

MAY 2021

# MANAGER TOOLKIT

A Comprehensive Guide To  
Supporting New Parents In The  
Workplace



**BenefitBump created this toolkit to help managers understand the many ways they can create a better employee experience for those starting or growing a family. We want to ensure you have the tools needed to manage expectations, improve communications, and provide the right level of support that leads to higher satisfaction and engagement at work.**



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# INTRODUCTION

The work environment has certainly changed dramatically in the past year, and it is no secret that it has taken an exceptionally hard toll on working parents. New parents have faced additional challenges; Pregnant employees were not allowed to have partners join for important doctor appointments and faced uncertainty of delivering during a pandemic. Those who planned fertility treatments were not able to start the journey, or delayed the journey, due to COVID restrictions. Domestic and International adoptions nearly came to a halt. And many of these employees are still working remote or working flexible schedules to accommodate childcare.

This leads to new strategies managers should be considering when supporting these employees. While it is important for managers to consider time away and return to work as top priorities, there is additional value in going above and beyond by considering all an employee may experience at work while growing a family. What do you do if someone needs accommodations? How can you challenge your own biases? How do you support an employee who experienced a loss? A comprehensive approach can help create a diverse, equitable, and inclusive experience.

While innovative benefits provide the foundation for a positive experience during maternity leaves, parental leaves, and family leaves, its often the influence of the manager that can provide the most positive outcomes. After all, your employee has the most contact and connection with you.

BenefitBump created this toolkit to help managers understand the many ways they can create a better employee experience for those starting or growing a family. We want to ensure you have the tools needed to manage expectations, improve communications, and provide the right level of support that leads to higher satisfaction and engagement at work.

Employer policies and benefits are the first line of defense in supporting working parents. And while this type of support is invaluable, benefits and perks are only as good as the company culture behind it. Here is where you, the manager, can step up the game:



# Managers have an incredible opportunity to create a culture where parents feel valued, included, and fulfilled

## How can you help create a culture that supports new parents?

**Show compassion and empathy** - Pregnancy and adoption are "positive stressors." While it can be an exciting time in one's life, it still comes with a great deal of stress and emotions related to health, work, relationships, and more. Your support is priceless.

**Each experience is unique** - Values, practices, and beliefs vary among genders and cultures and influence choices for childbirth, recovery, childcare, and more.

**Familiarize yourself with employer benefits and resources** - Policies and procedures may be confusing or hidden. Find out what is available and encourage your employee to reach out for help navigating the various tasks. Tap your Human Resources team to learn more.

**Check your assumptions** - There are many paths that lead to parenthood for single individuals and same and opposite sex couples; pregnancy, adoption, surrogacy, foster care, and assisted reproduction, among others.

**Avoid stigmas** - Stigmas and stereotypes against pregnant and adopting parents can lead to discrimination, which can then lead to employees leaving the workforce, or worse, lawsuits.

**The process is not always smooth** - Pregnancies end unexpectedly, adoptions fall through. Extra support is needed to help those who are grieving.



Ready to Learn  
More?

# ACCOMODATING PREGNANT EMPLOYEES

Working while pregnant can be a very vulnerable time, both physically and emotionally. While most women can continue to work during pregnancy and after childbirth, there are some limitations that can occur. Helping a pregnant employee continue to work throughout pregnancy and after returning to work can be done with the help of a supportive attitude and the right accommodations.

Providing accommodations not only helps an employee work as long as possible before and after birth, but also fosters a sense of feeling valued and can help an employer avoid difficult legal charges. As a manager, here's what you should know about accommodations:

## What are some of the situations in which accommodations might be needed?

During certain points of pregnancy, some actions may be limited such as lifting, bending, or standing for extended periods. For some women, health complications can

arise due to pregnancy or childbirth such as high blood pressure or gestational diabetes. For others, there may already be health concerns that can be exacerbated by pregnancy.

If an employee tells you that they are struggling to keep up with a task due to a health condition or pregnancy, you should begin to engage in a discussion on accommodations and loop in your local Human Resources as soon as possible.

