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Supporting parents and carers in the workplace

HR has many routes to create and nurture a culture that is inclusive and empowering of working carers and parents

Summer is fading and, as the leaves begin to hint at a change of season, the focus of many working parents turn to a change in routine. There will be school runs and collections, the evening bustle of packing sports bags, and the concern of interruptions to the working day. This time of year often highlights discussion around the ways of working to facilitate working parents. It is also useful to remember that it is not only parents who require support from their manager and their HR department; carers and employees of all descriptions need provisions to be made in the work environment.

HR's support of working parents and carers is vital. One way of facilitating carers in the workplace is to offer flexible working. The use of flexible working has a big impact on employees' attitudes to work-life balance. Professor Cary Cooper, President of CIPD, is of the view that flexible working provides employees with more control, promotes trust between manager and employee, and allows for a better work-life balance.

Professor Cooper suggests that HR can support managers to understand the value of flexible working not just as a vehicle to enable people to achieve greater work-life balance, but also because it delivers to the bottom line in terms of performance and a more engaged workforce.

Workers who are parents or carers oftentimes require robust supports and a degree of understanding from their employer. The most recent Irish Census notes: *fewer than half of parents in one-parent families are at work, compared to 70.2% of two-parent families.* This indicates that utilising the skills of single parents in the workplace requires stronger and more flexible supports on the part of employers. Many employees have significant responsibilities outside the workplace, be they parents or carers. In this climate of recruitment and retention difficulties, it is in everyone's best interests to provide provisions to facilitate the needs of employees, while delivering business goals.

HR has many routes to create and nurture a culture that is inclusive and empowering of working carers and parents, for example:

- Foster an open and inclusive culture where employees feel supported and empowered to respond to situations as they need as far as possible.
- Ensure that line managers have the confidence to have sensitive conversations with employees and empower them to tailor their working arrangements to suit their individual needs wherever possible.
- Encourage line managers to hold development and career conversations with working parents and carers to ensure their careers are not negatively impacted.
- Ensure that senior leaders lead on this agenda and visibly champion the needs of working carers.

It is also important that HR creates and promotes a policy, formal or informal, covering the organisational provisions available to carers and parents, recognising their challenges, and sends a clear message to staff that the organisation will support them.

For employment law regarding leave, including carers' leave, please see our [factsheet on leave entitlements](#).