

# Working Parents: Trends and Strategies For Support

Jennifer Sabatini Fraone  
Boston College Workforce Roundtable  
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# Center Mission

The Center for Work & Family works with progressive employers to develop a learning community focused on **enhancing the employee experience**. As a university-based center, we provide a **bridge linking research and practice** to foster innovative, evidence-based, workforce management practices.



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# Center Members include...



# Organizational responses to COVID-19 Caregiving Crisis

- Ask for and listen to caregivers' needs
- Provide flexibility - Focus on results, not schedules
- Caregiving benefits and supports - assess how your company can help with childcare and eldercare
- Developing the future workplace - smarter policies and practices
- Show empathy and understanding - create a culture of support
- Continue to evaluate what's working



## BENCHMARKING SUMMARY: COVID-19 SUPPORTS FOR WORKING PARENTS

NOVEMBER 2020

Briefly share what steps your organization has taken or plans to take to support your working parents, particularly mothers who now have increased responsibilities at home.

### Flexibility

- Communication around all the flexibility options available
- On-going remote work (some through next June)
- Flexible start/stop times, Sunday work, night work
- Reduced schedule while maintaining full benefits (80%)
- Extended Caregiving Leave (partially or fully paid)
- Hybrid model- some days at home/some days at office
- Part-time work and job share options
- Compressed work week
- Sabbatical - encouraging use for caregiving reasons
- Leave bank - Vacation time or PTO donated by other employees

### Well-being and Mental Health

- Promotion of existing EAP and counseling services
- Workshops and virtual events on resilience, stress, mindfulness and other wellbeing topics
- Telehealth services for physical and mental health
- Frequent pulse surveys and touch points
- Checking in and simply asking how employees are doing each week
- Wellness initiatives that offer services, tips, and hacks to reduce stress, balance home, family, getting enough rest
- Promoting appreciation, recognition, well-being and self-care activities, workshops, resources
- Assistance navigating the healthcare system
- Ergonomics support for remote working

### Leadership and Culture

- Messages of understanding and validation from top leadership
- Regular town hall meetings or blogs from leaders to express support
- Transparency around return to work plans
- Review and enhance benefits to ensure they are inclusive of all employees and their caregiving needs
- Encourage authentic conversations and storytelling
- Reaffirming commitment to diversity, inclusion, and women's advancement
- Training for managers on empathy and support for caregivers during this crisis

### Access to Care Support

- Access to Care.com or other caregiver platforms
- Back up child care in home or at center (paid or discounted)
- Elder care resources and support
- Support for children with special and unique needs
- Babysitting co-op where employee teens/older children can offer services to other parents with young children
- Virtual homework help - 24/7 access to online tutors for kindergarten through college (paid or discounted)
- Executive coaching and dual career couple coaching

### Financial

- Subsidies for child care, tutoring, babysitters (some subsidies available to all, some based on income or hardship)
- Additional back up care days paid for by company
- Discounts on tutoring and enrichment programs
- Dependent Care FSA (COVID as critical incident allowing changes)
- Concierge Services

### Community Support

- Intranet boards/social media groups for caregivers to connect with each other and share ideas and solutions
- Caregiver ERGs/business networks providing support and education
- Parent gatherings and virtual programming
- Women's groups programming to help connect with each other, find support, and reboot

# COVID-19 SUPPORTS FOR WORKING PARENTS

We asked Roundtable members to share what steps their organizations have taken or plan to take to support working parents.



# Types of Support for Caregivers



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## FLEXIBILITY:

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- Flexible start/stop times, Sunday work, night work
- Reduced schedule while maintaining full benefits (80%)
- Extended Caregiving Leave (partially or fully paid)
- Hybrid model- some days at home/some days at office
- Part-time work and job share options
- Meeting-free Fridays or other uninterrupted time
- Encouraging use of PTO or sabbaticals for caregiving
- Leave bank - Vacation time or PTO donated by other employees

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## MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING:

- Promotion of existing EAP and counseling services
- Workshops and virtual events on resilience, stress, mindfulness and other wellbeing topics
- Telehealth services for physical and mental health
- Frequent pulse surveys and touch points
- Checking in and asking how employees are doing each week
- Wellness initiatives that offer services, tips, and hacks to reduce stress, balance home, family, getting enough rest
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# Types of Support for Caregivers

