums.com.au/>, a website dedicated to helping mums re-enter the workforce, says that confidence is one of the biggest barriers to going back.

Have a plan of action

This is particularly true of those who've been out of the workforce a long time. Childcare is another deterrent - not so much the childcare placement as the cost, especially if there's more than one child involved. But recent changes to the childcare rebate mean parents will get a 50 per cent rebate paid every quarter.

The other hurdle, of course, is a lack of employer flexibility. However, the prevailing labour market conditions can work in mums' favour in terms of re-entering the workplace.

'We're experiencing a national skills shortage. This means it's a wonderful time for parents to take advantage of it and move back into the workforce - and negotiate flexibility,' Kate says.

Where to begin? Kate has these tips for getting started:

- **Work out what you want to do.**

After becoming parents, many people feel like a change of direction workwise. Have a think about what you can do, writing a list of what you're good at.

If you find this difficult, sit down with your partner or a friend and brainstorm. Then start to think about the roles you'd like to fill.

If you find there is a gap between what you can do and what you'd like to do, it might mean doing a course to bridge that gap.

- **Look at your CV.**

Don't just leave a gap for the time you have spent as a stay-at-home mum. Turn that non-paid work into 'workspeak'. For example, your canteen duties at school might read as 'handling money, working as part of a team and providing customer service'.

Volunteer, charity work and helping your partner with their business should all be listed in terms an employer understands. Respect your non-paid work.

Find a family friendly employer - www.eowa.gov.au is a site Kate recommends, listing businesses that recognise female workforces. And

www.workplace.gov.au promotes businesses that offer flexible conditions. These websites are a great place to start.

Next, be proactive - if you see a business you think you might suit, contact them and send in your CV. Also, a lot more recruitment firms specialise in filling flexible roles.

- **Network.**

Never underestimate the family and social connections available to you. Some fantastic leads can be obtained this way. Tell people what you want, send that email, be bold and brash.

- **Don't take too much on.**

Ensure family responsibilities are shared and you have adequate support. Kate also recommends mums on maternity leave maintain work connections. 'Stay in touch. Go in for a work meeting once a month. Ask your boss about project work, just to stay involved,' she says.

'This might also be the time to explore the possibility of a course to keep your skills up.'