

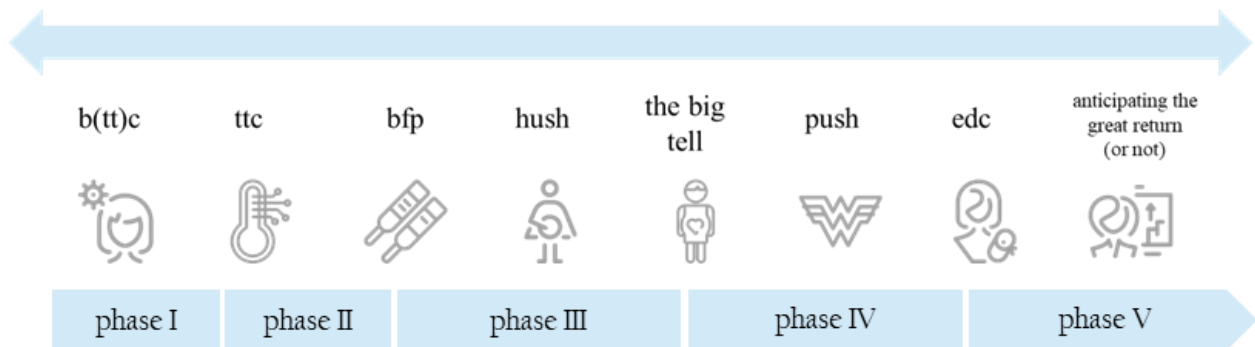


carry strong: rethinking pregnancy and work *stephanie kramer*

The Journey to working motherhood is beyond trimesters, discover what phase you are in now and how that perspective can be incredibly helpful for both your current mindset and what to do next.

There are five phases of a Carry Strong® Pregnancy for Work as illustrated below by the key moments on the timeline. Remember that this is *your* timeline, which is why there are no numbers of weeks. Trying to conceive, the second phase, could happen before you know it or could take some time and many different experiences with regards to work. The same goes for when you share your news. “The Big Tell” after the “Hush” of phase three for many women feels right after the hurdle of the first trimester, there may be medical or personal reasons to share that news sooner or later. What is important is that it is *your* news to share to support *you* with comfort and confidence. **Carry Strong.**

What phase of working pregnancy are you in and what are key considerations for this phase?



phase I: “B(TTC)” Before Trying to Conceive

This phase is pre-preconception in the medical sense. One of the unique aspects of carrying strong is that you start thinking about it when “contraception”, versus “conception”, is a more familiar term. Why? To understand where your head is and what you want to think about now with regards to pregnancy and work including your health, career goals, financial considerations, and beyond, so that the idea of the intersection of motherhood and work isn’t “impending doom” or even “a crossroads”. It’s just normal. A big (normal) deal. For work, if you’re in this phase, consider work conversations to normalize discussions about policies for families, asking about benefits before you need them in a way that you feel comfortable. Here is where you also can consider thinking about the possibility (and impact) of fertility testing and other previously taboo topics with relation to work.

phase II: “TTC” Trying to Conceive to the “BFP” Big Fat Positive (or Big F-ing Positive)

Many women describe this phase as a “Mind F#\$K”. For most women they go from trying hard to not be pregnant to trying hard to be pregnant. Others are instantly zapped to an abrupt, “Whoa!” with a faint plus sign. With that perspective, trying to conceive is remarkably simple or complex with regards to work. I still give pause to the fact that someone could be trying to be pregnant for years at work, or pregnant and then not pregnant on end, without someone knowing. It is a big deal. The end of this phase (or start for those mentioned above) is the “BFP”—the “Big Fat Positive”. This old school message board turned social media/blog shorthand should be renamed from “Big Fat Positive” to “Big Freaking/F-ing Positive”. It is so huge for every woman. At work, it is a trigger. One that can use a guide so it can feel a bit more positive like the test itself. Here are two tips for you to consider. Don’t obsess about the timing, but be aware you might. And speaking of time, if you need it from work because of fertility needs or in dealing with loss, take it. For both that reason and to give you support in uncharted waters. Find community. Find an ally and advocate at work.

phase III: “Hush”

If “TTC” is a “Mind F#\$K” The “Hush” is often a bigger one. The Hush represents the time period from when you find out you are pregnant until when you decide to share the news with “The Big Tell”. It is different for everyone, but every single interview I did had a point of view on it—especially at work. Just like in the TTC, here you need community and comfort. In this phase you may have morning/afternoon/evening/all-day sickness, you might be exhausted, or just mentally struggling to be present. In addition, while “Carry Strong” does focus on the physical pregnancy, this is a time period where even if you are not the “carrying” partner, navigating your family’s pregnancy can be complex and leave you feeling inevitably soon to be “exposed”.

phase IV: From “The Big Tell” through the “Push”.

“The Big Tell” is also a known entity. In fact, one of the only known entities that is publicly discussed regarding pregnancy and work. i.e. “How to tell my boss I’m pregnant”—variations of this question are googled tens of thousands of times a month and are met with short lists of helpful tips, but unlocking it, even just in the way she thinks about it, is so much bigger. More to come here in your next download! This moment, a crucible one for many, leads into the “Push”. The Push is the period of “modern nesting” from when you announce your pregnancy until you have the baby or go on maternity leave. The Push before the push. Identifying it as a window is not only relatable, but also reality, no matter the week it starts or stops for you. The end date, your due date or when you give birth as it’s a moving target.

phase V: Anticipating the Great Return (or not)

This final phase of the working mother’s pregnancy journey truly spans from the Push through her return to work (or not), although really it can be concurrent to the whole process. The key word is “anticipating”. Mothers will evolve. What they anticipate they will need or how they will act or feel will likely change, however understanding the possibilities and preparing gives her control and comfort in the unknown so when she does get there she knows the other options, too. Career wise, this is a key part so that there isn’t a looming return to work that seems like a far off distant next step. It is just returning to work, even if that is a complete pivot that lines up with the birth of your child.

To learn more, sign up for alerts on carrystrongproject.com including the launch of the book, “Carry Strong: Rethinking Pregnancy and Work”.