



GRADUATE STUDENT  
**PARENTAL LEAVE  
TRAIL GUIDE**

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# CONGRATULATIONS

*on your upcoming arrival! At the University of Delaware, we know that for many graduate students, welcoming a new member into your family comes with both great joy and many questions. Whether this is your first child or not, you are likely taking steps down a path that is new for you, both personally and professionally. We also know that open and honest discussions about expectations, plans and goals, can lead to smoother and more successful transitions into and back from parental leave.*

Just as a hiker would not embark on a new expedition without a map, we want you to feel comfortable that you know your next steps on your upcoming parental leave journey. Our goal in providing you with this “Trail Guide” is to signal issues for your consideration, and to facilitate productive dialog between you, as a new parent, and those with whom you work and study at the University.

There is no right or wrong path for you to follow, as you stop at each of the guideposts in this document. Rather, we hope that by providing a structure for thinking through concerns that are common to many new parents on our campus, everyone involved in supporting your leave and return process can begin to engage in an ongoing, productive, and iterative dialog.

Please feel free to bring this Trail Guide with you to meetings with your University mentors or administrators, as you make plans for and discuss your leave. This may be the first time, for example, that your PI or manager has worked with someone going out on parental leave, and they will likely find this information helpful as well! Stop at the Guideposts that are applicable to your situation, and feel free to ignore those that aren't. Each person's leave situation is unique.

We look forward to hearing about your experiences with this Trail Guide and how we may continue to refine it over time. **If you have suggestions, please contact the CBI Program Director, Catherine Leimkuhler Grimes (cgrimes@udel.edu) and she will be happy to work with you to incorporate.**

The “Guideposts” we present as places to stop and reflect on your parental leave journey are as follows:

## **GUIDEPOST 1**

Your Physical and Mental Health

## **GUIDEPOST 2**

University Policies, Resources, and Forms

## **GUIDEPOST 3**

Informing Your PI/Manager/Chair

## **GUIDEPOST 4**

Determining Anticipated Dates of Leave

## **GUIDEPOST 5**

Thinking Ahead to Childcare

## **GUIDEPOST 6**

Assessment of Current Workload and Coverage Plans

## **GUIDEPOST 7**

Communication/Accessibility During Leave

## **GUIDEPOST 8**

Re-engaging Upon Return

## **GUIDEPOST 9**

Work-Related Travel

## **GUIDEPOST 10**

Managing Breastfeeding and Pumping

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# GUIDEPOST 1

## YOUR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Of utmost importance as you embark on a journey to grow your family is your own physical and mental health, and the health of the new member(s) of your family. Before worrying about the logistics of taking parental leave, check in first on your own health.

Particularly if you are a graduate student who works in a laboratory, consider that it may be helpful if your first conversation about your impending parenthood is with the [UD Environmental Health and Safety \(EHS\) Office](#). All inquiries to EHS are held in confidence, which means you can reach out for their guidance, even if you are not yet prepared to tell others about plans to expand your family. (Note: we recommend that both women and men connect with EHS to discuss potential safety concerns.) Conversations with EHS will allow you to identify risks, which you can then take back to your physician and care team to allow you to make informed decisions. EHS can also help assess the safety protocols you may eventually put into place.

Even if you are not concerned about safety issues in your role as a graduate student, it is still a good time to assess your current health needs and insurance options. Do you have a care team in place for both your physical and emotional health as you embark on your parenthood journey? If you are looking to connect with other graduate students who have faced or are facing dependent care concerns, please feel free to attend meetings of the [Graduate Students with Dependents Support Group](#), which meets on Mondays from 4-5pm.

Take the time to review your health insurance policy now, too. What obstetric care is covered and how? What mental health supports are covered during the perinatal period? What actions must you take – and by when – to add a baby to your insurance plan? What steps (e.g. calls or notifications) must you take after your baby arrives, to ensure your health plan will cover your labor and delivery costs? If you are on the University's plan, will your coverage continue through the duration of your leave? Every plan differs, and the details are worth reviewing well before you are scheduled to go on leave.

# GUIDEPOST 2

## UNIVERSITY POLICIES, RESOURCES AND FORMS

Another important early stop on your parental leave journey is with the University's Leave of Absence Policies, resources, and required forms. As a graduate student, regardless of which program or school you are in, you are entitled to a period of six (6) weeks of paid parental leave, and a total of fourteen (14) course-weeks (one semester) of unpaid leave in a 12-month period, to accommodate parental responsibilities. (This leave is available twice during your matriculation in a graduate program.)

