

# Ultimate Checklist for Managers

Maven's guide for virtually supporting and empowering working parents before, during, and after leave in a remote work environment



# Your managers are key to creating a more supportive workplace for parents

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many workplaces to shift to a virtual environment, adding new challenges for employees and their managers to navigate when it comes to an already difficult transition period: becoming a new parent or growing your family. Data reveals that at least 14% of women and 11% of men are considering quitting their jobs because of the additional load at home due to COVID-19—and the reality is likely much higher.<sup>1</sup>

What you do to support your employees who are becoming new parents during this pandemic is critical, and it must begin with training your managers and equipping them with the tools to support their team members during their transition to leave and back-to-work. The policies and behavior you encourage during this time can solidify your company's position as a family-friendly workplace, and will set the stage for employee retention, talent attraction, and growth long-term.

While global employers have taken commendable steps to offer benefits that demonstrate their commitment to families—increasing paid parental leave policies, offering flexible schedules and childcare benefits, implementing policies that are equitable across diverse paths to parenthood, and offering adoption coverage or egg freezing benefits—shifting office culture often lags behind company policy, meaning parents lack the support they need on a daily basis at work from their managers,

colleagues, and HR. The latest numbers reveal that despite leaps in paid leave policies, only 11% of companies offer supportive programs for parents re-entering the workforce.<sup>2</sup>

Beyond return-to-work support, there is widespread evidence proving bias against mothers is a systemic problem: mothers are viewed as less competent and less committed to their jobs<sup>3</sup> (though that myth has been debunked time and again<sup>4</sup>) and face a lack of professional advancement termed the “maternal wall”.<sup>5</sup> As a result, 42% of women worry that growing their family will hurt their career.<sup>6</sup>

How can you help prevent biases and make sure that your employees feel supported and empowered as they become parents, which is more important than ever during this time? Maven’s comprehensive family benefits sit at the intersection of parenthood and career. We know firsthand from our experience with employees and employers that training managers is a critical piece of any workplace family benefits program. As one recent example: we conducted a survey at a global business consulting firm that had just implemented Maven’s end-to-end family benefits but hadn’t yet equipped managers with training, which revealed that 67% of managers did not have adequate knowledge of resources to address the needs of new or expecting parents who are their direct reports.

*Maven’s Checklist for Managers is a comprehensive playbook that equips your managers with every step they need to take to support parents before, during, and after leave.*

Maven’s Checklist for Managers is a comprehensive playbook that equips your managers with every step they need to take to support parents before, during, and after leave. Provide copies of this checklist to your managers and encourage them to use it as an easy-to-follow guide when their direct reports share the news they are becoming parents.

By equipping leaders at your company with the proper training and tools, beginning with Maven’s Checklist for Managers, you will drive employee satisfaction and productivity, and, ultimately, increase retention by creating a more supportive and empowering environment for working parents.

## MAVEN'S ULTIMATE CHECKLIST FOR MANAGERS

# Your go-to guide for virtually supporting employees before, during, and after parental leave

As a manager, you play a critical role in supporting your employees in the challenging and exciting transition to parenthood. This checklist is your go-to resource, full of everything you need to empower new and expecting parents on your team throughout their journey—and ensure a positive experience for all. In this checklist, we'll refer to your direct report as “your colleague”. If you're unsure about how to handle something, talk to your HR partner for their expert guidance.

**One golden rule to keep in mind:** As a manager, you set the tone for video meetings. Think about how you might prepare for in-person meetings in a conference room to cue your full attention, and make your best effort to do the same in virtual meetings: silence your email or chat notifications on your computer and phone, avoid multitasking or typing, demonstrate actively listening, and make eye contact with whoever is speaking.

Of course, the current reality is that the lines between work and home are blurred, and that's okay. If you have distractions at home with children, pets, or family members, be open with your team. Let them know you're doing your best to be fully present in the meeting, but you may have to deal with a distraction. Being transparent about this will help your colleagues feel more comfortable to do the same with you, and will help relieve unnecessary stress or anxiety by normalizing this current reality.

## Upon first hearing the news

- Congratulate and listen**  
How you respond to the news that your colleague is expecting is absolutely critical. Offer your congratulations! Listen to your employee and ask questions about how you can best support them through this transition.
- Direct them to HR**  
Encourage your colleague to review company-provided benefits materials, join internal resource groups, and speak directly with HR to get a detailed, up-to-date overview of what resources are available to them.
- Over-communicate**  
Have your colleague send you a communications plan for how they would like to announce their news, and offer your assistance. Create space for them to make the announcement to the team and organization. (Remember: it's their news to share, so respect their wishes!)
- Define timeline and leave plan**  
Work with your colleague and HR to set leave dates and outline your colleague's proposed return to work, plus any flexibility or other needs prior to leave.

