



## **Supporting Working Parents as a Recruitment and Retention Strategy**

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Question: We have several employees, primarily mothers, who are parenting younger children. Are there strategies we should consider for recruiting, retaining and better supporting these employees? We notice that some of them struggle to balance child care, school and work schedules.

Answer: According to data collected by Harvard University, approximately 73% of all employees have some type of caregiving responsibility. In addition, the labor force participation rate in 2022—the percent of the population working or looking for work—for all mothers with children under age 18 was also 73%. The bottom line is that most workers have either children at home under the age of 18 or some other type of caregiving responsibilities. Therefore, you are right to be thinking about this topic and how to be proactive in supporting your employees.

The first step I'd suggest is to talk with your employees, individually if possible. Ask them how the current schedule is working for them and if there is flexibility or other supports that would help them better balance responsibilities at home and the needs of the business. Be clear that you are not guaranteeing anything at this point, but you want to learn more about how you can support them, while also meeting the needs of customers.

What we most often hear from these conversations is that employees could use more flexibility for drop off and pick up times for child care and school. Another frequently cited issue is being able to stay home with children when they are sick or having options for sick care.

In response to these issues, do you have a mix of employees with different scheduling needs so that your morning and afternoon shifts are covered? In addition, do you have other staff who can be “on call” to sub in for those who are absent, or if you have multiple offices, can rotate between offices as needed? These are some strategies that can assist with ensuring adequate coverage, if needed. This may mean that you are “overstaffed” a bit, but ideally you will save time and decrease stress on staff and managers.

Part-time roles and hours can also meet the needs of many working parents. If you don't have part-time roles already, can you build these into your staffing structure? You may not only attract more qualified workers, but you may have less scheduling issues because they are committing to work during hours when they are most available. With enough notice, can you also allow flexibility for your employees to attend child care and school functions? These types of supports can also make a big difference for your employees and also increase commitment to your company.

Lastly, can you create a partnership with a nearby child care provider/facility to provide sick coverage? This is a more complicated strategy as child care providers have licensing requirement for ratios, etc., but

it doesn't hurt to ask and see if there are options that could be developed. Depending on the age of the child and the issue, can parents periodically bring their child to work when needed?

While also building supports and flexible staffing structures, it is important to be clear with employees about when you can be flexible and when you cannot. It is reasonable to have parameters because you are running a business and serving customers. Make sure that you are clear about proactive communication and how you will manage requests. Building open communication between employees may also help them coordinate with each other for coverage. And, frankly, there will be times when you cannot be flexible and the employee may need to use their paid time off or take time off unpaid.

Engaging in open conversation with employees and implementing these supports and structures, where possible, can help build a supportive and flexible culture and increase commitment from employees. And this can help you stand out from other employers in the competition for talent.