**250,000**

It's estimated that some 250,000 pregnant workers each year do not get the accommodations to which they are entitled.<sup>2</sup>



# Why be proactive in understanding and providing accommodations?

There are two federal laws that may require an employer to accommodate a pregnant worker: the Pregnancy Discrimination Act (PDA), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). PDA requires employers to treat a pregnant employee who is temporarily unable to perform, or is limited in performing, the functions of her job because of pregnancy, childbirth, or a related medical condition in the same manner as it treats other employees who are similar in their ability or inability to work. The ADA requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations to employees with disabilities, so long as doing so does not impose an undue hardship on the employer. Nearly 27,000 pregnancy discrimination charges have been filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) since 2015, so it is extremely important that employers take the accommodation process seriously.



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# Who can help with the accommodation process?

This is not something a manager needs to try to handle alone. Turn to your local Human Resource representative who can initiate the interactive process. The EEOC recommends employers use this process, which simply means that employers and employees work together to come up with appropriate and effective accommodations. Your Human Resource representative will help ensure they are meeting the proper obligations to engage in this process.





## WHERE ELSE CAN I GO TO LEARN MORE?

**For more information, check out these helpful resources:**

The Job Accommodation Network <https://askjan.org/>

The US Department of Labor <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/employers/accommodations>

US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission <https://www.eeoc.gov/employers/small-business/disability-accommodations-tips>

Society for Human Resource Management <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/pages/0214-pregnancy-accommodation.aspx>

# CULTURAL SENSITIVITY TOWARDS GROWING FAMILIES

As the world becomes more interconnected, and workplaces become increasingly diverse, companies will need to increase efforts around cultural sensitivity within their leadership team and their organization. Cultural sensitivity is “being aware that cultural differences and similarities between people exist without assigning them a value-positive or negative, better or worse, right or wrong”.<sup>5</sup> Culture can be shaped by ethnicity, socioeconomic background, or religion. Cultural sensitivity is not learning every cultural difference in your organization or interacting with each employee according to their assumed cultural traditions. This type of mindset, of trying to master cultural differences and apply them to an entire group, can lead to stereotyping and biases. Instead, cultural sensitivity is being aware that many differences exist and being open to listening and respecting about how individuals’ culture shapes their interactions and daily life. Mastering this skill requires a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and self-critique, by both individuals and organizations, and takes continued active effort.

So, how does cultural sensitivity apply specifically to interactions with pregnant or expecting employees? Pregnancy and birth customs are unique and vary between cultures and throughout regions. In some regions, such as the Ivory Coast, expecting mothers try to keep pregnancy a secret for as long as possible due to superstition and modesty. In other regions, such as South Korea, recently discharged moms may spend several weeks with their babies in a special postpartum center that focuses on the wellbeing of mom and baby. Delivery plans, including the staff that is present, where the birth occurs and the type of delivery, also vary across cultures. When employers understand that each family may have different traditions around welcoming a new child and are willing to listen to what those traditions are for that individual family, they can foster a more inclusive and culturally sensitive work environment.

## Best Practice

The best practice for managers is not to assume what an employee will need or want based on your own experience. If you are also a parent, you may not want to assume based on the experiences of your friends or family and you shouldn't assume based on someone’s cultural assumptions. Ask your employee what they may need, before and after welcoming their new baby. Open communication is the key.





# COMMUNICATING BEFORE AND DURING LEAVE



Welcoming a child is a monumental milestone for men and women. Recent studies have shown that family-friendly policies including paid parental leave are top priorities for young working professionals. However, paid parental leave also has implications for managers and employers themselves. Considering some of these suggestions can help make the leave process smoother for managers and employees alike.

## PREPARATIONS BEFORE LEAVE

**Open the lines of communication** - One study by UNUM Insurance indicated<sup>11</sup> that 49% of new moms and 36% of new dads did not meet with their manager or HR to discuss leave options. Doing so can help ease employees – and managers’ – anxieties about how the upcoming leave will impact their work. It is likely that employees have questions about leave; the same UNUM study found that only 32% of new parents understood the FMLA process before taking it themselves. Some questions you may be able to answer quickly for your employees; for other questions, BenefitBump is ready to help.

**Check in** - How is your employee doing? Are they excited about their new addition? Nervous? It is not necessary to be your employee’s friend or therapist, but a simple check in can do wonders to help employees feel connected and comfortable if they need to reach out later.

**Respect their privacy** - Pregnancy and adoption are very personal events. When and how does the employee wish to share their news with other coworkers? This may seem like a minor detail, but it can help an employee feel respected and supported by you, their manager, and the company as a whole.

