

# SUPPORTING THE ONGOING SEASONS OF WORKING PARENTHOOD



## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN, AND WHY IS IT **IMPORTANT?**

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Much of our public discussion around working parents focuses on the needs of new mothers, as if the challenges of integrating work and parenthood evaporate once a child enters school (not to mention that working fathers are often ignored completely). In reality, as children get older, working parents experience new joys and stresses.

HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW

Most family-friendly programs focus on supporting new parents, however parenthood also involves ongoing transition points as children grow from babies and toddlers to school-aged children and adolescents.

With each new phase comes a new set of joys and challenges. Without effective ongoing support, later-stage working parents can be just as vulnerable as new parents to the conflict between work and family roles.

Supporting parents to manage the varying stages of parenthood not only makes life easier for employees, it also builds an organisation's reputation for being a family-friendly employer, leading to increased retention of employees and a stronger ability to attract new talent.

*This resource was developed as part of the Perinatal Workplace Wellbeing Project, funded by WorkSafe Victoria's WorkWell Mental Health Improvement Fund.*



# HOW DOES SUPPORTING THE ONGOING SEASONS OF WORKING PARENTHOOD REDUCE THE IMPACT OF WORK-RELATED FACTORS?

Work-related factors, also known as psychosocial hazards, are anything in the management or design of work that increases the risk of work-related stress, which can lead to physical injury, mental injury or even both at the same time.



## Supporting the ongoing seasons of working parenthood can help reduce common work-related factors such as:

Low job control.

High and low job demands.

Poor support.

Poor organisational change management.

Poor organisational justice.

Low recognition and reward.

Low role clarity.

Poor workplace relationships.

Remote and isolated work.

### For more information see:

[www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/work-related-psychological-health-and-safety-systematic-approach-meeting-your-duties](http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/work-related-psychological-health-and-safety-systematic-approach-meeting-your-duties)



Parenting is an 18-year gig that affects men, women, adoptive and biological parents, parents with newborns and teenagers – all in different ways. Companies should think about crafting policies accordingly.

THE PARENTING INSTITUTE



You have to be able to talk about it if you want to solve any problem.

FACEBOOK, MATERNAL BIAS TRAINING

# GENERAL STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT WORKING PARENTS AT ALL STAGES

## Know who your working parents and carers are

It's easy to spot the visible parents, e.g. biological mothers, but look out for the less visible ones: adoptive parents, same-sex families, blended families, grandparents providing care, legal guardians, foster parents.

- Urge leaders to get personal! 'How are the kids?' is a good start.
- Encourage employees to communicate their specific needs so that the organisation can provide targeted support – for example, caring for both children and ageing parents at the same time, or managing children with special needs.

## Implement policies that support parental leave and flexible working arrangements

Get the Parental Leave transition right, and you have already laid the foundations for open conversations about managing ongoing work and family integration.

- As the seasons of parenthood change, so too can the needs around flexibility – ensure that your policies and practices reflect the ongoing seasons of working parenthood and that it is not 'set and forget'.
- Invest in educating and supporting leaders to implement the policies well – there's no benefit to having a great policy if employees don't feel comfortable using them.
- Find role models who have made good use of the policies and make them visible.

## Promote awareness and focus resources on the ongoing key transition points

- Transitions can add an extra layer of complexity to working parenthood, and so represent times when parents may need a little extra support.
- Promote awareness of the key transition points so that you can focus resources as required (See page 9 for Key Transition Points).

## When employees ask for support, adopt a 'where there's a will there's a way' attitude

- Open the door to ongoing conversations, and engage the employee and their leader in problem solving what could work rather than what can't.
- Mitigate the risk of a new arrangement by agreeing to a trial period, with pre-scheduled review dates to discuss what's working and problem solve what's not.

## Encourage employees to use leave as needed

- Help employees understand their leave options and enable them to use it at their discretion, e.g. recent changes to the use of Long Service Leave can help with balancing family needs.
- Encourage your employees to use annual leave, not to bank it up. Parents need a chance to rejuvenate ... but leave some in the tank for the next transition point!



## Promote the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and how it can help with transition points

- Reduce barriers to access – make contact details readily and publicly available to everyone (avoid ‘ask your manager for details’), remind employees it is confidential and free.
- Encourage parents to use the EAP to address feelings of guilt, anxiety and work-family conflict.
- If your EAP support extends to direct family members, remind employees of this feature. This can be particularly helpful if the children themselves need some support adjusting.

## Facilitate connections within the business and external partners as required

- Make introductions to internal coaches, mentors, fellow working parents who can help navigate work-family life.
- Use the intranet or workplace app to bring parents together, provide information and support.
- Start a Working Parent Network (Refer to Resource: ‘How to Set up a Working Parent Network’) or set up a peer/buddy program.
- Engage external specialists as required, e.g. coaches, workshop facilitators etc.