Please read in detail the University's [Leave of Absence and Parental Accommodation Policy](#), and reach out to Mary Martin at [marym@udel.edu](mailto:marym@udel.edu) with any questions you may have about the policy. The Graduate School also built this helpful [online FAQ document](#) for students with dependent care responsibilities, that you should consult as you make plans for your leave. (It includes topics like "Pregnancy & Nursing", "Leave Policies", and "Food and Housing".)

**As you prepare to take a parental leave, you are required to complete [this online form](#).**

If you have specific questions about university policies or about state and federal laws as your own parental leave journey evolves, please do not hesitate to connect with any of the following campus resources:

- [Graduate College](#)  
(302) 831-6824 | [grad@udel.edu](mailto:grad@udel.edu)
- [Office of General Counsel](#)  
(302) 831-7366
- [Office of Equity and Inclusion](#) (includes Title IX)  
(302) 831-8063 | [oei@udel.edu](mailto:oei@udel.edu)
- [International Student & Scholar Services](#)  
(302) 831-2115 | [oiss@udel.edu](mailto:oiss@udel.edu)

If funding for your position comes from sources outside of the University, be sure to explore each funding source's policies on parental leave as well. (For example, recipients of NIH-funded grants should refer to the NIH's [Family-Friendly Initiatives](#) and [FAQs](#) webpages for relevant information.)

# GUIDEPOST 3

## INFORMING YOUR PI/MANAGER/CHAIR

When you are ready to share the news of your upcoming arrival, you will need a plan for speaking with your PI, Manager or Chair. If you have any trepidation about this conversation, please know that you are not alone. Studies show, for example, that nearly half of all pregnant women in the United States fear telling their manager about their pregnancies. This common experience reflects broader societal biases against caregiving that many activists are looking to change. In the meantime, though, as you prepare for this conversation, remember that having and caring for a child is a normal part of the human experience.

Consider both the timing of your conversation and the message you will convey. We recommend scheduling a private, in-person meeting that is not rushed, to let your supervisor know your news, and remember that this will be only the first of many conversations in an ongoing dialog.

As questions arise during the conversation with your supervisor, please feel free to share this guide with them, and encourage them to reach out to resources listed above with any questions about law, policy, or funding for your position during your leave.

# GUIDEPOST 5

## THINKING AHEAD TO CHILDCARE

As you may have heard, the United States currently faces a severe shortage of childcare providers, and the pandemic only exacerbated an already-existing problem. Even if your family's expansion is a number of months away, it is never too early to begin researching childcare options. For example, we strongly recommend adding your name to waitlists as soon as possible, if you would like to use a childcare center. (Then, once you are on a list, read: [How to Lobby a Daycare \(to Get Off Their Waiting List\)](#).)

For University resources related to dependent care, see:

- [Dependent Care Resources](#)
- [Dependent Care Resources for Graduate Students](#)

# GUIDEPOST 4

## DETERMINING ANTICIPATED DATES OF LEAVE

The initial months of a baby's life can be a whirlwind of new learnings (and sleep deprivation) for new parents. The University of Delaware offers you a period of paid parental leave specifically for purposes of bonding with and orienting yourself to your new family member.

Even with supportive and explicit policies in place, many new parents worry about how their absence will be perceived by their teams and how their leave will affect their graduate work and career trajectories. To the extent you have these concerns, we encourage you to discuss them with your supervisor.

Together, with your supervisor, you can begin to estimate and note on mutual calendars the approximate start and end dates of your parental leave, keeping in mind that these dates may change for any number of reasons. Also, if you are embarking on this parenthood journey with a partner, consider whether staggering all or part of your leave with your partner's is possible and desirable for your family.

If you are deciding what type of childcare may best fit your needs, we share with you these resources from Mindful Return about various childcare options:

- [Choosing Daycare as Our Childcare Option](#)
- [In Home Daycares: The Scoop from 5 Moms Who Have Used Them](#)
- [When a Family Member is Your Childcare Provider](#)
- [Exploring the Au Pair Option for Child Care](#)
- [How to Have a Successful Nanny Relationship from the Start](#)
- [Demystifying the Nanny Share: Advice from 4 Moms Who Used Them](#)

# GUIDEPOST 6

## ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT WORKLOAD AND COVERAGE PLANS

We know that our Graduate Students care deeply both about their families and about their research and careers. Best practices related to the transition into and back from leave involve intentional planning related to how your teaching and research will be covered when you leave, and how you will resume projects upon your return.