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## LEADERSHIP AND CULTURE:

- Messages of understanding, validation from top leadership
- Regular town hall meetings, storytelling or blogs from leaders to express support
- Transparency around return to work plans
- Review and enhance benefits to ensure they are inclusive of all employees and their caregiving needs
- Adjustment of goals and performance measures as needed
- Reaffirming commitment to diversity, inclusion, and women's advancement
- Training for managers on empathy and support for caregivers during this crisis

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## ACCESS TO CARE SUPPORT:

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# BCCWF Tip Sheets

## BALANCING CAREGIVING AND REMOTE WORK

**Establish a daily schedule and maintain routines.** Maintaining a routine is important for health and well-being and helps kids feel safe, regulated and calm.

- Keep bedtimes and wake times relatively consistent for the whole family.
- Kids need structure, but it doesn't have to look like a typical school day. Take time each work for your family and give kids a say to help with buy-in.
- Work out a daily schedule that includes time for physical activity, social connection time for every family member. Have an activities list that kids can turn to if they get bored.
- Mark the transition from non-work to work with activities like taking a walk and get ready for the work and school day.

**Set clear expectations and boundaries.** Establish how work will get done with your family and colleagues.

- Carve out quiet zones for each family member to get work done.
- Trade off with your partner throughout the day taking 1-2 hour shifts. Rather than 24/7 it is more effective if one of you is "on" as caregiver, while the other focuses on work.
- Set alarms to manage transitions and use physical signals like "stop light entry" to understand when you can and cannot be interrupted.
- Color code your calendar or use automated replies during the day to let colleagues know when you are not available or may be slower to respond.

**Focus on your most important work and accept that you can't do it all.** Work with your manager and colleagues to identify the most essential projects and tasks.

- Establish clear and realistic deadlines to set yourself up for success.
- Backburner "non-essential" tasks that do not relate to top business priorities.
- It is impossible to be productive and "on" at all times. Carve out non-work time and breaks to stay engaged and avoid burnout.
- Give yourself permission for this to be messy and imperfect. If you have a bad day, accept it and move on.

**Lead by example.** As parents learn to do remote work, kids will learn by example.

- Model self-discipline and focus. This is an opportunity for kids to become more self-motivated.
- Tend to your own self-care and show your children how you manage your own stress and anxiety.

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## Guidelines for Employees Working Remotely



### Set Yourself up for Success



- Establish a daily routine. For example, showering and getting ready for the day, grabbing a coffee before you start your work, or taking a short walk over lunch.
- Create daily goals. This will help you to build structure into your day. Use sticky notes as reminders for deadlines. Setting goals is motivating.
- Use the 1-3-5 Rule. Every day focus on 1 big project that is a priority for you to complete, 3 medium things that need to be done, and 5 small tasks to finish.
- Take breaks. Taking short (2-5 min) breaks is important when working from home to boost your productivity and focus.

### Communicate Effectively

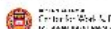
- Communicate frequently with your manager and colleagues. Use regular check-ins to update others on your progress, and to elicit feedback.
- Let your manager know about the competing responsibilities you have and that you are committed to doing your best to maintain your productivity as much as possible.
- Be an active participant on virtual meeting platforms and conference calls.
- Regularly give and receive feedback. When giving feedback to your colleagues, ensure it is specific, constructive, and empathetic. Use your feedback to discuss outcomes and actions.

### Maintain Balance and Well-Being



- Set aside specific times when work does not interfere with family or personal time, and when family does not interfere with work, such as during dinner time and when family does not interfere with work, such as during the morning and/or afternoon. This can be challenging if you are caregiving for family members who would usually be at school or daycare. If you have a partner, work out a schedule so you are some uninterrupted work time.
- Set working hours and try to stick to them. Having your home as a workplace together makes for very fluid boundaries. Disconnect work. Taking time off to rest and recharge will keep you more productive in the long run.
- Find time to exercise. Physical activity combats stress and boosts productivity.

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## Managing Remote Workers

Remote working comes with a unique set of challenges. This is especially true for those who are new to remote work and may need time and support to adjust. Below are a set of tips to help you best manage your remote workers.