## Pay special attention to employees with caring challenges or change of circumstances

- Single parents could be managing childcare alone and may benefit from additional support.
- Children with special needs may require ongoing specialist appointments, e.g. weekly therapy (can be at a different time every week), or bi-annual paediatrician appointments. Times can be limited and difficult to reschedule, and parents have to take whatever time they are offered.
- Caring for children and elderly parents may require additional flexibility/time off for visits or to set up appropriate care.
- Blended families may have additional transition points, e.g. introducing a new family member, juggling logistics of kids living at home with kids who live with another parent part-time, etc.
- Newly relocated employees may also need time to settle their children into new childcare facilities and schools.

## Remain inclusive by considering non-parents in initiatives where possible

- Educate and support co-workers on how the organisation supports working parents.
- Find out what drives other employees and put the same effort into ensuring you are allowing them to bring their whole self to work too.
- Offer flexible working arrangements to all employees – not only to the limited class of employees that are eligible for flexibility at law.

# WHAT SOME COMPANIES ARE DOING

- ✓ **Childcare Kits** which provide information about childcare facilities and fees, government assistance and rebates and childcare options (i.e. a childcare directory).
- ✓ **Emergency Childcare** that provides access to registered nurses or carers for emergency care needs.
- ✓ **On-site Childcare** managed by an external childcare provider.
- ✓ **Family Room** allowing parents to bring their children back after school or have them attend if the child is unable to go to day care or school.
- ✓ **Term-Time Working Arrangements** (all school holidays off) and the option to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for any purpose.
- ✓ **Vacation Care Programs** that provide engaging recreation-based activities during school holidays.
- ✓ **Family-Friendly Meeting Scheduling** (i.e. avoiding early morning/late afternoons when parents are likely to be dropping off or collecting kids).
- ✓ **Life Admin Days** to catch-up with life administration tasks that often fall to the bottom of the to do list for working parents (including medical check-ups).
- ✓ **Teenage Time** in the form of half a day a month to spend time with teenage children.



Australian couples with two young children earning the average wage devote 31.3% of their pay to childcare.

OECD



## THE BABY AND TODDLER YEARS

### Parents may be experiencing

- **Sleep deprivation and fatigue** due to babies waking during the night or requiring night feeds.
- **Breastfeeding** – there is a lot of pressure on mothers to breastfeed. This is challenging for some, and returning to work can represent an additional barrier.
- **Settling babies** into care.
- **Sick children** – babies and toddlers average 8-10 colds per year. Parents can also experience more periods of sickness during this period.
- **Stress and feelings of guilt** relating to arriving late / leaving early, and also for leaving their young children in the care of someone else.
- **Workplace discrimination**, or negative comments from supervisors or co-workers.
- **Loss of confidence** and questioning their career.
- **Job insecurity.**
- **Caring for children** with additional needs.
- **Juggling baby/toddler** and older children.
- **Financial stress.**

### How employers can help

- ✓ **Ensure safety** – make sure risks associated with fatigue are managed. Particular attention should be paid where employees operate heavy machinery, do long drives, have onerous rosters, etc.
- ✓ **Provide breastfeeding facilities**, train managers on allowing additional time for expressing.
- ✓ **Flexibility is key** – allow time off to settle babies into childcare (Keeping in Touch (KIT) Days can help. Refer to Resource: ‘Staying Connected during Parental Leave’).
- ✓ **Build a culture of leave** to care for kids for dads as well as mums.
- ✓ **When planning events, make use of brunches and lunches**, as parents may find it difficult to attend after-work events.
- ✓ **Provide clear policies and open communication** to minimise concerns about career and missed opportunities.
- ✓ **Allow employees to use working hours to sort out childcare related logistics** where needed, e.g. Centrelink for childcare rebates.
- ✓ **Consider external support** such as Parental Leave Transition Coaching.



With 12 weeks school holidays per year and four weeks annual leave – the maths doesn't add up!

PWWP FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT



## THE PRIMARY SCHOOL YEARS

### Parents may be experiencing

**Stress and anxiety** – for both parent AND child as they approach this transition point.

**Initial transition logistics** – some schools ease kindergarten kids in slowly via reduced school hours for the first few weeks and some kids can find it hard to adjust to both school AND after school care at the same time, so many parents will want to hold off after school care for a few weeks.

**Formal Out of School Hours (OOSH) Care is not always available** – some have lengthy waitlists, and special developmental schools or smaller schools are unable to cater to a wide range of needs.

**School events** – assemblies, award ceremonies, school concerts, Mothers and Fathers Day morning tea, Grandparents day, book week parades – these occur frequently throughout the school term, sometimes with only a few days' notice and/or in the middle of the day.