**Document the employee’s daily responsibilities** - Your employee is the expert in their own work. If you have enough time leading up to their leave, ask your employee to document their day-to-day responsibilities. Doing so can help develop a collaborative and productive conversation around work-related priorities while they are on leave. What tasks need to be picked up by someone else? What tasks can be set aside or shifted while they are out?

# WHILE ON LEAVE

## STRIKE A BALANCE IN HOW OFTEN TO CONNECT.

There is no “perfect” amount of engagement while your employee is on leave, but the goal is to help them feel connected without imposing undue work-related pressure or stress. Ask your employee what he/she prefers in terms of how often they might want to connect. An employee may or may not want to connect with managers or peers while on leave, and either choice is okay.



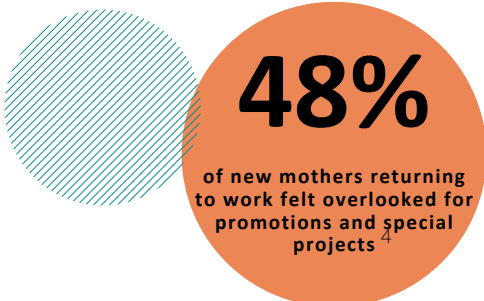
Consider informal Keeping in Touch (KIT) days. Although not common in the United States, other countries with family leave policies include a limited number of KIT days to help employees stay up-to-date and ease the transition back into the workplace. In countries that use the model, KIT days are paid days (or partial days) that can be used to catch up on developments related to important projects, attend training, learn about new developments in the company, or simply catch up with coworkers. It is important to note that KIT days are not mandatory for either the employee or employer, but they can offer another way to support new parents.

## FOSTER A “CULTURE OF EMPATHY” FOR ALL EMPLOYEES.

Adjusting to a new child and balancing parenthood with professional work is stressful. Consider creating a workplace culture that asks, “What can we do to help?” or “What do you need from us to help you do your best work?” These questions are valuable to all employees but can be particularly impactful for new parents who are trying to find a new balance between work and home.

Talk about flexible return to work options. The demands of new parenthood do not end when your employee returns to work after leave. Options will vary based on employer policies and the specific demands of your field, but offering flexibility can foster loyal, inspired employees. Is phased re-entry after parental leave a possibility? Is temporary remote work possible? Can certain meetings be attended remotely so that a parent can take a child to the pediatrician or make it to daycare pickup on time?

Although some of these suggestions take some intentionality and time, they can be easily implemented. All of these suggestions can make a significant difference in a new parent’s sense of engagement in the workplace. Making effort to create a smooth, supportive leave process can help employers and managers build a more loyal, inspired, and productive team.



# HOW TO SUPPORT DADS ON LEAVE

As more new fathers choose to take time off to take care of and bond with their new child, managers have a responsibility to support fathers during this journey. This includes reviewing time off programs for dads (both provided from the state and their organization), helping fathers efficiently structure and use their time away, and reducing the stigma around fathers taking parental leave.

## REVIEW TIME-OFF OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO PARTNERS.

Research shows 79% of fathers take time off work for the birth or adoption of a child, with the average leave being one week, and most are unpaid.<sup>13</sup> Familiarize yourself with the options available to dads at your organization. WorldatWork reports that 52% of U.S. employers offer paid leave for both birth parents as of March 2019.<sup>12</sup> If your organization offers paid parental leave, encourage fathers to use that time. Financial concerns are one of the top reasons fathers state that they do not take time off after birth or adoption, so explaining the amount of pay they will receive and alleviating financial stress during the leave is crucial. Some states offer parental leave insurance, so be sure to know the laws in your state and communicate them to fathers asking about leave time.



## ENCOURAGE PARTNERS TO USE THEIR TIME AWAY.

Typically, parental leave falls under The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) which states that parents of any gender can take up to 12 weeks off after a birth or adoption and still return to the same job with the same pay. If they have worked over 1,250 hours during the prior year and your organization has over 50 employees, they likely qualify for this unpaid job protection. Even if all you have to offer a father is sick and vacation time, your encouragement to use that time off may make the difference in them feeling comfortable using it or not.



## REDUCE THE STIGMA AROUND TAKING LEAVE.

One of the barriers to men using parental leave is the stigma around men taking time off to care for their new child. Male workers may face tension in the workplace when they prioritize family over work. It is not the fear of losing their job, but the unspoken disapproval—and questions about dedication—that can come with a long leave. Help to normalize taking parental leave by encouraging all employees to take the time off available to them. If necessary, hire temporary workers to replace them while on leave.

