



Boost Your Competitive Edge: Actions for a Healthy, Productive Workforce

National Center for Injury Prevention and Control
Division of Violence Prevention





Introduction

As a business leader, you know that the greatest strength of your organization walks out the door at 5 p.m. More so than the quality of your product or strength of your business model, your company's success depends on its employees.

Recognizing your people as your greatest competitive advantage is the first step to setting them—and yourself—up for success. Next, it is important to recognize that the stress your employees feel outside of work joins them in the office, affecting their focus, commitment, and ability to get things done. You've heard the break room chatter: "I'm stressed...my family is struggling with...I wish I could get more time to..."

There are actions you can take now to decrease your employees' stress, which could, over time, help you:

- Retain current¹ and recruit new employees;
- Increase your employees' enthusiasm and commitment to their work;¹
- Get more and higher quality work done;¹
- Reduce the number of days your employees call in sick;² and
- Lower your health care costs.²

Your efforts could also make a difference over the long term. Your employees are parenting the future workforce, so what you do now matters to ensure that today's children grow up to be healthy employees and citizens.

This resource outlines actions your organization, no matter what size or shape, can take to ensure a healthier and more productive workforce, now and into the next generation:

1. **Model safe, stable, nurturing relationships in your organization;**
2. **Create a family-friendly workplace;**
3. **Take a comprehensive approach to employee wellness;**
4. **Provide parenting resources for employees; and**
5. **Consider the role of state and local policy in improving employees' and their children's access to safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments.**

Use this resource as a guide to consider strategic investments that may reduce employee stress through the promotion of safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for your employees and their children, as well as throughout your community as a whole.

Beyond the Bottom Line

It is just good business to prioritize actions that can increase your competitive advantage and ultimately improve your bottom line. The great news is that the suggested actions in this resource can also have broader societal impacts, including reducing and preventing child abuse and neglect.

How? These actions facilitate **safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments** for all families and children. **Safety, stability, and nurturing** are three critical qualities of relationships and environments that make a difference for children as they grow and develop.

Ensuring safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments may also lead to:

- Children being ready to learn in school.
- Laying the foundation needed for development of reasoning, problem solving, and planning skills.
- A well prepared and more productive workforce.
- Lower absenteeism and employer turnover.
- Safe, desirable community/state locations for your business.
- A stronger economy.
- Reduction in healthcare costs.

Opportunities for Action

1. Model safe, stable, nurturing relationships in your workplace.

Experiencing positive relationships in the workplace is important. We know that adults who have good relationships are not only more engaged and productive at work, but also more equipped to provide a safe, stable, and nurturing home environment for their children.³

Here's how you can model safe, stable, nurturing relationships in your workplace:

- **Work to improve workplace relationships.**
Employees have relationships with their supervisors and coworkers, and those relationships require daily nurturing, just like all relationships. Provide opportunities for employees to bond and strengthen their relationships. Teambuilding activities are a great start, but simply taking time to get to know one another and explore common interests is important as well.
- **Create a culture where employees feel valued.**
Study after study suggests that productivity increases when workers feel valued. Recognizing great work and employee accomplishments will help them to feel valued by the company.
- **Be the change you want to see.** When top leaders consistently demonstrate how employees should be treated, they influence the behavior of others and set the culture of the organization. Leaders can also model the use of workplace programs and policies, which could make employees more comfortable with using them themselves. For example, leaders can participate in Employee Assistance Program (EAP) activities and/or take advantage of flexible hours and telework opportunities.

Small Business Tip



Model safe, stable, nurturing relationships with modest investments:

- Host a family fun night.
- Hold “lunch and learn” sessions around topics identified by staff.
- Institute an Employee of the Month recognition program.
- Establish an employee committee that determines how your company can support community organizations/ causes through volunteer work or funding.

Example:

- Oshkosh Corporation, a truck and vehicle manufacturing company, shows appreciation for employees through comprehensive training and advancement opportunities and tuition reimbursement. They also offer a rotation program whereby engineers can learn new skills in different units then apply for job opportunities that are posted specifically for internal candidates.⁴





“We simply believe that by treating our employees well and creating an excellent experience, including a great balance in their lives, they will be even more focused on doing amazing work for our clients.”

