



A WORKING PARENTS GUIDE

The Transition Playbook

josie*

Shift Happens



A PRACTICAL GUIDE
TO NAVIGATING WORK,
CAREGIVING,
LEADERSHIP,
IDENTITY, AND
CHANGE

Working parenthood is often framed as a question of balance - but balance implies stability. And for most people, life doesn't stay stable for very long. Caregiving evolves; Careers accelerate; Children grow; Parents age; Schedules shift; Support systems break; Burnout surfaces; Identity changes.

The challenge is rarely one transition at a time. It's navigating several at once, while still being expected to perform professionally and show up personally.

This playbook is designed to help both working parents and employers better understand the realities of *modern caregiving transitions*: the operational strain, the emotional load, the invisible labor, and the leadership shifts that often happen simultaneously by offering reframes and giving them language to navigate these pivotal moments.

Because transitions are no longer the exception - they *are* the working parent experience.



Moments of Transition

EXPANDING

When family growth changes everything

Navigating fertility, pregnancy, postpartum recovery, parental leave, returning to work, and the operational realities of expanding a family.

Includes transitions such as:

- Fertility journey + pregnancy
- Birth, adoption, fostering
- Parental leave + return-to-work
- Rebuilding routines after baby
- Perinatal loss + recovery

ACCELERATING

When career growth and caregiving collide

The tension of stepping into larger professional responsibilities while navigating increasing demands at home.

Includes transitions such as:

- Promotions + scope expansion
- Leadership changes
- Client-facing/high-stakes work
- Increased visibility
- Re-entering the workforce
- Performance cycles + pressure

RESTRUCTURING

When the systems around you change

Work structure shifts and logistical complexity that force families to constantly adapt routines, schedules, communication, and support systems.

Includes transitions such as:

- Return-to-office
- Schedule changes
- Increased travel
- School calendar + childcare complexity
- Relocation/manager changes
- Operational overload



Moments of Transition

EVOLVING

When parenting changes shape over time

The shift from physical caregiving to emotional labor, increasing independence, adolescent complexity, and the evolving realities of presence.

Includes transitions such as:

- Toddler to preschool shift
- Middle school + teen years
- Emotional labor
- Identity shifts as children grow
- Presence versus perfection
- Parenting during career growth

CARRYING

When caregiving expands in every direction

Navigating invisible labor, partnership renegotiation, default parenting, aging parents, complex family systems, and caregiving in multiple directions simultaneously.

Includes transitions such as:

- Sandwich generation
- Aging parent support
- Partnership role shifts
- Co-parenting + blended families
- Neurodivergence or medical complexities
- Equity at home + invisible labor

REDEFINING

When burnout, identity, and ambition shift

The emotional and psychological transitions that reshape how people think about success, leadership, capacity, and self-worth.

Includes transitions such as:

- Burnout and recovery
- Loss of confidence
- Identity recalibration
- Seasonal overload
- Career setbacks
- Rebuilding sustainably



When family growth changes everything

Family expansion is often treated like a singular milestone, but for many working parents, it is the beginning of a *complete systems overhaul*. What makes this transition particularly difficult is that many people prepare for the baby, but not for the operational, emotional, and professional recalibration that follows. Existing systems often stop working entirely, and the pressure to quickly “find balance” can leave working parents feeling isolated or behind before they’ve even adjusted.



SHIFT

The challenge isn't just the baby. Family expansion reshapes capacity, relationships, and expectations all at once. The goal is not getting back to who you were before, *it's building systems that support who you are now.*

SCRIPT

For Working Parents:

"I can't do this the same way I did it before, and that's okay. We need to figure out what works for us now."

For Employers:

"This is a big transition! Would it be helpful to speak with someone who's been through this before?"



Everything you think you know about your capacity, your needs, and your systems will shift once you're in it.

— TINA CARTWRIGHT



When career growth and caregiving collide

Career acceleration often arrives during the exact season of life when caregiving responsibilities intensify. The challenge is not ambition itself - it is the *expectation* that ambition should exist independently from the realities of caregiving. Many working parents quietly navigate both expansion and exhaustion simultaneously, feeling pressure to prove they are fully committed in every direction at once.

SHIFT

Career acceleration in this season isn't about perfect control; it's about *radical steadiness*. The overlap of intense caregiving and professional growth is your ultimate leadership training ground. You're building the resilience and high-EQ needed to command bigger, messier roles.



SCRIPT

For Working Parents:

"My availability looks a bit different right now, but my commitment has not changed."

For Employers:

"Your responsibilities at home don't affect how much we value your leadership."

