



Supporting Cornell's Working Families



Guidance for Managers

In a recent Cornell survey of working families, staff, faculty, and academics indicated the most essential support they need to successfully manage their work and personal lives through the COVID pandemic is scheduling/workload flexibility.

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, understanding these challenges and collaborating with working parents/caregivers will be critical to supporting those you supervise and achieving essential work goals.

Explore this page or [view this 30-minute training](#) 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.

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1. Current Child Care & Public School Realities

- A. According to the Tompkins County Child Development Council (2017), Tompkins County had roughly enough care to serve 1 in 3 children 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 schools and/or childcare programs may require them to stay home 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 expensive. 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 during the pandemic, and fewer programs are offering this service. Even if school/child care is open, the family may have medical concerns and choose to keep their child at home.
- E. 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 they will have to support their child with distance learning
- How a child with special needs will be accommodated
- How transportation needs will be met

It's Taking a Toll

- Parents are struggling with feelings of burnout, mental fatigue, exhaustion, and anxiety.
- Some working parents are considering resigning their positions if they cannot build a work schedule that aligns with their caregiving needs.
- 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.
- 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.
- Accommodate changing schedules/hours of required work, understanding these changes may happen suddenly and frequently.
- Revisit priorities, move deadlines that can be moved, and remove low priority tasks.
- Support an employee in making the choices they believe are the best for their child, family, and circumstances without jeopardizing their career.
- Check in more frequently and ask how caregiving is going. Let them know it is ok to have caregiving take priority at times.
- Share Cornell resources (such as the [Cornell COVID-19 Parenting Webpage](#) and the [Cornell Wellbeing update](#)).
- 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 (individually or in combination) to accommodate working families with their schedule. Although not all options will be appropriate for all positions, 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, utilizing the entire seven-day week if necessary. Schedules can be very creative, such as:

Monday-Thursday, 9:30 am-1 pm, 2-5 pm, and Saturdays 6 am-1:30 pm (40 hours)

If an employee does not have the capacity to work non-traditional hours, consider a reduction to part-time 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. **Hybrid Remote Work Arrangement**

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 time off is needed.

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 fewer hours worked than normal without using HAP/Vacation time. 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 who 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 and the workplace.
- There may be times when staffing needs make it difficult to support an employee 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 requested by the employee is not feasible, suggest alternatives.
- Caution: Reallocating work must be done thoughtfully. Non-caregivers should not be asked to conduct the work of caregivers automatically and without additional consideration of workload, priorities, etc. Prior to reallocating work, consider the following:
 - 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-caregivers) what interests they may have in taking a stretch assignment, temporary part-time job rotation, or participating in a Gig.
 - It may be less costly to offer occasional over-time to an employee to cover work gaps, particularly if the caregiving employee is unpaid during their hours away. Carefully weigh the costs and benefits.

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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