

## **How to be Family Friendly: A Guide for Employers**



# Who we are and what we do

Employers For Childcare aims to make it easier for parents with dependent children to get into work and to stay in work. The organisation encompasses a charity and the only Social Enterprise Childcare Voucher company in the UK.

We help parents maximise their incomes, manage childcare costs and create a suitable work-life balance. Through working with employers and policy makers we encourage and secure better support for families in the workplace and in public policy.

**Family Benefits Advice Service:** Our specialist Advisors carry out personalised benefits checks for parents and better off calculations to ensure that every parent is claiming all the financial help they are entitled to, particularly with the cost of childcare. We also deal with queries on childcare and work related issues through a Freephone Helpline used by thousands of parents, employers and others across the UK, deliver presentations and seminars, and publish information.

**Research, Policy and Lobbying:** We undertake research which provides us with the evidence to lobby Government on childcare, family and work-related issues, striving to ensure that the voices of parents, childcare providers and employers are heard when policy decisions are being made.



We fund the work of our charity through our Social Enterprise activities:

**Employers For Childcare Vouchers:** Employers For Childcare Vouchers is a Social Enterprise meaning that its profits are invested for social good.

Since 2004 we have been working with employers across the UK to offer the Childcare Voucher scheme to help parents save money on the cost of registered childcare and employers save on their National Insurance contributions.

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# Introduction

The term 'work-life balance' has grown in popularity in recent years, yet parents tell us the ability to achieve the desired balance between work responsibilities and home commitments has, for some, become increasingly difficult. Lines between home and work are blurred by the decline of the '9-5' working culture and the expectation that staff are always accessible through changes in technology. This presents benefits and challenges – for employers and for their staff. This is an issue that matters for all staff, male and female, whether they are parents, or have other caring responsibilities such as for their own parents, an elderly neighbour or even a pet. It is also important to recognise that the term 'balance' will have a different meaning for each individual staff member and organisation. This guide is intended to support employers and all employees in designing and constructing working arrangements that suit their needs.

## Changing times

In 2015 Government reflected the changing needs of working families through the introduction of family friendly initiatives such as shared parental leave, an extension of the right to request flexible working, and the enhancement of parental leave to cover all children up to age 18.

A series of international employers began a trend of offering enhanced family friendly policies to their staff, for example, entertainment company Netflix, extended its parental leave programme allowing employees to take unlimited time off. This prompted international debate on support for working parents and projected the message that work-life balance is both desirable and achievable.

And yet...

According to a YouGov survey for the Young Women's Trust, published in December 2017, one in seven employers admit they would be reluctant to hire a woman who they thought might go on to have children.<sup>1</sup> Separate research, also by YouGov, on behalf of the Equality and Human Rights Commission published in February 2018, found that six in ten employers agree that a woman should have to disclose whether she is pregnant during the recruitment process.<sup>2</sup> While the policies may move on, we need to make sure practice and culture do as well.

## Setting the scene: the experience of working parents

This guide is drawn from research undertaken by Employers For Childcare, examining the experiences of parents and their perception of how employers could better support them. Launched in October 2015, and based on feedback from over 4,200 parents, Employers For Childcare's report *Striking the Balance: The impact becoming a parent has on employment, working life and career*<sup>3</sup> provides an insight into the challenges that working parents face today, and explores the impact becoming a parent has on a person's employment, working life and career.

The findings clearly show the need for employers to embrace a family friendly working culture. While for some parents, a change to their working arrangements is a matter of personal choice, our concern is where parents feel that they have no choice other than to change their working arrangements due to a real or perceived lack of support. We have taken the suggestions and concerns raised by working parents on board in developing this guide for employers.

## Supporting parents by supporting employers

Employers For Childcare aims to support parents to access, stay in and progress in work.<sup>4</sup> Engaging with employers to achieve this goal is integral and we have consistently encouraged the use of family friendly policies amongst employers. From 2004 we have worked with companies across the UK to provide employees with assistance towards the cost of childcare through the Childcare Voucher scheme. Since 2011 we have celebrated some of the best family friendly initiatives through our annual Family Friendly Employer Awards. As the culture of work changes it is ever more important that the value of work-life balance is recognised. For those employers who are beginning to develop a family friendly approach to working, we hope that this guide is a useful place to start.