**Sickness** – as well as needing to keep children home when they are ill, there may be other medical needs. This can be exacerbated by any specialist appointments required, where the waitlist is long and there is limited choice on times.

**Extra-curricular activities** (i.e. after school sports etc.) and homework requirements. This can change throughout the year, requiring ongoing coordination.

**School holiday care challenges** – even with both parents spreading their leave there is typically a shortfall. Furthermore, going away as a family can be difficult for some industries where school holidays might be their busiest time of year, e.g. retail.

### How employers can help

- ✓ **Flexibility is key** – ask the parent what arrangements would help them the most.
- ✓ **For those working rosters/weekends, balance the schedule** so parents don't miss out on sports every weekend.
- ✓ **Access to health benefits to help parents keep their children well**, e.g. corporate discounts on health-related check-ups, subsidise extras cover, negotiate corporate rates for private health insurance, vaccination for parents, e.g. influenza, whooping cough.
- ✓ **In addition to EAP, inform parents of other resources** such as Parenting hotlines and websites, e.g. Raising Children Network and Parentline.
- ✓ **Offer parents the opportunity to take kids to after-school activities**, attend parent-teacher meetings and occasionally volunteer or attend events at the school.
- ✓ **Invite kids into the workplace**, e.g. make it ok to bring a child into work if they are home from school and if your business provides products or services to kids, consider inviting them to test products and provide feedback in exchange for pizza or movie vouchers.





Now they're really busy with their own lives – work, parties and whatever, you almost need to fit your busy schedule into their busy schedule, even to be able to see them and maintain that relationship.

PWWP FOCUS GROUP  
PARTICIPANT



## THE HIGH SCHOOL YEARS

### Parents may be experiencing

- **Stress and anxiety with start of high school**, new peer group and schooling environment.
- **Financial stress** – high school can mean increased school costs.
- **Difficulties with teens** – alcohol, drugs, moodiness, troubles at home, complex peer relationships. This is a challenging time of parenting as tweens and teens start to seek independence and test boundaries.
- **Concerns relating to youth suicide**. In 2018, suicide accounted for 43.4% of deaths among 15-19 year old males, and 34% among 15-19 year old females (Source: Life in Mind Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics).
- **Extracurricular activities that are ramping up**. As children start to engage or compete in larger settings, their activities might be well outside the local area. Increased need to be 'taxi driver'.
- **VCE year** – additional study requirements, tutoring, increased pressure and stress.
- **Career questions** – kids are starting to think about what occupation they might pursue.
- **Additional challenges associated with blending families** with large age gaps and/or two families of teenagers.
- **Increasingly, caring for elderly parents** as well as older kids.

### How employers can help

- ✓ **Maintain the same level of flexibility** afforded to those with younger children.
- ✓ **Educate leaders about the importance of teenage years** – look for opportunities to help parents spend time with their teenage kids.
- ✓ **Offer emotional support to parents:**
  - ✓ Provide resources and connections. If no formal parent network exists, consider ad hoc expert speakers or set up a peer network.
  - ✓ Encourage the use of EAP.
  - ✓ Provide vouchers to attend parenting seminars and webinars etc. (these are often inexpensive).
- ✓ **Offer support to teens:**
  - ✓ Provide work experience opportunities for high school children, summer internships/casual jobs.
  - ✓ Organise wellbeing workshops – transitioning to high school, managing stress and anxiety.
  - ✓ Offer Year 12 support, e.g. time off for parents supporting VCE students, corporate discounts on tutoring programs.

For more ideas to support parents across the seasons of parenthood, refer to Resource: 'How to Set Up a Working Parents Network'.

# RESOURCE:

## CONVERSATION STARTERS TO SUPPORT ONGOING WORKING PARENTHOOD

What's important to you as a working parent?

Is there any way we can be more supportive to you during this time?

What sort of flexible work arrangements would help facilitate your work life integration?

What assignments do you want/not want to take on?

What sort of training and promotional opportunities would you like to be considered for?

What can the organisation/I do to ensure you are able to integrate your work and family life?

How can the organisation/I make it easier for you to tell us if you need anything further or if circumstances change?



# RESOURCE:

## TIPS TO EASE THE TRANSITION BACK TO SCHOOL

- ✓ Remind employees of your family-friendly policies.
- ✓ Remind managers to contact HR or management if they need help facilitating support for working parents.
- ✓ Enable your employee to work from home or do half days during the early transition days.
- ✓ Provide useful info that could help your working parents get organised through this period of transition, e.g. create a sheet of back to school tips, lunchbox ideas, meal plans.
- ✓ Remind employees of the EAP which may be useful as they handle any feelings of stress or anxiety around this period of transition – including a reminder if the EAP support extends to family members.



# RESOURCE:

## KEY TRANSITION POINTS

