

# 2021 MATERNITY LEAVE EXPERIENCE REPORT

**SURVEY SHOWS CANADIAN EMPLOYERS ARE FAILING MOTHERS RETURNING FROM PARENTAL LEAVE**



**Maternity leave and the years surrounding it represent the **largest single point** in which women off-ramp from corporate organizations.**

This leaves a gaping hole in the female talent pipeline as companies grapple with how to progress women into senior management and leadership positions.

Investing in improving this process represents one of the single biggest opportunities to close that gap and to continue to move women forward.

**The results of the survey provide a startling look at the complete lack of policy, process and procedures surrounding this leave.**

This is in stark contrast to the formal guidelines and processes that exist in other leaves supported by organizations including disability leave, short term, long term and workers compensation leaves.

# The Survey

In 2021, Moms at Work undertook an initiative to gather the experiences of 1,090 Canadian women who had taken maternity leave from their workplace in the last 10 years. Moms at Work is Canada's largest community for working mothers. We are an advocacy, education and community group dedicated to improving the lives and experiences of working mothers.

Our goal is not to just present the problem, but to fix it. Our solution is based on decades of combined experience from our team of return-to-work experts, employment lawyers, HR professionals and mental health practitioners in collaboration with leaders in pregnancy and infant loss, perinatal mental health, lactation consultants and more.

**95%** did not receive any formal support during their mat leave transition

**40%** considered quitting during the return to work process

**79%** felt their return to work could have been managed better

**18%** did not have a contact for their return to work

**58%** of workplaces do not have formal policies around maternity leave and return to work

**58%** said their employer was not prepared for their return to work

**79%** were not provided any options for a graduated return to work



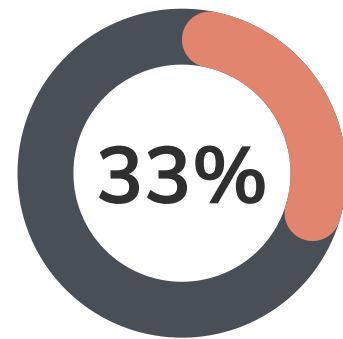


**noted that their employer had no formal supports for expectant parents**

Those that indicated their employer offered some form of maternity leave or return-to-work support noted that it was often in the form of a short workshop or brief conversation with HR. There is much more employers can do to better support women through pregnancy at work and maternity leave such as having formal procedures in place, developing transition plans, assigning a manager or member of HR to help employees navigate the process and offering resources.

### **The most common instances of discrimination experienced:**

- Poor treatment and derogatory comments
- Denied opportunities to develop professionally (projects, training, responsibility)
- Laid off, restructured or demoted
- Denied promotion, new role or advancement of earnings
- Inadequate or denial of accommodations

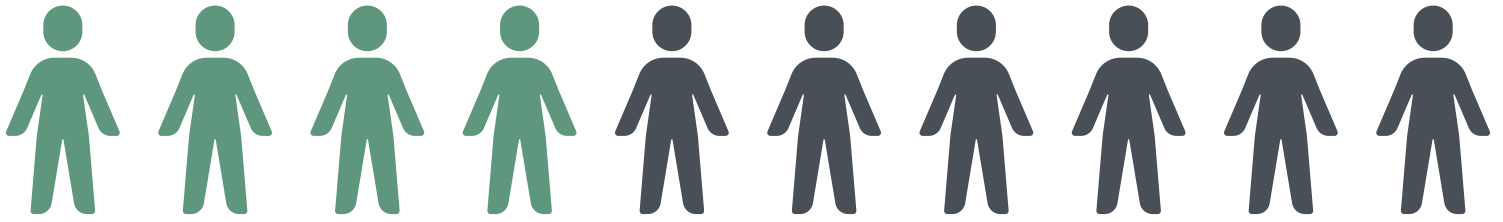


**report that they were discriminated against due to becoming, or being a mother in the workplace**



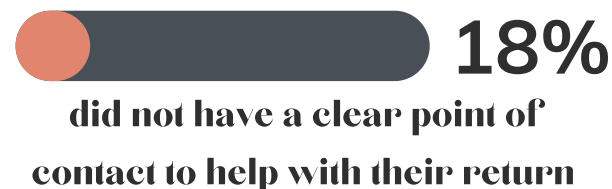
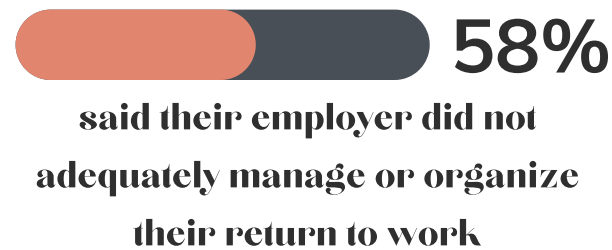
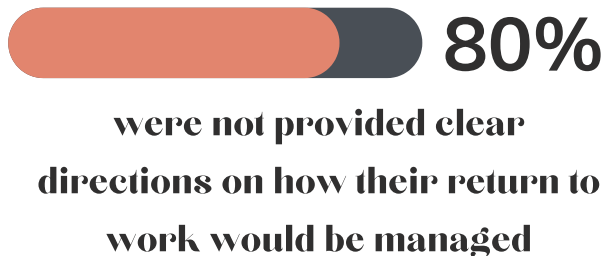
**were not provided options for communication during their maternity leave**

Survey respondents indicated that they would have liked to be kept in the loop: remaining on the email list, having an out-of-office for their email, being informed of company announcements or changes, awards, details about colleagues, promotion opportunities or internal job postings.