1 [www.youngwomenstrust.org/what\\_we\\_do/media\\_centre/press\\_releases/711\\_employers\\_reluctant\\_to\\_hire\\_women\\_who\\_might\\_have\\_children](http://www.youngwomenstrust.org/what_we_do/media_centre/press_releases/711_employers_reluctant_to_hire_women_who_might_have_children)

2 [www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-work/news/employers-dark-ages-over-recruitment-pregnant-women-and-new-mothers](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-work/news/employers-dark-ages-over-recruitment-pregnant-women-and-new-mothers)

3 The full report can be downloaded from [www.employersforchildcare.org](http://www.employersforchildcare.org).

4 While our focus is on working parents, we recognise that family friendly and flexible working can – and should – benefit all employees.



# The Business Case: the benefits of being family friendly

**Striking the Balance:**  
*The impact becoming a parent has on employment, working life and career*  
found that:

**91%** of parents said that it was difficult to combine work with family commitments.



**63%** of parents made changes to their employment after becoming a parent.



**29%** said the lack of flexible jobs was an obstacle to work.



**77%** said it was more difficult to progress a career after having children.



**40%** said that parenthood was incompatible with senior roles of responsibility.

The findings of our *Striking the Balance* report highlight various ways that parents could be supported in the workplace through Government interventions, better advice and information and more financial support for childcare.

While these are important measures, it is the role of the employer in supporting parents that was paramount. When it comes to creating a suitable work-life balance the employer is at the front line. The report shows that parents who believe they have a supportive employer are more satisfied with their work-life balance than those who believe their employer is unsupportive. There are also clear benefits for individual employers and for the economy as a whole.

## Business benefits

Many organisations are strong advocates of offering work-life balance policies to staff because of the potential business benefits. CIPD, for example, promote the business sense of offering a suite of family friendly policies<sup>5</sup>, which they argue represent a win for both the employer and employee. They say it enhances the company brand and promotes it as an employer of choice. This is important for targeting employees, widening the talent pool, and future-proofing the business.

CIPD was one of many organisations involved in the *Family Friendly Working Hours Taskforce* set up by the Department for Work and Pensions in 2009<sup>6</sup>. The Taskforce explored the challenges around improving the availability and quality of family friendly working practices. Its report reinforces the business case for offering family friendly policies on a practical and strategic level and details some useful case studies.

In 2014, the *Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)* conducted a literature review of research and reports<sup>7</sup>, exploring the costs and benefits to businesses of adopting work-life balance working practices. The report acts as a comprehensive summary of the evidence available and draws together key business reasons for employers to implement work-life balance policies.

<sup>5</sup> See CIPD (2013) *Future-Proofing Business Resilience Through Flexible Working – Insights from Members of the CIPD Senior Diversity Network*, London: CIPD.

<sup>6</sup> See Family Friendly Working Hours Taskforce (2014) *Flexible working: working for families, working for business*. A report by the Family Friendly Working Hours Taskforce, [http://www.cipd.co.uk/NR/rdonlyres/F36B815C-ABAF-4A04-8842-639EA20E48BD/0/Flexible\\_working\\_Taskforce\\_report.pdf](http://www.cipd.co.uk/NR/rdonlyres/F36B815C-ABAF-4A04-8842-639EA20E48BD/0/Flexible_working_Taskforce_report.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2014) *Costs and Benefits to Business of Adopting Work Life Balance Working Practices: A Literature Review*, available at [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/323290/bis-14-903-costs-and-benefits-to-business-of-adopting-work-life-balance-working-practices-a-literature-review.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/323290/bis-14-903-costs-and-benefits-to-business-of-adopting-work-life-balance-working-practices-a-literature-review.pdf).

These fall under four broad headings:

- 1. Increased productivity:** there is a positive association between increased employee productivity and the provision of family friendly working practices, and in particular flexible working policies.
- 2. Reduced absenteeism:** family friendly policies are also positively correlated with a reduction in absenteeism. Furthermore, surveys show that if properly formalised they are effective in helping employees both prepare for and manage absence. They can be a key tool in enhancing staff well-being, reducing overall stress and anxiety, and helping a staff member to not simply be present, but to be engaged.
- 3. Recruitment:** family friendly policies can be a competitive differentiator and offering family friendly policies can help employers attract staff, as well as widening the potential talent pool to incorporate those who have a caring responsibility and ensure a workforce that is reflective of the broader society.
- 4. Staff retention:** studies show that employees are more likely to be engaged at work and loyal to employers who offer such policies. This benefits employers in a number of ways, for example by holding onto skilled, trained and experienced staff, and by reducing the cost of recruitment. If you think about the investment you have made in staff, surely it makes sense to hold on to them including on their return from maternity or shared parental leave. Consider the cost of having to replace an employee in whom you have invested whether that cost is in the recruitment exercise itself, a loss of productivity, or staff time in bringing a new member of staff up to speed.

