



“Mummy, I feel Sick”

The words "Mummy, I feel sick" causes alarm and anxiety in every mother. For the working mum (or dad) these four words can herald a crisis, and usually, no matter which way it turns out, feelings of guilt follow quickly!

Usually, the best place to be when your child is sick, is at home with your child. Unfortunately, the responsibilities of work can make this very difficult, and you may need to make alternative arrangements to balance all of your responsibilities.

If your child is seriously ill, there is no choice to be made – you need to be with your child. You should never feel guilty about taking time off work to be with a genuinely sick child.



A lot of the time when kids are sick, or need to be kept home from school, the illness in question maybe a fairly minor complaint. Things like head colds, school sores, head lice or a mild flu seem to come along with monotonous regularity, and the truth is that you probably won't have enough sick leave or rostered time off to deal with each incident. Where possible, try not to use your annual leave for minor illnesses – you and your kids deserve family holiday time as often as possible.

Grandparents and extended family

Your child's minor illness might be just as well handled by your child's grandparent or other close family member. I know that when I was a child, I enjoyed spending the day at my nanna's house where I got home made soup and lots of extra attention. Nanna loved to look after us and was quite capable of taking us to a doctor's appointment and picking up a script of antibiotics. When grandparents are local, and willing to help, don't hesitate to make the most of their support. It helps the kids to build a loving and close relationship with their extended family, and you can keep close tabs on their progress throughout the day with a few phone calls.

Friends and neighbours

Not everyone has family close by to help with a sick child. My own mother passed away when my children were toddlers. I was able to take advantage of her expert mother skills on a few occasions when the kids were very young, but now I need to find alternatives when emergencies crop up.

My neighbour is a great source of support. She is also a parent, and whenever I need emergency care for a non-contagious child, she is there to help. Obviously, other parents are going to be concerned about minding a sick child if there is any chance that their own children will get sick, so finding friends or neighbours without kids is a real bonus.

My parent's neighbour, who is also a grandma and retired, offered to assist me if I ever needed help. This is a lady who knows and loves my kids, who I completely trust (this lady babysat me on many occasions when I was a child) and she has plenty of experience with her own children and grandchildren. She is a widow, and the occasional care of a child is something that brings a bit of joy into her life. Maybe you



have a retired neighbour or trusted family friend who would enjoy caring for your child on the odd occasion. If you have someone in mind, have a chat with them and ask them if they would be able to help you if your child has a minor illness. Don't ring someone out of the blue asking for emergency care – be sure the person has already agreed that they would like to help.

Colleagues or co-workers

I would never suggest you ask a colleague to mind your child, but you may work in a position where shifts are rostered. If this is the case, speak to a few of your colleagues, preferably other mothers, and see if you can arrange to help each other out by swapping shifts if this type of situation arises. If you do this, you need to be willing to sometimes swap your shifts around to help others out when they have similar issues.

Change your work schedule

If you have a part-time role, you may be able to request that your weekly schedule be changed to cater for a sick child. For example, if you usually work Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, you may be able to change your timetable for that week to Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Remember; ask your employer if this flexibility is available before your child gets ill.

Bring your child to work

In some employment settings, it might be viable to bring your child to work with you. Before you do this, ask your boss and co-workers if this would be an option if your child has a minor illness. If your workplace has a staff room, you might be able to set your child up there for the day. Maybe you could bring in the portable television, some colouring in books or computer games. If there is a lounge, you could bring in a pillow and blanket for them to have a nap. Make sure that you have the support of co-workers to ensure this doesn't cause friction with the workplace. Most people won't mind if your child is well behaved and doesn't disrupt business.



Work from home

It may be possible to do some work from home. Discuss this option with your employer before your child gets ill. If you have a PC with internet access, you may be able to finish a project or make calls from home. Before you ask to be reimbursed for phone calls etc unless, be sure that your employer will be willing to help. Consider your saved travel costs and the ability to care for your child against the additional costs of a few phone calls. You may need to drop into the office to collect paperwork, but it may be a better alternative than spending the whole day in the office.

Whatever happens, try not to feel guilty. If your child is really sick, you need to be with him or her. If all of your contingencies for minor illness have fallen through, enjoy the day with your child and pat yourself on the back for giving it your best shot.

By Coleen Rivas, Career Trainer and Coach, Work Savvy Parents