Questions you should discuss with your team include:

- What projects am I currently working on, and what projects will I likely be working on around the date my leave begins?
- Who are some of the possible candidates to take over these projects when I go out on leave?
- Are there specific tasks I can front-load and complete before my leave? Are there other tasks that can be deferred until I return?
- What manuals or instruction guides can I create for any high-priority daily work responsibilities that I will need to transition to someone else during my leave?
- What introductions need to be made as I transition my work?
- If you will be serving as a teaching assistant during the semester you are due or likely to adopt, notify your graduate director as earlier as possible so that plans can be made to re-assign teaching during your leave.

We strongly recommend that you co-create a written document with your supervisor that details your leave plans and your ongoing work. For ease of planning, we offer you the following optional language and format for communicating your list of projects.

### **Progress on Current Work Projects**

*I anticipate continuing to work on my current projects until around the date of our child's arrival.*

*The following is a list of tasks I intend to complete before my leave:*

- **Task 1:** *[Description of work to be done before you leave, including any additional responsibilities that may fall during your absence. Consider suggesting someone who may take on responsibility, if appropriate.]*
- **Task 2:** *[Description of work to be done before you leave, including any additional responsibilities that may fall during your absence. Consider suggesting someone who may take on responsibility, if appropriate.]*
- **Task 3:** *[Description of work to be done before you leave, including any additional responsibilities that may fall during your absence. Consider suggesting someone who may take on responsibility, if appropriate.]*

### **Daily Work Responsibilities and Coverage**

*The following are my high-priority daily work responsibilities that will require coverage in my absence. Before I leave, I intend to develop a manual and instructions for each of these tasks, so that others will be able to complete them.*

*[List any day-to-day tasks that will need to be attended to during your absence. Be thorough, so as not to miss an important element of your role that will need attention. To the extent you have ideas of who might be able to cover each task, list the individual here. Don't forget to include passwords to systems that only you might have access to, perhaps in a separate document.]*

# GUIDEPOST 7

## COMMUNICATION/ACCESSIBILITY DURING LEAVE

Each new parent may have a different approach to the type of communication they would like to have with colleagues during their parental leave. Preferences range from a desire for no contact for the duration of the leave (other than for addressing administrative issues such as adding a child to a health insurance plan), to progressive connectivity, to regular communication.

Parental leave best practices include communicating these expectations and desires clearly prior to going on leave, while also acknowledging that your pre-leave feelings about this topic may change as your leave progresses. An expectant parent who desires progressively increasing communication, for example, but who experiences a complicated labor and delivery or health issues with their child may ultimately prefer no communication until the return. Conversely, an expectant parent who initially desired no contact may at some point during leave begin to crave contact with colleagues and desire to re-engage with projects.

Questions to ask yourself and to discuss as you prepare for leave include:

- What are my communication preferences with my team during my leave? Have I communicated these preferences and expectations to my team members, while also indicating that these preferences may shift over time?
- What systems can I put in place to help my team respect the boundaries I set? (e.g., committing to staying off e-mail, but accepting a text or phone call for a work-related emergency)
- If communication from my team increases during my leave beyond a level I am comfortable with, can I schedule a time to speak with my team to re-establish boundaries?
- As I approach my return date, can I schedule a transition meeting with my team? (Consider this as part of a childcare phase-in process, to “try out” both at the same time.)

The following is an example of sample language you might include in a written parental leave document to set parameters around your accessibility during leave:

*During my leave, I will be unavailable to respond to daily e-mails or calls related to my work. However, I will make myself available for a weekly call every [DAY OF WEEK] after Week [X] of my leave, to discuss information I may need to know about reentry – project statuses, upcoming work, organizational changes, etc. Additionally, after that date, I expect to be able to engage with our team related to projects we deem high-priority, but I do not anticipate spending more than a few hours per week managing these projects until my more formal return. After [DATE], I plan to gradually become more accessible as I transition back to work.*

# GUIDEPOST 8

## RE-ENGAGING UPON RETURN

As you begin to think about transitioning back to work after leave, you will need to give thought to the availability and daily schedule you would like to have – and that will work for your team – upon your return. Developing a plan with your team that allows you to phase-back into your campus responsibilities over a certain period of time may be an option to consider. Keep in mind that any availability and schedule you decide to implement now need not be permanent; these are conversations that can, and should, be revisited and evolve over time.

We know that the demands of childcare and life with an infant raise new struggles for graduate students who may previously have worked with around-the-clock availability. Early evening hours, in particular, can be times when work-life conflicts present the most complex challenges. Best practices for successful returns include open, ongoing, and evolving dialog around schedules, flexibility on both sides, and a shared concern for the mental and physical health of everyone involved.