*"After I had my first child, I left a highly paid high profile job to accept a job less well paid and less high profile. This was done purely for work-life balance reasons."*  
**Parent, Striking the Balance, 2015**





In addition to these four broad benefits, businesses can also gain from the reduced cost which can be incurred through the provision of some forms of flexible working. For example, offering roles on a part-time basis decreases the organisation's paybill, whilst home-working arrangements can save on premises and energy costs.

In one of the largest global workplace surveys of its kind, 83% of respondents said adopting flexible working had resulted in improvements in productivity. Results from the research with 8,000 global employers and employees, conducted by Vodafone, also showed that 61% said it had helped increase company profits.<sup>8</sup>

These studies, along with the findings of our parent survey, show that while written policies are vital, the workplace culture plays a key role in dictating how beneficial they will be for both employer and employee, as it determines whether people are encouraged, or not, to avail of the benefits available to them.

### Addressing the challenges

Employers For Childcare recognises that some employers may naturally be concerned about the implications for their business. Questions that we hear regularly include:

- Is our company too small?
- Will staff who aren't parents feel discriminated against?
- How can we manage performance and ensure we are delivering for clients?
- How can we afford to do that?
- Can we provide access to development and promotion opportunities fairly?

The purpose of this guide is to highlight ways in which employers can ensure they are family friendly in a way that suits their business needs as well as the needs of their staff. In doing so, the benefits far outweigh the cost.

Accommodating a request for flexible working has been estimated as costing, on average, just £241.24.<sup>9</sup> As you will see in the practical section of this guide, no organisation is too small – nor too large – to adopt an approach and culture that values staff for the rounded individuals that they are, and recognises that doing so has the potential to enhance performance and productivity.

It is up to individual organisations to tailor this approach to their own needs, and balance their business requirements. For example, not all organisations will be able to allow staff to work from home. They could, however, introduce some flexibility in terms of starting and finishing times. In doing so, they are benefiting all staff, not just those who have dependent children.

<sup>8</sup> [www.vodafone.com/content/index/media/vodafone-group-releases/2016/flexible-working-survey.html](http://www.vodafone.com/content/index/media/vodafone-group-releases/2016/flexible-working-survey.html)

<sup>9</sup> [www.psi.org.uk/images/uploads/bis-14-903-costs-and-benefits-to-business-of-adopting-work-life-balance-working-practices-a-literature-review.pdf](http://www.psi.org.uk/images/uploads/bis-14-903-costs-and-benefits-to-business-of-adopting-work-life-balance-working-practices-a-literature-review.pdf)



# Family Friendly Employer Toolkit

Building on the information set out above, and informed by the views of over 4,200 parents, Employers For Childcare has prepared a toolkit that employers can use to ensure they are offering an environment that delivers to them and their staff the benefits of family friendly working. The toolkit can be used by all sizes and types of organisation, from the smallest to the largest.

Each step in the toolkit offers a range of options that can be tailored according to the nature of your work and your workforce. Just as each employee – and each family – will have different needs, each employer will require its own solution.

## Using the toolkit




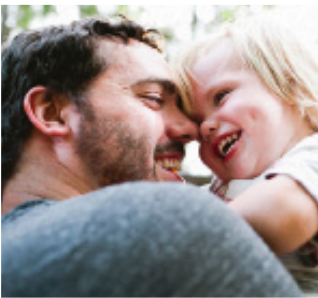
We recommend that you work through the toolkit step by step, whether you complete it as an individual or as part of an HR team. You should revisit this toolkit periodically as you may find that your capacity or the needs of your staff develop. The policies and culture that you put in place now should continue to evolve. Each step includes a guidance note, questions to ask and key actions to take.

As you consider each of the eight steps, update the checklist at the beginning of the toolkit to help you keep track of progress.