**Research shows that dads who took all the time available to spend with their newborn, were glad they did, and became more committed, productive employees because of it. Supporting new fathers not only benefits their wellbeing, but can benefit your organization's wellbeing.**

# 52%

U.S. employers offered paid leave for both birth parents as of March 2019 according to WorldatWork survey<sup>12</sup>

# SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES THROUGH LOSS



Not every pregnancy or adoption has a happy ending. Sadly, 10%-15% of known pregnancies will end in miscarriage.<sup>3</sup> About 1 in 160 pregnancies end in stillbirth,<sup>9</sup> and between 10-16% of adoptions do not go through.<sup>10</sup> This can lead to a period of deep sadness and grief for parents who experience this. As a manager, consider the way this type of experience might impact your employees. You can play a key role in helping your employee feel valued and comforted. Consider these unique challenges experienced by grieving parents:

- **It doesn't matter how early or how late the loss took place, it's a loss of a child no matter what** - Be aware of how your own bias toward the stage the loss occurred might influence the way you respond. Always respond with compassion and empathy.
- **Parents who take time off work after a loss may face unique challenges** - Time off policies may be unclear as short-term disability or FMLA may or may not cover the absence depending on policy guidelines. And bereavement policies are often only a couple of days. Work with your local HR and offer flexibility, when possible, to help your employee have the time needed to grieve, recover, and take care of any personal matters.
- **Returning to work may also be difficult** - Some employees may be so early in the process that they had not had a chance yet to disclose they were pregnant or adopting. This may make it hard to explain to team members why they were absent. While others may struggle to face co-workers, who were excited along the journey with them. You can ask your employee what would help them best and guide your team accordingly on what is okay and what is not helpful upon returning to work.
- **There is no timeline for grief to start and end** - Do not expect someone to "be over it" at a certain time. Grief is complicated and no one experiences it in the same way. Offer your support and proactively ask what you can do to help.
- **If you notice changes in job performance or attendance, don't jump to conclusions too quickly** - Talk with your employee and elicit help from your local HR and Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for additional support. It may be that your employee needs some temporary accommodations or to talk to a professional to work past some hurdles.

Experiencing the loss of a child is something no parent should ever have to go through. But you can support your employees by providing the right tools to help them through this and regain a sense of "normalcy." Your leadership and partnership at a time like this is invaluable and can surprisingly aid in their recovery.

## 10-15%

of pregnancies will end in miscarriage.<sup>3</sup>

# RETURNING TO WORK AFTER MATERNITY OR PARENTAL LEAVE

**As a manager, you can directly impact the experience a new mother or father has while he or she transitions back to work after a leave of absence.**

New moms and dads can feel a bit overwhelmed with all the “to do’s” they need to think about upon returning to their role. Reaching out to provide some guided support can go a long way to ensure the process is seamless and smooth.

Returning to work for parents presents some obvious challenges, and it is time to address them. There may be concerns around postpartum depression and separation anxiety, but there are also considerations, such as pumping [breast milk], bottling issues, handing your child over to a day care worker, the significantly increased financial burden of day care and the blur of sleep deprivation. As a manager, you have an opportunity to directly impact the experience a working parent has during this incredibly challenging time while keeping your talented professionals from leaving the workforce.

When your employee is approaching their return-to-work date (two to three weeks before), plan an outreach call to them to “check-in” to get a sense of how they are feeling about returning. The emotional side of this event can really be hard to endure. Give your employee some time to think through their return-to-work plan and what it may look like. Be thinking of ways that you, as their manager, can help:

- Ask them if accommodations are needed upon returning to work, whether working remote or coming into the office.
- Does their work schedule need to shift for a period of time around naps and feeding schedules?
- If they are breastfeeding and returning to an onsite work location, give them assurance they can pump in a private, designated space and offer to send or review the company policy for breastfeeding breaks.
- Offer to contact HR on their behalf if they have questions you can not solely decide on without HR’s approval. Anywhere from a reduced work schedule to intermittent leave options or certain accommodations that may need to be addressed by a designated role, like HR, within your organization.