### Communication is key

As a manager, be accessible to all of your team members. Video conferences using tools like Zoom and WebEx can keep remote employees from feeling isolated. Making an effort to have some face-to-face conversations in place of emails ensures a more communicative remote team. This connectivity bolsters trust and leads to better collaboration.



### Focus on results

When evaluating productivity and performance, managers need to create a system that is focused on objective results to help ensure realistic and effective assessment. Understand that employees working from home may be juggling multiple responsibilities, including caregiving, and they may need flexibility around the hours that they work.

### Set clear expectations

Don't leave remote workers trying to read your mind. Distance amplifies uncertainty, and it is the role of the remote manager to provide a sense of structure through clear roles and responsibilities, precise objectives, and performance measures. Create ways remote workers can monitor their own performance and not always have to wait for your feedback.



### Provide regular feedback and inspiration

Remote workers should be recognized and rewarded for their successes, individually and publicly. Let remote workers know how their work is important to the bigger picture - how it contributes to the success of the unit, the division, the organization, to the wider community. Make an effort to normalize and celebrate virtual teams.

### Encourage work-life integration strategies

Remote workers can have very fluid boundaries between their personal and professional lives because their office is in the home. Encouraging employees to try to keep to a routine and establish a space that is work-specific can help with this. Employees should also feel like they are able to "shut work off" to rest and recharge at the end of the day.



## HELPING REMOTE WORKERS STAY CONNECTED

Look for regular staff meetings, conference calls, and

- Use technology to make virtual meetings interactive and engaging
- Ensure that the time is predictable and as convenient as possible for all attendees
- Include celebrations and other casual conversations in addition to business to foster social connection

Work by establishing communication guidelines

- Create opportunities for teams to work together to accomplish important tasks
- Reward effective performance and contributions to these team activities
- Make sure that all team members know their roles and the special talents that they contribute

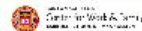
Messaging and email to assess work progress, to share announcements, and to communicate departmental

- Check in with your employees to ask questions, ask how they are doing and share information
- Use instant messaging to share quick news
- Establish a protocol regarding email communications: who should be included, who needs to respond
- If social networking tools are available, add photo, personal, and professional information on profile

Be open to your employees

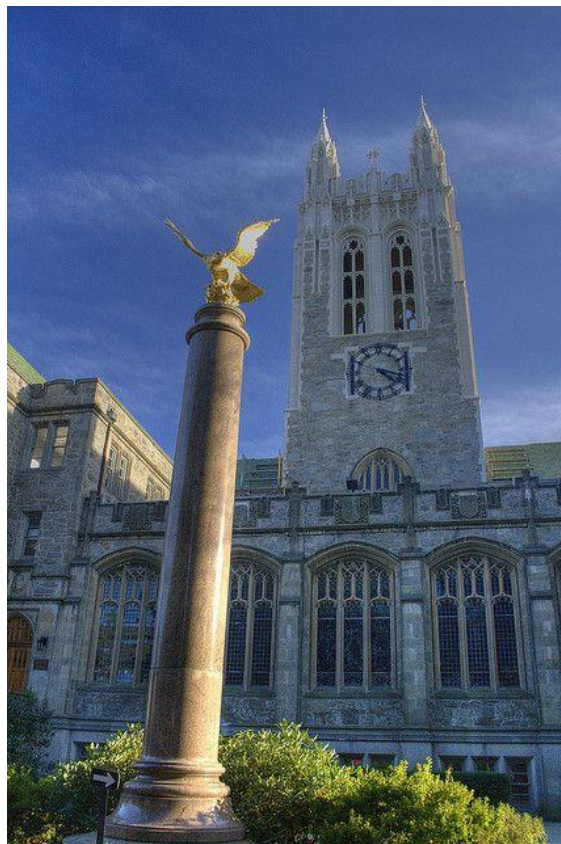
- Be available for and responsive to the needs of all of your employees
- Anticipate that there may be special flexibility needs of remote employees and be open to talking through solutions

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Thank you!

[jennifer.fraone@bc.edu](mailto:jennifer.fraone@bc.edu)

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