## Where can you get more information?

If you have any questions about using this toolkit, you can contact Employers For Childcare or visit our website [www.employersforchildcare.org](http://www.employersforchildcare.org). Through our website, we promote and share best practice including a new, regular interview with a family friendly employer. You will also find details of our annual Family Friendly Employer Awards, celebrating those organisations – of all shapes and sizes – that have gone above and beyond in supporting their staff, as well our annual Family Friendly Employer Workshop which provides an opportunity for learning. Contact us on 0800 028 3008.

## 8 Steps to Family Friendly Working

<p><b>1.</b></p> <p><b>If necessary, create a business case and secure buy in</b></p>	<p><b>2.</b></p> <p><b>Know your legal responsibilities</b></p>	<p><b>3.</b></p> <p><b>Offer flexibility that meets staff and business needs</b></p>	<p><b>4.</b></p> <p><b>Develop an understanding workplace culture</b></p>
			
<p><b>5.</b></p> <p><b>Ensure equality of opportunity</b></p>	<p><b>6.</b></p> <p><b>Proactively communicate with staff</b></p>	<p><b>7.</b></p> <p><b>Identify support for staff who require childcare</b></p>	<p><b>8.</b></p> <p><b>Promote your organisation's family friendly credentials</b></p>

# Toolkit Checklist

	Step	Progress	Date completed
1	<b>If necessary, create a business case and secure buy in</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audit current arrangements using this toolkit.</li> <li>• Consult with staff.</li> <li>• Prepare your business case.</li> <li>• Present it to senior staff.</li> <li>• Agree key actions and a timeline for completion.</li> </ul>		
2	<b>Know your legal responsibilities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document the statutory responsibilities you have towards staff, for example, in a staff handbook.</li> <li>• Identify the staff responsible for ensuring and monitoring adherence.</li> <li>• Ensure that they have access to any information and training they require.</li> </ul>		
3	<b>Offer flexibility that meets staff and business needs</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document the flexible working policies you may consider and communicate these to staff.</li> <li>• Have a process for requesting flexible working.</li> <li>• Consider each request with a supportive and facilitative approach aiming to secure the best outcome for staff and for the organisation.</li> <li>• Learn from each experience, and from other organisations, to enhance your approach – be creative!</li> </ul>		
4	<b>Develop an understanding workplace culture</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate well-being, work-life balance and flexible working into staff supervision and support.</li> <li>• Adopt a policy that meetings should, where possible, be scheduled for core hours.</li> <li>• Ensure language used in the workplace is respectful and positive towards flexible working.</li> <li>• Implement regular training for line managers.</li> </ul>		

	Step	Progress	Date completed
5	<b>Ensure equality of opportunity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When recruiting to a position proactively consider how flexible working arrangements could be accommodated.</li> <li>Promote that you will consider requests for flexible working in job advertisements, internally and externally.</li> <li>Ensure that internal and external communications, whether formal or informal, are respectful and appreciative of staff who have flexible working arrangements and build this into staff training.</li> </ul>		
6	<b>Proactively communicate with staff</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use a range of methods to communicate and promote your policies to staff on a regular basis.</li> <li>Talk to staff and find out more about what they would value.</li> </ul>		
7	<b>Identify support for staff who require childcare</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Signpost staff to support, for example, Employers For Childcare's Family Benefits Advice Service.</li> <li>Build a bank of useful websites and factsheets for staff.</li> <li>Remember Employers For Childcare is a resource for you too, call us if you have any queries.</li> </ul>		
8	<b>Promote your organisation's family friendly credentials</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apply for the Family Friendly Employer Awards, organised by Employers For Childcare, an annual event to recognise employers who provide and actively promote family friendly working policies.</li> </ul>		

### Step 1: Create a business case and secure buy in for your action plan

In order to develop as an employer that is truly family friendly you will need to ensure that you have buy in from across your organisation. You may need to invest staff time and resources, and approval may be required for this. You may also face opposition from colleagues who are concerned about what this could mean for them or for their teams. It may be helpful for you to construct a business case. Use this to secure the buy in of staff from across your organisation. This may include a senior management team or board of directors. How complex your business case is will depend on the scale and nature of your organisation.

Your first step in constructing a business case is to conduct an internal audit and self-assessment of how family friendly your organisation currently is. Use this toolkit to help you. You may also wish to consult with staff. Based on this information, set out the gaps in your current offering, the strengths you would like to build on, and the challenges that need to be overcome. You can then create an action plan, building in key milestones to chart progress against an overall timeline.

