Supporting Cornell's Working Families

In a recent Cornell survey of working families, the vast majority of respondents (staff, faculty, and academics) indicated scheduling and workload flexibility is the top support they need to help them successfully manage their work and personal lives through the COVID pandemic.

These practices were encouraged in a recent message from Mary Opperman, Vice President and CHRO and Avery August, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs. As a manager, you can help working parents/caregivers by understanding these challenges and working together to find ways to support them through this crisis, while also getting essential work deliverables achieved.

Explore this page to learn about best practices and options. Contact your HR Representative, Medical Leaves Administration (benefits@cornell.edu), and/or Work/Life in Human Resources (worklife@cornell.edu) for additional guidance.

Learn how you can help parents and caregivers of adults that work on your team navigate the upcoming academic year with the Supporting Caregivers on Your Team Workshop, September 1st from 11:00 am - 12:00 pm and September 3rd from 1:00 - 2:00 pm.

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1. Current Child Care & Public School Realities

A. Tompkins County had roughly enough care to serve 1 in 3 children (per Child Development Council, 2017) prior to COVID-19. This problem has been exacerbated by COVID-19 as care providers have left the industry or are limited in the number of children they can serve.

B. If a child is ill (regardless of whether it is COVID) they may be excluded from school or a child care program for up to two weeks. The threshold defining "ill" is very low in New York State.

C. Care options such as in-home babysitters are very expensive. It is a competitive market to find and hire a qualified caregiver. Parents who cannot afford care may leave their children unsupervised and vulnerable. The average cost of an in-home babysitter 40 hours per week is $2,400/month.

D. Emergency and drop-in child care options are riskier in today's environment due to the inconsistent nature and mixed
group challenges, thus fewer programs are offering this service.

E. Even if school/child care is open, the family may have medical concerns preventing its use.

F. Parents of school-age children have many unknowns:
   - Start dates and class schedules for in-person/virtual education
   - The availability of before/after school care
   - What to do if schools/care programs shut down unexpectedly
   - How much help they will have to provide their child with distance learning
   - How a child with special needs will be accommodated and if its sufficient
   - How transportation needs will be met

**It’s Taking a Toll**

A. Parents are struggling with feelings of burnout, mental fatigue, exhaustion, and anxiety.

B. Some working parents are considering resigning their positions if they cannot build a work schedule that aligns to their caregiving needs.

C. There are still gender disparities in caregiving. A woman is more likely to pause her career to care for a child. Female faculty publishing rates and grant applications have slowed throughout this crisis while male rates have increased.

D. Parents who are also caring for adults/elderly relatives have dual responsibilities and additional pressures.

**2. Recommendations for Managers**

There are no one-size fits all recommendations to address every caregiving need. However, these strategies will greatly support working parents throughout this crisis.

- Lead with compassion and empathy.
- Support an employee in making the choices they believe are the best for their child, family and circumstances without jeopardizing their career.
- Accommodate changing schedules/hours of required work, understanding these changes may happen suddenly and frequently.
- Check in more frequently and ask how caregiving is going. Let them know it is ok to have caregiving take priority at times.
- Revisit priorities, move deadlines that can be moved, and remove low priority tasks.
- Share Cornell resources (such as the Cornell COVID-19 Parenting Webpage and the Cornell Wellbeing update).
- Be alert for changes in people’s behavior and/or performance - encourage your team to take breaks and time off.
- Take care of yourself and model prioritizing your wellbeing and, if relevant, your own caregiving.
- If you’re struggling, ask for help from: your manager, HR Business Partner, Work/Life in HR (worklife@cornell.edu), the Faculty and Staff Assistance Program (fsap@cornell.edu), and/or attend an open Cornell Manager’s Chat.

**3. Schedule & Workload Options**

The following approaches may be used to accommodate working families with their schedule and workload (a combination of approaches is also ok). Not all options will be appropriate for all positions, however managers are encouraged to be as creative and supportive as possible.

**Please note:** Per the Cornell Flexibility in the Workplace Policy, a manager must consult with the HR representative prior to denying a request for workplace flexibility.

1. **Adjusted Start & Stop Times / Window Schedules**

   Focus on chunks of time based on availability and energy, utilizing the entire seven-day week if necessary. Schedules can be very creative, such as:

   Monday-Thursday, 9:30am-1pm, 2pm-5pm, and Saturdays 6am-1:30pm (40 hours)
If an employee does not have the capacity to work early mornings, evenings, and/or weekends to sustain their normal work schedule, a reduction to part-time may be a better option if the department workload allows.

2. **Compressed Workweek**

Ideal for hourly employees in customer service or facilities roles, compressed schedules (such as four 10-hour workdays) may give the employee one full day/week to address a caregiving gap.

3. **Remote Work**

In situations where an employee must return to on-campus work, consider whether there is a portion of work that can still be conducted remotely - create a hybrid schedule to support this.

4. **HAP or Vacation (both Exempt and Non-Exempt)**

Use in increments of hours, half days, or full-days. Note: Exempt employees are also eligible to use small increments of hours, which may be ideal if needed multiple days per week.

5. **Reduction of hours – Temporary & Formal**

Reduce the employee’s hours with a subsequent reduction in pay – hours must be at least 20 per week to sustain health benefits. Exempt positions may have to become non-exempt positions per Federal FLSA laws. Retirement contributions and time away from work accruals may be impacted. Check with your HR partner to better understand any implications of a change in hours worked.

6. **Reduction of work hours – Temporary, Informal, & Occasional**

Hourly employees may informally and occasionally report less hours worked than normal without using HAP/Vacation time to offset. The employee will not be paid for these hours. Time away from work accruals may be impacted. Discuss frequency and expectations with your supervisor and/or HR representative in advance.

7. **Occasional Schedule Swap**

Employees that perform similar work may wish to provide coverage for each other. Note: union rules related to this process, overtime, and seniority must take precedent, so consult with your manager, HR Lead, and/or Cornell Labor Relations in advance.
8. **New York State Paid Family Leave**

For staff/non-academic employees caring for children with disabilities, or to provide care to children with a serious health condition.

9. **Unpaid Leave of Absence**

Up to 3-month duration.

### 4. Managing Requests from Employees

- Managers and employees should work together to determine how to find solutions that work for the employee as well as for the needs of the workplace.
- There may be times when staffing needs make it difficult to support an employee being away from work, and it is appropriate to have a conversation about this with the employee. However, please make every effort to give employees the flexibility they need to balance caregiving during this uniquely challenging time.
- If the exact arrangement they are requesting is not feasible, suggest alternatives that may work.
- To prevent giving extra work to non-caregivers (a common concern in navigating these arrangements), consider:
  - What work can be paused entirely? Consult with your team and leader about options based on current priorities.
  - Proactively ask others on the work team (both caregivers and non) what interests they may have in taking a stretch assignment, temporary part-time job rotation, participating in a Gig. Post Gigs on Workday.
  - It may be less costly to offer occasional over-time to an employee to cover work gaps, particularly if the caregiving employee is unpaid and not using HAP/Vacation during their hours away. Carefully weigh the cost/benefit, including the implications if the caregiver is not supported (they may have to resign their position).

### 5. Other Ways to Support Working Parents

- Try to accomplish team projects asynchronously (using OneNote, Box, recordings, etc).
- Discuss with the team “no go” hours for scheduling meetings, social time, etc.
- Record standard meetings and provide the recording to individuals who were unavailable to attend.
- Aim for no more than 2-3 tangible objectives each week. Acknowledge that goals may extend into the following week
- Meet regularly for a 1:1 and discuss personal and professional needs

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