**37%** of new mothers said they did not take the full maternity/ paternity/adoption leave they were permitted because of career pressure, feeling this would undermine their standing at work<sup>4</sup>

Each new mom or dad will experience a different set of circumstances and how they view returning from their own point of view. Some will be eager to return to work and jump right in where they left off. Others may experience some anxiety and have reservations and concerns about leaving their children with a new sitter or daycare facility. As their manager, you can offer resources to prepare them for these events.

One way to show support is to make sure they are aware of all the resources and policies available that the company offers. There are some great company resources, you as a manager, can be aware of and offer to share with them to prepare for their return:

- **Employee Assistance Program** - The EAP offers free short-term counseling sessions that can provide emotional support and coaching techniques on ways to cope with anxiety around returning to work. The resource pool is extensive at the EAP for things like childcare and other caregiving resources. The EAP will do all the legwork to vet and find the resources that are reputable and has openings; all within the parameters such as mileage from work or home that the employee specifies. Referring new parents to the EAP can be extremely valuable.
- **Communicate Important Reminders** - If you know paperwork needs to be completed (such as a release from their doctor before returning to work or adding their new baby to their health insurance) within a certain time frame, remind them of those deadlines so they do not forget them. It is quick and simple to communicate deadlines. This small reminder can alleviate negative feelings towards the employer for missing a deadline.

As more people delay having children, their childbearing and child-rearing years increasingly overlap with their prime working years. This has implications for employers seeking to attract and retain the talent they need. With 7.3 million job openings in an economy with only 6.54 million unemployed workers, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employers seeking employees with specific skills and experience are likely to have an even greater challenge replacing those who leave.<sup>13</sup>

Turnover in general is costly. Turnover among an organization's most important contributors is even more so.

Remember that part of your role as a manager, is to demonstrate that you do care about your employee's emotional well-being. It can be small in gesture but will feel much more valuable to the employee than you can imagine.

# SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS AROUND SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES' RETURN TO REMOTE WORK

Returning to work after parental leave is a topic that receives a lot of attention on both sides – from mothers and fathers preparing to transition back into the workplace as well as managers looking for ways to best support employees. The topic that has received less attention is how to navigate the return-to-work milestone in a remote-work setting. Here are helpful suggestions for managers to support returning parents, whether their work has always taken place remotely or they are trying to navigate a newly “virtual” world.

## BEST PRACTICES FOR ALL REMOTE MANAGERS

**In many ways, return-to-work preparations are similar for in-person or remote work** - However, limited casual interactions and impromptu discussions make the transition back into the workplace challenging for new parents and their managers. Here are some things to keep in mind:

**Normalize occasional interruptions** - COVID-19 has made it impossible for employees to separate work and home. Interruptions and cameo-appearances by children, pets, and stray toys are unavoidable. However, many new parents still feel uncomfortable about revealing their home lives, for fear that it makes them “less professional.” Managers can show support by normalizing the realities work-from-home life, and regularly reassuring employees that they are not penalized for these interruptions.

**Time to breastfeed/express milk** - Whether their children will be home with them or not, breastfeeding mothers will still need to build in time throughout the day to nurse their child or express milk. Break time for nursing mothers is legally protected, but is easy to forget about in a remote world. Show new mothers support by encouraging them to block this time off on their schedules.

## COVID-19 CONSIDERATIONS

If you manage a team who has always worked remotely, you may think that your return-to-work routines are already strong. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial for managers to consider some of the unique circumstances faced by new parents. Outside of work, remember that these new parents have had a birth and postpartum experience unlike anyone before them. Many women faced prenatal appointments without their partners present, as hospitals and clinics limited visitors due to COVID-19. Mothers and fathers may not have had visitors in the hospital. Help during the critical postpartum period was extremely limited, as many new parents limited contact with friends and family for safety reasons and outside help (such as house cleaning, childcare, pet care, and self-care services) have been significantly diminished.





Additionally, rates of postpartum depression and anxiety appear to be skyrocketing during this time; prior to the pandemic, 15-20% of women experienced postpartum depression and anxiety. In a study released in December 2020, rates of postpartum depression were closer to 36%. Whether they are experiencing significant mental health challenges or not, it is likely that returning parents are feeling even more isolated and exhausted than pre-pandemic returning parents. Managers should consider:

- **Does the employee have consistent childcare?**
- **Is it possible that the employee's childcare plan will be interrupted because of COVID-19 (i.e., exposures, quarantines, etc.)? How can managers and employees create a proactive plan to communicate and prepare for potential interruptions?**
- **Can accommodations be made to allow for flexible work hours to account for limited childcare?**
- **How can managers build in rituals or social interactions to welcome an employee back from parental leave?**

Although the flexibility of remote work is typically enticing for new parents, there are clear advantages and disadvantages for both employees and their managers. With proactive planning and intentional engagement, managers can ensure a smooth and productive transition back into the workplace for their parenting team members.