Remember, you may not be able to introduce all of your desired policies overnight, but you can start immediately to build a culture that puts a value on understanding the needs of staff. Revisit your business case and action plan regularly as the needs of your organisation, and the nature of your workforce, change and evolve.



#### Ask yourself:

- What opportunities do we have to implement family friendly policies?
- What is the anticipated cost in doing so?
- What staff will be required?
- What benefits do we hope to achieve for our organisation and for staff?
- What challenges will we need to overcome?
- How can we ensure a positive impact on clients and broader work plans?
- Do we need to get help or seek advice?



#### Actions:

1. Audit your current arrangements using this toolkit.
2. Consult with staff.
3. Prepare your business case.
4. Present this to senior staff.
5. Agree key actions along with a timeline and regular milestones.

### Step 2: Know your legal responsibilities

Employers have a range of legal responsibilities to their staff. At a minimum it is important that you know what these are and have a record of them to ensure that all staff who are eligible are able benefit. These include, but are not limited to:

- Statutory maternity leave and pay.
- Paid time off for antenatal care for pregnant employees.
- Unpaid time off for two antenatal appointments for the father or pregnant woman's partner.
- Protection against unfair treatment, discrimination, and dismissal of pregnant employees.
- Shared parental leave and pay.
- Adoption leave and pay.
- Paternity leave and pay.
- Unpaid parental leave.
- Employees' right to request flexible working once they have worked for you for 26 weeks or more.

You will find more information on employment rights for expectant and for working parents in the factsheets on Employers For Childcare's website: [www.employersforchildcare.org/parents/download-library](http://www.employersforchildcare.org/parents/download-library)

**Ask yourself:**

- Do we have a record of our statutory responsibilities towards staff?
- Are those staff who are responsible for these able to access information and training?
- Are we monitoring adherence to these?

**Actions:**

1. Document the statutory responsibilities you have towards staff, for example, in a staff handbook.
2. Identify the staff member or team who are responsible for ensuring and monitoring adherence.
3. Ensure that these staff have access to any information and training they require.

**Step 3: Offer flexibility that meets staff and business needs**

Alongside meeting the statutory obligations set out in step 2, you can offer a workplace that provides flexibility to meet the needs of staff and of the business. This could be through offering formal flexible working options or simply through giving a bit of flexibility for a short period of time when it might be needed, for example, a working parent who would like to change their working patterns during school holidays.

The capacity of your business may evolve over time. Depending on the nature of your organisation, you may not yet be able to offer all of the examples set out below. However, over time, you could build on and develop the suite of flexible options you provide for staff. These policies could benefit all staff, not only working parents or those with caring responsibilities. Examples of formal flexible working options include:

- Part-time working: agree hours that suit business needs and the employee whether this is shorter hours each day or fewer days each week.
- Home working: facilitates workers to spend all or part of the week working from home. Practically, you could allow meetings to be held using Skype or teleconferencing. For some employees, home working could be for part of a working day, for example, allowing a staff member to leave the office for the school run and then to work at home in the evening.
- Flexi-time: gives employees the freedom to choose their actual working hours, usually outside certain agreed core times. This means that employees can vary their start and finish times each day at work.
- Term time working: allows an employee to only work during school term time.
- Compressed working hours: allow employees to work their total number of contracted hours over a shorter number of days.
- Annualised hours: employees work on an annualised hours basis with contracted hours calculated over the year rather than per week.
- Career break: employees can take time off work knowing they have a job to return to.
- Job sharing: allows the responsibilities of one job to be shared by two or more employees.

Another option is to allow flexibility in using the policies available. Some parents may choose not to opt for a permanent flexible working pattern, but in some instances allowing staff to use the policies in place on a flexible, short-term basis can be beneficial. For example:

- Allowing parents to work from home when children are ill.
- Allowing the build-up of 'time off in lieu' (TOIL) to facilitate other commitments.
- Making flexi-time available during certain circumstances.
- Enabling annual leave days to be broken down into hours.
- Allowing staff to buy additional annual leave.

This can help take the stress off working parents when an emergency situation arises or to help plan in advance for parent teacher meetings, sports days or appointments. A little flexibility goes a long way.

