

Leader Tool – Supporting Working Parents and Caregivers

We recognise that your organisation is made up of people who wear a myriad of different hats outside of their time working. This leaders tool focuses on what you can do to support the mental health of working parents in particular and caregivers in general.



Flexibility: Working from home was once seen as the hallmark of flexibility, as the pandemic has forced WFH on many businesses a whole raft of new challenges has emerged. Helping your people to set boundaries WFH is a topic in our wellbeing postcard series and can be found in the [Employer Login Area](#) under COVID-19 Support > Postcards.

Regardless of where work is carried out, increased productivity is achieved when people are respected and trusted to deliver their responsibilities in a flexible time frame. They are likely to be more engaged and usually put in more effort.

It is much easier to write this information down than put it into practice. However, take the time to practically re-evaluate job descriptions to provide role clarity and consider job sharing or part-time options if possible and give staff a sense of control over their work and work environment, which can mitigate work/life pressures.

Flexible hours to accommodate child care arrangements. People who have flexible working hours are more productive as they can work around their personal needs and will often work more than their hours, discuss with your people what will be most supportive. e.g. schedule meetings earlier in the day rather than at the end of the day when parents need to pick up children or for those parents in lockdown it may be a case of scheduling based on when online lessons occur or when their partner can supervise children.

Encourage self-care: Support strategies that encourage your people to look after themselves such as mindfulness, exercise, time out and other wellbeing initiatives, and foster a workplace culture of civility and respect. This may be particularly important for working parents, but in the pandemic, it is vital for everyone.

Communicate: All of our workspaces have changed in response to COVID-19, which has impacted how many of people do their work. This may have resulted in increased productivity for many organisations who have shifted to working from home. However, those organisations who have people working on the front line through the pandemic face different challenges, such as fatigue, burn out or frustrations about the freedoms others have. Working parents may require further flexible working arrangements as working from home can increase some of the work-life balance pressures. Children tend to be a very physical presence, and it's not always easy to enforce work time when the working parent does not leave home. Having open and honest conversations about individual situations can help to provide clarity with mutually agreed-upon outcomes. Frame recognising the needs of all members of your team as a collective issue to work through together to avoid misunderstandings.





Lead with empathy: These are challenging times, and getting into a new working rhythm which supports caregivers in your organisation will take time. Begin by proactively engaging with your people, acknowledging their challenges and if appropriate role modelling behaviours which encourage a healthy work/family life balance. Men and women in your team may be facing different social pressures to appear to have everything under control and this will be compounded by economic pressures and job insecurity. Fostering an environment where your people can ask for help is a very protective factor for mental health and where your EAP can provide support.

Be present, available and open-minded: Listening is a very important part of being present and available. It is something we return to again and again because it isn't easy. Listening and being seen to really listen, helps both parties to gain clarity of a situation and is vital in forming a solution or at the very least a way forward. A few reminders: Set a time for complete focus, give the other person the opportunity to start talking and keep talking while you listen, ask questions to both demonstrate you are listening and ensure you have understood, repeat back some of the main points you have taken out so that the other person hears it back but from a slightly different perspective. Make a plan as to how you will address what has been raised.

Encourage your people to seek support: A good start is to encourage them to take up the myriad options that are available to them via your EAP and wellness programs, your people will imitate you as their leader, so again it is important to lead by example wherever possible.

Share with your leadership peers: If you are finding it difficult to balance the needs of your team, the chance is that other leaders in your organisation are facing the same challenges. Share successes and failures (yes, failures even if we call them something else they do happen from time to time) to avoid pitfalls and give yourself a short cut to a win. Use the Manager Support Hotline to seek additional support from a Senior Clinician when you need to move forward quickly.

We are here to support you so that you can better support your people. If you have any further questions or would like to discuss a specific concern contact our Manager Support Hotline or your Relationship Manager. As always, as your EAP we are here to support your people whatever the nature of their concerns, please contact **AccessEAP** on **1800 818 728**.