**36**  
**%**

In a study released in December 2020, rates of postpartum depression were close to 36%, nearly doubling from previous years <sup>6</sup>



# How to Support Breastfeeding Employees

**When your employee returns to work from parental leave, she may be breastfeeding and need support and accommodations at work.**

The American Academy of Family Physicians have recommended that infants be breastfed for the first 12 months of life, and exclusively breastfed for the first six months.

Supporting nursing mothers has benefits for the employee and the employer, including decreased healthcare costs, decreased employee absenteeism, improved employee retention, increased employee morale and loyalty, and positive public relations.

Additionally, breastfeeding has numerous health benefits for mom and baby. Breastfeeding can help lower a mother's risk of high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, ovarian cancer, and breast cancer.

Infants who are breastfed have reduced risks of asthma, obesity, type 1 diabetes, severe lower respiratory disease, ear infections, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

There are certain arrangements that must be in place to accommodate nursing mothers. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act amended section 7 of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) requires employers to provide "reasonable break time for an employee to express breast milk for her nursing child for one year after the child's birth each time such employee has need to express the milk." Employers are also required to provide "a place, other than a bathroom, that is shielded from view and free from intrusion from coworkers and the public, which may be used by an employee to express breast milk."

Accommodating nursing mothers is not only important for health reasons, but also for employment law reasons. The federal court determined that breastfeeding is a medical condition related to pregnancy, which means employers are therefore required to accommodate it under the Pregnancy Discrimination Act. Despite this ruling that took place in 2014, there<sup>15</sup> has been an 800% increase in breastfeeding-related discrimination lawsuits in the last decade.



**85%**

of those surveyed agree that being a mother helps women prepare for the challenges they face as business leaders<sup>1</sup>

**As a manager, you can provide more individualized support to help your employee meet her breastfeeding goals while still growing her career. And this support will also positively impact mother and baby's health, employee retention, and help your employer remain compliant with federal law.**

**84%** believe having mothers in leadership roles will make a business more successful <sup>1</sup>



## INDIVIDUALIZED SUPPORT FOR NURSING MOTHERS

- Allow time for flexible schedules to accommodate for mothers to pump. Mothers will need to pump around every 3 hours, for around 20 minutes per session (and time to get to and from a mother's room). If possible, allow her to make up time early or later in the day, from home, or through other creative means to get work done.
- Get familiar with employer benefits and resources that will help her. Check with Human Resources to see if there are resources through insurance or other employer benefits that are helpful for breastfeeding moms.
- Show your support. You can convey a positive and accepting attitude and help your team do the same.

For additional information, visit:

- <https://www.aafp.org/about/policies/all/breast-feeding.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/about-breastfeeding/why-it-matters.html>
- <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/nursing-mothers/faq>
- <https://worklifelaw.org/publications/Caregivers-in-the-Workplace-FRD-update-2016.pdf>

# CONSIDERATIONS FOR ADOPTIVE PARENTS

**More families are growing through “non-traditional” means, like adoption or surrogacy. Having a plan to support those families will benefit you and your employees.**

There is a serious and growing demand for adoption benefits in the workplace as more families continue to be created through non-biological methods. Employers implement adoption-friendly policies because they care about their employees and see the provision of adoption benefits as “the right thing to do.” Let us talk about ways you can help employees throughout their adoption journey.

- **Remain flexible** - Be mindful that adoptive parents may need a flexible work schedule to address pre- and post-adoption requirements and challenges. By making flexible work options more readily available for all workers, both men, and women, the friction between work and life that affects many parents is reduced.
- **Review available leave options** - Review available leave options. No time like the present to re-evaluate leave policies to support growing families. Talk with your employee about the different leave options available to them. The adoption journey is a complex process and can take several years. Phased leave options are beneficial before and after placement to help parents and children bond and readjust to a work schedule. Paid leave allows adoptive families to complete necessary trips to facilitate an adoption, as well as post-placement parental leave. Additional unpaid leave on top of the 12 weeks required by FMLA, commonly between one week and one year, offers bonding time for parents and children as well.
- **Prioritize a supportive work environment** - The best thing any manager can do is promote an empathetic work environment that recognizes that every working parent is different and their goals and needs will also be different. Celebrate when employees adopt, just as you would when employees give birth. Educate employees about adoption with workshops, reading materials, and EAP programs that are available. Encourage employees to engage with BenefitBump’s Adoption Support Program.