Questions to ask yourself as you contemplate how to reengage upon your return include:

- What availability and schedule options am I considering for my return?
- Have I discussed these availability and scheduling options with my supervisor and team?
- With respect to my workload:
  - ▶ What expectations do I have about resuming the same projects I was working on prior to my leave?
  - ▶ What will be the process for taking on new projects upon my return?
- If I begin to struggle with work-life scheduling tensions, can I plan a call with my PI/Manager/Chair to brainstorm options?

If you are looking for more return-to-work resources and communities of support with others who are also returning from parental leave around the same time you are, please feel free to explore Mindful Return's courses for [new moms](#) and [new dads](#).

# GUIDEPOST 9

## WORK-RELATED TRAVEL

Another frequent topic of concern for new parents is that of work-related travel. New commitments at home, childcare, baby feeding logistics, and emotional issues often make post-baby travel more complicated than before baby's arrival. New parent comfort with and desire for work travel also varies widely from person to person.

Questions to ask yourself as you consider work travel upon your return include:

- Have I considered nuances that may affect my opinion on work travel – e.g., distance, length of time away, purpose of the trip, etc.?
- Have I considered all available options for accommodating travel – e.g., lining up backup childcare for my partner, bringing a caregiver and baby with me, bringing baby with me and finding a caregiver at my destination, etc.?
- Have I shared my thoughts about work travel with my supervisor and team members?
- If I am breastfeeding and need to travel without my baby, have I explored milk shipping services (e.g., [Milk Stork](#)) and pumping pods that may make travel easier? (Download the [Mamava app](#), and you can unlock any of their clean, private “pods” for free with your phone when you need space for pumping, feeding, or diaper changes in airports and other common spaces.)

We also share with you these resources from Mindful Return about both the logistical and emotional aspects of work travel when you have young children:

- [Is Milk Stork Worth It? One Working, Traveling Mama Weighs In](#)
- [The Blues – and Bliss – of Work Travel After Baby](#)
- [4 Tips for Returning to Work Travel as a Working Parent](#)



# GUIDEPOST 10

## MANAGING BREASTFEEDING AND PUMPING

For new parents who are breastfeeding and pumping milk, the logistical and emotional components of feeding a baby can be a significant source of anxiety. The University supports your decision to continue to breastfeed and/or pump upon your return from parental leave and encourages open dialog to normalize conversations around this topic.

For University resources, please see the FAQs specifically related to lactating persons in the [Dependent Care Resources for Graduate Students](#) and the [designated Lactation Rooms](#). Some Buildings (such as APBio, 15 Innovation) have multipurpose “personal rooms” that can be used as well. Also remember that if you are returning to a laboratory, the team at EHS can help walk you through any safety considerations you may have related to breastfeeding.

Questions to ask yourself about breastfeeding and pumping as you prepare to return from leave include:

- What are my breastfeeding and pumping plans and goals?
  - ▶ How many times a day do I predict I will need to feed my baby (e.g., if working from home and baby is there) or pump?
  - ▶ Is it possible to hold pumping session times on my calendar?
  - ▶ When I am on campus, where will I be able to pump? Will I need to reserve a room, or do I have a space where I can close a door or put up a shade while pumping?
- What are the milk refrigeration options available to me in sites where I will be pumping?
- Would it be helpful to discuss my breastfeeding and pumping plans and goals with my PI/Manager/Chair/Instructor on record (if teaching)?
  - ▶ If I expect this discussion to be awkward, have I thought through ways of initiating this conversation? (E.g., letting colleagues know that you'll be in a nursing room at certain times of day, or citing the American Academy of Pediatrics breastfeeding recommendations.)
- If I need to excuse myself from a call, class or meeting to pump, is there agreed-upon shared language I can use with my team to suggest I need to excuse myself for this purpose?
- If I am traveling, can I develop pumping location and milk refrigeration plans with someone at the site where I will be traveling, before I arrive?

We also offer you these Mindful Return resources related to pumping, breastfeeding, and sending food to daycare:

- [Sending Milk and Food to Daycare: Logistical Tips and Tricks](#)
- [An Honest Look at Life, as a Working, Pumping Mom](#)
- [Meditation for Pumping Milk \(Short Version\)](#) –(4 mins) to help you relax at the beginning of a pumping session and get a letdown
- [Meditation for Pumping Milk \(Long Version\)](#) – (15 mins), to last for entire pumping session







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