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# Six Tips for Supporting Parents During a Pandemic

BY BERNARD S. DYME

At the end of the latter part of the 2019-2020 school year, parents had children participating in school while at home and most believed this would be a temporary situation. They just had to last through the end of the term and occupy the kids during the summer.

That didn't quite work out as expected.



Parents and children have settled into what seems to be a full year of either online schooling or some combination of virtual and in-class education. This varies by location, but what is clear is that there is no immediate end in sight.

For many parents, this lack of certainty about what will happen and when is combined with the continued need for them to work from home. This is a scenario for which most families are not prepared. Not to mention those parents who are out of work, which drives stress levels astronomically high.

A recent study by the [Brookings Institution](#) found that “the three pillars of parenting — economic stability, parental mental health and support for children’s learning — have been shaken.” There were serious breaches in the levels of parental stress and breaks in parent-child interactions. And the results were the same for two very different communities: rural Pennsylvania and the urban Chicago area.

With the individual, couple and family stress from parents and kids all working at home, there are several things employers can do to help working parents balance caring for their children, homes, work, relationships, safety, health and more.

1. **Assess Gaps.** Are existing policies supportive enough for families? [Identify the most pressing needs of working parents](#). Be sure to consider vulnerable groups such as temporary, informal, pregnant or nursing workers, workers with disabilities and those who lack access to benefits like paid sick leave.
2. **Allow Flexible Hours.** Flexible work arrangements give workers freedom over when and where they fulfil their job responsibilities. Flexible work arrangements include teleworking, compressing the work week or ensuring protected long-term leave so that workers can care for relatives who are sick, elderly or live with disabilities. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act ([FFCRA](#)) requires certain employers to provide employees with paid sick leave or expanded family and medical leave for circumstances related to COVID-19.
3. **Offer Safe, Accessible and Affordable Childcare.** Many working parents are faced with few or no childcare options. Some may even be forced to leave younger children with limited supervision, compromising their safety. You can support these parents in numerous ways, including through [childcare referral systems \(to places that are available and safe\) and employer-sponsored subsidies](#).
4. **Help Cope with Stress.** Offer support for workers who feel anxious, confused or scared during the COVID-19 outbreak. You can also assist working parents trying to help their children cope with anxiety and fear. [Top-tier employee assistance programs \(EAPs\) have a range of mental health, wellness, self-care and other resources for employees and their family members](#).
5. **Reduce Financial Burdens.** [Reducing the potential financial burdens of the COVID-19 outbreak for working parents is critical](#). Consider support measures such as employment protection, paid sick leave and economic transfers like child benefits and subsidies for health expenditures. Provide vulnerable groups (e.g., low-income and informal workers) with extra support. Make sure you know how to help employees tap into the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act ([CARES](#)).
6. **Communicate.** Leaders should check in frequently with managers and employees and offer additional help when they can. Displaying empathy and grace by leadership is critical for all organizations.

The impact of the pandemic on families is likely to be with us for a while longer. There will be ups and downs. But the notion of adapting for parents doesn’t mean “not feeling.” The job of parents is to try and reassure children without denying reality. This will help them learn to adjust, feel safe and loved, and take comfort that we are all in this together.



Help comes in many forms but, with the limitations of COVID-19 and busy schedules, working parents may need more convenient access. If your organization offers an EAP, they can get help virtually, as well as in-the-moment help. Be sure to promote all the methods of accessing the EAP, including phone, video, email, text and more.

## About the Author

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