## Three months before leave: Prep period

- Develop coverage plan**  
Work with your colleague to prepare a detailed list of key projects and tasks as a coverage plan (based on overall team priorities).
- Outline responsibilities with team**  
Set up a team meeting to clearly outline and communicate the coverage plan, including who will take on key tasks and projects.
- Ensure smooth handoffs**  
Have your colleague prepare written guides, introduce external vendors, and have one-on-one virtual training meetings, as needed, with anyone taking on portions of their work. Allow time for smooth handoffs to happen, encourage documentation to avoid unanswered questions, and lend support when asked.
- Prep communications plan**  
Work with your colleague to define how they would like to be communicated with and kept updated on any important internal news or team updates while on leave, in order to set clear expectations. Share the plan with HR.

## One month before leave: Transition period

- Embed flexibility for leave**  
Agree to a clear start date of leave (unless baby arrives early, of course!), put it on the team calendar, and discuss your colleague's needs for flexibility as they approach their due date.
- Preview upcoming strategic plan**  
Meet with your colleague to walk through your team's strategic plan and calendar, and share any guidance or insights for upcoming months from company leadership to provide transparency in advance of their leave. Create space for your colleague to ask questions.
- Discuss professional goals**  
Based on your colleague's wishes, offer the opportunity to have a performance review to highlight their successes and learnings since their last review process, and to reiterate their career goals at the company before leave.

## During leave

- Offer congratulations**  
Send a congratulatory note when baby arrives. Ask their permission to share the news with the full team.
- Follow colleague's preferred communications plan**  
Check in based on their wishes and via your agreed-upon outreach method.
- Be proactive**  
Reach out directly with any major news or announcements that will be made external or new hiring plans/internal restructurings that directly impact your colleague.
- Employ the 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s rule**  
Touch base two-thirds of the way through leave to see how your colleague and their family is doing, determine their return-to-work date, and define their flexible work schedule.

## One month prior to return

- Check in on needs for their home workspace setup**  
Work with HR to ensure your colleague's success in a remote work environment: assess IT needs, flexible working hours due to feeding or nap schedules and childcare, and ask about any concerns that your company may be able to help address. If possible, offer a stipend for a remote workspace setup, office supplies, or wi-fi extensions.
- Suggest an update call**  
If your colleague wishes, two weeks prior to return, have a 30-minute check in call to share any key team updates, preview your colleague's key projects and goals for their first month back, and share a calendar of any planned all-staff or team events. Set clear expectations for a smooth transition: if possible, implement a two-week period for your colleague to test out their schedule, understand needs, and more.
- Connect with HR**  
Connect your colleague with HR directly to plan for needs, discuss latest company policies, and find out what resources and benefits are in place for working parents.
- Prepare welcome**  
Make team plans for a welcome back card or lunch for your colleague's warm welcome, aligned with company policies.
- Arrange a parent-to-parent welcome buddy with virtual coffees and check ins**  
Work with HR to reach out to another new parent in your company to be a partner for your colleague in their transition, and share best practices, offer a listening ear, and be there as a resource and support. Have them reach out to your colleague on their first day back and set up regular virtual hangouts over their first few weeks back.

## The return

- Set the tone**  
Send an email reminding colleagues to check in with their teammate on their first day back, to respect their calendar, and to make them feel welcome.
- Encourage transparency and over-communication**  
Make your colleague feel supported as they may juggle childcare needs, an ever-changing feeding and sleep schedule, and transitioning back to work. Be transparent and ask them to do the same, and make them feel supported every step of the way.
- Catch them up**  
Hold a 30-minute virtual meeting with your colleague to check in, share internal updates, set clear goals and priorities for their first two weeks, and answer their questions or concerns.
- Allow your colleague to define their schedule**  
If possible, set up your colleague's first two weeks back at work as a trial period for them to determine what they need to make their virtual work successful and productive. Encourage them to test their schedule and be flexible, and schedule a check in at the end of two weeks to find out what's working, what's not, and how you can support their needs.
- Check in often**  
Touch base regularly to ensure the transition schedule and plan is working, clarify goals and priorities, and ask about your colleague's needs.



## Endnotes

1. *“Workplace Impact Survey”*. Syndio, cited in *Fortune*. April 2020.
2. *“2018 Employee Benefits Survey”*. Society for Human Resource Management. March 2019.
3. Hamel, Liz et al. *“Kaiser Family Foundation/New York Times/CBS News Non-Employed Poll”*. Kaiser Family Foundation. December 2014.
4. Correll, Shelley J. et al. *“Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty?”* *American Journal of Sociology*. 2007.
5. Verniers C and Vala J. *“Justifying gender discrimination in the workplace: The mediating role of motherhood myths”*. *PLoS ONE*. 2018.
6. See endnote 3.

## This report is published by Maven

Maven is the leading women’s and family healthcare company providing end-to-end coverage for all paths to parenthood, including fertility, maternity, adoption, surrogacy, return-to-work, breast milk shipping, and early pediatrics. Maven partners with employers and health plans to improve maternal outcomes, lower costs, and attract and retain more parents in the workforce.



# Ready to partner with the company that pioneered return-to-work support?

Talk to Maven about comprehensive family benefits and manager training customized for your company. Reach out to [sales@mavenclinic.com](mailto:sales@mavenclinic.com) or visit [mavenclinic.com](https://mavenclinic.com) to learn more.