Workplaces throughout the world are beginning to address the need for more inclusive benefits packages, including policies for those who will create a family through adoption. BenefitBump is here to help guide you through the process and answer any questions you may have regarding adoption assistance programs and how you can support your employees who adopt.

For more information on creating an adoption-friendly workplace, please visit:

Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption

<https://www.davethomasfoundation.org/our-programs/adoption-friendly-workplace/>



**65%**

of those surveyed describe working moms as better listeners than other employees<sup>1</sup>

# UNCONSCIOUS BIAS TOWARDS PARENTS IN THE WORKPLACE

Unconscious bias in the workplace can be a complicated and a delicate topic. With the Covid-19 pandemic bringing with it a whole new set of challenges for working parents, managers play a critical role. In this article we discuss unconscious bias and the impact on the workplace, the maternal wall, and solutions for reducing unconscious bias in the workplace.<sup>17</sup>

## What is Unconscious Bias?

Bias is a prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another usually in a way that is unfair. Biases may be held by an individual, group, or institution and can have negative or positive consequences. Unconscious biases are social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness.



## The Impact of Unconscious Bias

When employees see others being promoted based on relationship rather than merit, they leave the company. Employee turnover resulting from unconscious bias is an expensive mistake. CareerBuilder estimates that turnover costs companies \$22,000 per employee.<sup>7</sup> Other sources estimate the cost to be much higher when replacing an employee earning \$100,000 or more per year.

## The “Maternal Wall”

A publication in the Harvard Business Review (HBR) describes women, who have always been successful at work, find their competence questioned when they take parental leave or ask for a flexible work schedule. They call this bias the “maternal wall.” This bias also affects fathers who ask for even the most modest accommodations for caregiving.<sup>16</sup>

## Standard Processes Reduce Unconscious Bias

Unconsciously the person with whom you have perceived affinity will automatically have an edge, whether they deserve it or not. Reducing our unconscious bias as we interact with others at work can be accomplished by creating standard processes that will help you to pause before you react in favor of, or to the detriment of someone in a review process.

### Offer Flexible Work Schedules to All

If your industry allows for it, flexible hours benefit both parents and non-parents in separate ways. For parents of young children, their work schedule can be tied to their children’s school, sleep, childcare, or spouse’s schedules. Non-parents can use flexible working hours to be more productive; taking advantage of their most productive time of day, shifting schedules to avoid sitting in traffic, or flexing their schedule to care for aging parents. Regardless of the reason, allowing all employees to work flexible schedules creates a standardized policy that reduces unconscious bias. If you have a work-from-home policy, stick with a blanket rule for all, and do not make managers judge whether someone’s reason is worthy or not.

HBR found that while most workplaces allowed their employees some flexibility in working hours, the usage rates for employees were exceptionally low. <sup>16</sup> The reason is because the use of flexible policies was shown to result in negative work consequences for employees, such as wage penalties, lower performance evaluations, and fewer promotions.

If you offer your employees flexible working hours, be sure to make it easy for them to take advantage of the policy. Be aware of your indirect and direct ways of communicating as mixed messages are confusing. Comments of “You are leaving already? Must be nice!” or conducting poor performance evaluations can be both harmful and unhelpful.

### Offer Training on Unconscious Bias

Training on unconscious bias helps to raise awareness of blind spots and remove or reduce the possibility of unconsciously discriminating against those who do not match the value system we have developed throughout our lives. Making managers aware of unconscious biases through training and development costs a fraction of the average turnover cost of an employee, at only \$1,200 per employee. Offering unconscious bias training is far less expensive and better for morale of the workforce.

### Create Policies to Support Working Parents

Offer family-friendly benefits to all parents regardless of their path to parenthood to support parents in the workplace and at home. These benefits can include paid parental leave, paid sick days, paid personal days, paid bereavement days, disability leave and benefit navigation assistance. Policies can be de-stigmatized through regular training and open communication about them.



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