You're responsible for more than ever, at the exact stage of life when control is the hardest to maintain. The real shock is realizing leadership is less about having everything handled and more about staying steady when nothing is.

-LILY WALLA



When the systems around you change

Many transitions are not emotional first - they are *logistical* first, and can create constant operational friction for working families. What once felt manageable can suddenly require far more coordination, communication, and mental bandwidth. Families are often left redesigning routines in real time while continuing to perform professionally and personally without interruption.

SHIFT

The goal isn't to perfectly stretch your old routine: it's to define your true non-negotiables first, and ruthlessly design the new layout around them. *Everything else* is negotiable.

SCRIPT

For Working Parents:

"I'm focusing on the highest priorities, and I appreciate the patience while we lock in the new routine."

For Employers:

"Let's revisit our goals and see what feels realistic and achievable right now."

”
It really forced us to rethink when the work got done, not just how.

– PAIGE CONNELL



When parenting changes shape over time

As children grow, caregiving evolves from primarily physical labor into *emotional labor*. Older children may require less hands-on care, but often need more emotional presence, flexibility, guidance, and attentiveness in less predictable ways. The responsibilities never truly disappear - they simply become quieter, more nuanced, and harder to measure. At the same time, career demands often continue increasing, creating ongoing *tension* between availability, ambition, and presence.

SHIFT

Parenting doesn't get easier - it *changes shape*. The work shifts from managing daily needs to navigating relationships, independence, identity, and presence.



SCRIPT

For Working Parents:

"I may not always be available, but I will show up during the important moments."

For Employers:

"Family needs change over time. I wanted to remind you of the resources and benefits we have available, if they can be helpful."

It's no longer about always being present, it's about catching the moments when they let you in.

— MICHELLE KEEFE



When caregiving expands in every direction

Many working parents eventually find themselves caregiving in all directions. These transitions often requires *constant reprioritization*. Responsibilities may not divide evenly, capacity may fluctuate, and traditional ideas about balance or fairness can quickly fall apart under real-life pressure. What matters most is not perfection, but *clarity*: understanding what needs support, what can be delegated, and what truly requires your energy in a given season.



SHIFT

Needing support isn't evidence that you're carrying too much - it's evidence that you're *carrying something important*. The goal is to build a system that can support what matters most.

SCRIPT

For Working Parents:

"Can we talk about how we can divide responsibilities right now?"

For Employers:

"You are carrying a lot outside of work, too. What support or flexibility would be most helpful right now?"

No one really prepares you for the emotional and logistical pull of caring both 'up' and 'down' at the same time.

— LEANNE WONG



When burnout, identity, and ambition shift

Burnout rarely appears all at once. More often, it builds gradually through *prolonged over-functioning*: carrying too much responsibility for too long while continuing to perform through unsustainable expectations. For many working parents, this becomes a turning point - the moment old definitions of success stop fitting their current reality. Achievement, productivity, and constant availability begin to feel incompatible with health, relationships, personal capacity, or the kind of life they actually want to sustain. What follows is often not disengagement, but *redefinition*: clearer boundaries, stronger support systems, more intentional priorities, and a different understanding of what success means.



SHIFT

Burnout isn't a failure, it's information. Sometimes the most important transition isn't doing more - it's redefining what success looks like now.

”

Becoming a parent changed my definition of success from achieving more to being more present, more aligned, and more available.

– JAVAREE WALKER

SCRIPT

For Working Parents:

“I can't keep going at this pace. How can I find a path forward?”

For Employers:

“Let's talk about this now before you completely burn yourself out.”



There is no perfect formula for navigating work, caregiving, leadership, identity shifts, and change. But one truth surfaces consistently:

Working parents do better when they are supported through transitions instead of expected to hide them.

The future of work is not separating life from leadership. It is building cultures, systems, and expectations that recognize they have always been connected.

Because shifts happen. And the best systems evolve alongside people.



*We asked leaders to share their best advice when navigating transitions.
Read their full responses on the blog at myjosie.com*

Thank you

STEPHANIE LEBLANC-GODFREY
BOSKY MUKHERJEE
TINA CARTWRIGHT

MICHELLE KEEFE
BETH WANNER
ALEXA STARKS
NICOLE HERRERA
JAVAREE WALKER
LEANNE WONG

LISA KAPLOWITZ
DEBORAH PORTER
PAIGE CONNELL
DEANNA TAYLOR
EVA JUNGSTEIN
HARRIS FANAROFF

HELEN KUPP
JR BUTLER
ALLI KUSHNER
LILY WALLA
ERIN GRAU
ALEX EGELER

josie*