There are some important caveats:

- Flexibility goes both ways and, in showing flexibility to your staff, you can also expect that they will demonstrate a similar approach to you. For example, staff may put in some additional hours during a particularly busy week, provided they have notice, but can then leave early the following week.



- You will need to set boundaries and communicate clearly your expectations of staff. For example, if an employee is working from home they can be expected to check in regularly with their line manager. It is important to remember that working from home is not a solution to full-time childcare needs, but may facilitate arrangements on a temporary basis.
- Your approach to offering flexibility has to be genuine. Ensure staff feel confident to talk to you, understand how to make a case for their request, and know that, while not every flexible working request can be met, each will be considered on its own merits.



#### Ask yourself:

- What flexible working policies do you have already, and are there other options you could offer to staff either formally or on an ad hoc basis?
- Are staff open to talking to you about their needs, do they know that they can?
- What is stopping you from offering any of the flexible working options set out above? Can you be creative in addressing any barriers or obstacles?



#### Actions:

1. Document the flexible working policies you may consider and communicate these to staff, for example, in a staff handbook.
2. Put a process in place for staff to make a request for flexible working.
3. Consider each request with a supportive and facilitative approach, aiming to secure the best outcome for staff and for the organisation.
4. Learn from each experience, and from other organisations, to enhance your approach – be creative!

### Step 4: Develop an understanding approach

The supportiveness of an employer is not necessarily reflected in the number of policies available. An organisation may have every policy available in writing, but a poor culture can prevent staff from feeling able to avail of them. Equally, a smaller organisation may not be able to implement the full range of formal flexible working policies, but can offer a culture of flexibility that staff value. Analyse how supportive your workplace is, including whether there is any stigma or negativity in the workplace towards those who work flexibly, are on parental leave, or avail of flexible working policies.

Parents who work flexibly have chosen to do so to accommodate their work commitments and their caring responsibilities. Many face a daily challenge co-ordinating work with school, childcare and (if applicable) their partner's work. This routine can be difficult to rearrange. Particular challenges identified include:

- Meetings organised during non-working hours for those who work flexibly.
- Managers setting the same deadlines or workloads for full-time and part-time staff.
- Organisations requiring work during anti-social hours on a regular basis.
- Shift workers being given little advance notice of shifts making it difficult to plan childcare.

Most often these situations occur simply because the arrangements are not considered from the perspective of staff who work to a more flexible pattern.



#### Ask yourself:

- Do you promote an approachable, open and honest environment, encouraging communication?
- Do you respect each employee's chosen work patterns?
- Have you trained your line managers in your policy and approach?
- Is the language used in your workplace respectful and positive regarding flexible working?



#### Actions:

1. Incorporate well-being and discussing flexible working requests into supervision and support of staff.
2. Facilitate proactive conversations with staff about their work-life balance and workload.
3. Adopt a policy that meetings should, where possible, be scheduled for core hours.
4. Ensure language used in the workplace is respectful and positive towards flexible working.
5. Implement regular training for line managers.



### Step 5: Ensure equality of opportunity

Some parents will seek to work flexibly to accommodate their family responsibilities. While this may facilitate the person's role as a parent, it can impact negatively on their career. This comes across in our *Striking the Balance* research with parents. A regular comment from part-time workers is that they feel they are treated unfairly in promotion opportunities. Many commented that their decision to choose part-time or flexible hours meant that they were overlooked for promotion, and they attribute this to a negative perception of part-time work. For roles that require full-time hours, there are solutions such as home-working or job-share which could help make these roles available to part-time workers.

77% of *Striking the Balance* respondents stated that it was more difficult to progress or develop their career after having children while others commented on feeling under-valued compared to their full-time colleagues. Some felt that they were seen as not fully committed to the job and, as such, are not consulted on business matters. Parents commented that this impacted on their self-esteem and morale. Not only is this bad for personal wellbeing, it can impact on business performance and productivity.



#### Ask yourself:

- Do you encourage all staff to go for promotions and are senior roles open to employees with flexible working arrangements?
- Could you look at alternative ways of completing a role, such as home working or job share, which would attract a wider range of applicants?
- Do you show all employees that they are valued?



#### Actions:

1. When recruiting to a position proactively consider how flexible working arrangements could be accommodated.
2. Promote that you will consider requests for flexible working in job advertisements, internally and externally.
3. Ensure that internal and external communications, whether formal or informal, are respectful and appreciative of staff who have flexible working arrangements and build this into staff training.