## 40% of women considered quitting during the return to work process

Survey respondents shared similar reports of lack of clarity, no onboarding, little consideration for simple things including not being provided an office, computer or internet access. Many found the process demoralizing including those who had previously indicated a high level of commitment to their organization. The results show just how critical the management of this transition is for retaining and promoting female employees.



Our survey found that more than half of respondents felt their leave could have been managed better, with less than 15% of respondents being offered a formal transition plan or options for a gradual return to work following maternity leave.

This number is surprising since our survey participants indicated that 40% of companies did not have formal policies and procedures in place for maternity leave and return to work. The need for cross-corporate training for HR and managers, as well as employees, is critical to ensure all employees have positive experiences during this transition.

Overwhelmingly, the experience for return to work seems to be based on the work done by the manager or HR professional and varies even within the same organization. This demonstrates the need for standardized practices to eliminate discrimination in the process of return to work. Survey respondents shared examples of how managers undermined returning women such as refusing to share new information, lack of onboarding, assignment of menial tasks and multiple instances of women returning to work with no equipment, office or clear expectations.



**Only 10% of women were provided with information about their rights and accommodations for breastfeeding and pumping**



While BC and Ontario are the only provinces with laws that explicitly protect breastfeeding as a right, the Canadian Human Rights Act prohibits discrimination based on sex, and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees “gender equality” under the law.

Women who choose to breastfeed face unique challenges in balancing the needs of their child and their employment obligations. The Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) explains that, “women should not have to choose between their own health, or the health of their baby, and their jobs, housing or being able to take part in a service.”

**Accommodation is expected to the point of undue hardship.**



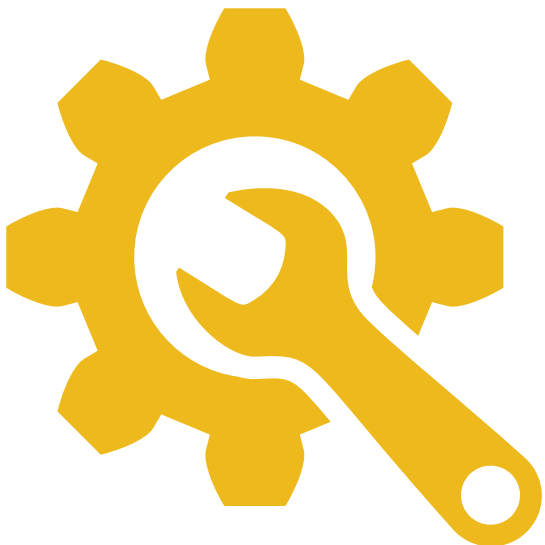
**Almost 80% of respondents were not provided any options for a graduated return to work**

Graduated return to work - returning to a partial work load that increases over time - is the gold standard used in every other type of work leave (disability, workers compensation, stress leave). Repeatedly, studies have shown this approach to have significant cost savings with benefits for both employers and employees. Graduated return to work increases worker retention, reduces sick time and overall leave time. For those who personally requested a GRTW, that request was often denied - and in many instances no reason was given for the denial.



## Conclusion

Women's experiences of maternity leave and return to work show us the immediate need to remedy these issues. This is a significant transition in a woman's career and deserves the attention and planning that we provide to other professional leaves of absence. Correcting the issues outlined in this report carry huge economic benefits for both companies and women while helping companies to reach their targets on inclusion, diversity and equity.



## How we can fix this

Ready to Return is Canada's first and only comprehensive program and certification created to support employers, parents and helping professionals improve the maternity leave and return-to-work process. Our experts design and deliver impactful, supportive and cutting edge training, certification and programming.



## READY TO RETURN

Moms at Work created a comprehensive maternity leave and return-to-work solution that provides systemic and lasting change. Designed by Allison Venditti, Return to Work expert, Certified Human Resources Leader, mother of three and founder of Moms at Work, Canada's largest community of working mothers, the Ready to Return program is based on over 15 years of experience building end-to-end corporate programs and helping hundreds of women transition back to work after having children.



In collaboration with Sunnybrook Pregnancy and Infant Loss, Hudson Employment Law, Nutmeg Consulting (lactation and post natal support) and more, Ready to Return is here to help you redefine how your company handles maternity leave and close the gender gap for Canadian workplaces.

## How Ready to Return can help you:

**For Employers - Ready to Return Certificate.** Allow your HR and managers to complete our certificate program teaching our custom process and providing them with the tools and resources they need to implement and understand how to manage this transition

**For Employers - Become a Ready to Return Employer Partner.** Access our knowledge hub's surveys, studies and resources, attend webinars from our guest speakers, paternity leave coaches, policy writing experts and more. Having a Ready to Return Employer Partner badge on your website showcases your support for working parents and shows potential candidates your company's commitment to supporting them.

**For Employees/Individuals - Ready to Return Online Program.** Over 300 individuals have been supported through our initial program offering access to resources, live experts and more. Empower your employees to return to work feeling fully supported with all their questions answered. Live and on-demand options available.

**For Helping Professionals.** Therapists, coaches, HR managers and other experts can support their clients with practical tools and knowledge about the return-to-work process from various points of view. Help your clients make this transition easier as a Ready to Return Certified Coach.

**LEARN ABOUT OUR PROGRAMS AND OUR STORY at [readytoreturn.com](https://www.readytoreturn.com)**

*Maternity Leave Experience Report, Moms at Work, 2021*



## **Moms at Work**

Created by Allison Venditti, we are the meeting place that brings together our community members, employers, experts and decision makers to help amplify our voices. Moms at Work is Canada's largest group for working mothers with 7,500 members. Through free events, educational programs and community initiatives including the Moms at work job board, directory, for hire list (to connect working mothers to new opportunities) and summit - we are directly impacting our community on an individual and collective level. We are changing the world of work for working mothers. Collaborate with us!

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