### Step 6: Proactively communicate with staff

Proactive and consistent communication with staff is vital to ensure all staff know what they might be entitled to, the process they can use to request flexible working, and that there is no stigma attached to having a conversation about their needs.

You should also communicate the benefits of flexible and family friendly working to staff, and the policies your organisation has, to promote a culture of understanding. You can do this through a staff intranet, newsletters, leaflets, posters in a staff room or through staff meetings. This goes a long way to ensuring that staff feel valued. By not promoting or communicating policies, staff may feel discouraged from using them.

As well as sharing information with staff, why not ask them what benefits they would like to see, and how you can support them to improve their work-life balance. Employees who are given a voice and have their opinion heard may be happier in their roles and more productive.

As a first step, make sure that all employees – new and existing – know about company policies, statutory entitlements and how they can find out more information or go about asking for a change if necessary. On top of this, you could give employees information about the benefits of a healthy work-life balance.

When you provide information, accompany this with an open line of communication, for example, ensuring that employees know who to talk to about their working options or the policies available to them, such as an HR colleague or their line manager.

**Ask yourself:**

- Do you proactively provide information on your organisation's policies to all staff, new and existing?
- Is this information easily accessible and is the level of employee awareness high?
- Are there other ways you could be promoting and encouraging the use of these policies?

**Actions:**

1. Use a range of methods to communicate and promote your policies to staff on a regular basis.
2. Talk to staff and find out more about what they would value.

**Step 7: Identify support for staff who require childcare**

The cost of childcare can cause a significant financial burden for families, whilst finding affordable and suitable childcare can also be a challenge. Employers can support staff paying for registered childcare:

- Offer assistance to your employees: from ensuring eligible staff have access to Childcare Vouchers, to operating a workplace nursery, there are many ways employers can support their staff. This could be regular support or occasional ad hoc assistance for example signposting to emergency childcare.
- Provide access to information: you can provide information yourself, offer an Employee Assistance Programme, or signpost to organisations that can help employees manage their well-being and mental, physical and financial health. Employers For Childcare's Family Benefits Advice Service, for example, provides free, confidential and impartial advice to parents on the best forms of financial support with the cost of childcare. Our Freephone helpline is 0800 028 3008.

**Ask yourself:**

- Do you currently offer any assistance to your employees who have childcare costs?
- Are your staff aware of support they might be entitled to?

**Actions:**

1. Signpost staff to support, for example, Employers For Childcare's Family Benefits Advice Service.
2. Build a bank of useful websites and factsheets for staff. Refer to Employers For Childcare's website for helpful tools you can use to communicate with staff.
3. Remember Employers For Childcare is a resource for you too, call us if you have any queries.

**Step 8: Promote your organisation's family friendly credentials**

Promote your organisation's family friendly credentials both within your organisation and externally. Use your website or a newsletter, as well as job applications, to promote the openness and flexibility that you offer to staff. This will help to build your reputation as a family friendly employer of choice.

**Ask yourself:**

- What are we doing to promote our family friendly credentials?
- Would a client or potential job applicant know about the work we are doing?

**Actions:**

1. Apply for the Family Friendly Employer Awards, organised by Employers For Childcare, an annual event to recognise employers who provide and actively promote family friendly working policies. As well as their award, winners receive a logo, to help promote them as a Family Friendly Employer, are profiled in Employers For Childcare's calendar, which is distributed to more than 3,000 organisations across the UK, and receive a feature on Employers For Childcare's website, also promoted on social media.

## Conclusion

There are many approaches that an employer can take to introduce a family friendly working culture in the workplace. Some organisations will be in a position to offer a whole suite of different working options to suit the needs of any staff member. However, it is important to keep in mind that many employees in the *Striking the Balance* survey simply asked for a more understanding and approachable employer.

Creating an environment which supports employees to reach a balance between work and life for their individual circumstances is arguably not dependent on the range of policies offered, but on the attitude of the employer and other team members. In our years of experience of working with parents, it is not unusual for family friendly policies to be offered to staff on paper but not in practice. To create a family friendly culture goes beyond a policy document; often a little flexibility and understanding goes a long way.

We are here to help, if you would like more advice on how you can support your employees do not hesitate to get in touch. Call 0800 028 3008 or visit our website [www.employersforchildcare.org](http://www.employersforchildcare.org) for more information.



# Employers For Childcare

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