– John Tobin,
Slalom Consulting
Co-Founder

2. Create a family-friendly workplace.

Oftentimes, employees struggle with maintaining balance between their work and home lives. Navigating this balance can be a challenge for all employees, especially as they take on multiple life roles of parenting or caring for other family members. Employers who institute policies and practices to provide a family-friendly work environment demonstrate to employees that every aspect of their lives is important, not just their work life.

During a June 2014 White House Summit on Working Families, business leaders and employees discussed the challenges that face everyday workers in America, including lack of access to flexible work hours, paid family leave, affordable childcare, and a livable minimum wage. A family-friendly workplace benefits the employee as well as his/her family and allows for increased productivity, lower turnover, and stronger family bonds. Here are some ways you can create a family-friendly workplace:

- Support nursing mothers by allowing adequate break time and providing a lactation room (clean, quiet, non-restroom space). Federal law already requires employers with more than 50 employees to provide adequate time and space for this purpose.⁵ The Health Resources and Services Administration offers a “Business Case for Breastfeeding” resource to help employers create a breastfeeding-friendly workplace: <http://mchb.hrsa.gov/pregnancyandbeyond/breastfeeding/>.
- Offer flexible work schedules and teleworking arrangements when possible. Include all employees, regardless of if they have children, in these arrangements.
- Offer paid family leave so that new parents can experience early bonding with their child and so that employees can serve as caregivers to older or ailing relatives.
- Provide access to high-quality childcare and back-up care (on-site or through subsidizing the cost).
- Look for meaningful ways to include children of employees in your charity or social sponsored events.

Small Business Tip



Create a family-friendly workplace with modest investments:

- Transform a small storage room into a lactation room with minimal resources.
- Support activities where employees can include their children, such as “bring your kid to work day” or hosting a family BBQ.
- Allow flex time to attend parent teacher conferences and/or special school activities.
- Solicit ideas from your employees on no- or low-cost ways to help them juggle their dual parent/employee roles (might include job sharing, working from home, bringing infants to work).

Examples:

- Denver-based Johnson Moving & Storage offers telework, a flexible work week, and job sharing to many of its more than 200 employees, including customer service representatives, order-entry associates, and long-distance dispatchers. The company has experienced markedly reduced turnover and gross profit above the industry average as a result of its workplace policies.⁶
- Many of IKEA's Savannah Distribution Center's 110 employees work on shift schedules. When gas prices skyrocketed several years ago, employees approached managers about the possibility of moving to a compressed work schedule. Now, the Center works on a four-day, 10-hour work week—but employees who could not make the change work, including parents with child care responsibilities, maintained their old schedules. This approach has allowed the Center to reduce turnover and increase efficiency.⁷
- Florida-based Team Horner, a privately owned swimming pool and spa distributor, offers an employee-driven “Color Me Healthy” initiative that includes more than 35 programs that address emotional and physical health. Team Horner grants flex time on an individual basis for family and health issues and expecting mothers work flexible hours in the later stages of pregnancy, then work remotely after the baby is born. Ninety-four percent of Team Horner employees said they feel they can openly communicate with their supervisor and 25 percent of employees have been with Team Horner for 10 years or longer.⁸

3. Take a comprehensive approach to employee wellness.

Many companies limit their definition of wellness to include only physical fitness and nutrition. Both are very important health considerations, but there are other aspects of health that should not be ignored.

Mental and emotional wellbeing play a major role in how one deals with stress. Helping employees to manage mental health concerns, including substance abuse, requires special consideration.

“Early childhood development is the compelling economic, social, and moral issue of our time. It helps provide all children with the opportunity they deserve to develop their natural abilities. It is also the most effective way to build the workforce and customer base we need. Investing in young children’s healthy development is a financial and social imperative for any country.”

– **John Pepper, Former Chairman and CEO, Proctor & Gamble; Co-chair, ReadyNation; CEO, Task Force on Early Childhood**



One way you can address total wellness in the workplace while maintaining a sense of trust and anonymity is to provide an Employee Assistance Program that offers the appropriate mental health support, education, and referral services for your employees and their families. Be sure that all employees are aware of the benefits of the Employee Assistance Program and understand how to access it.

Providing an Employee Assistance Program gives you the added benefit of cost savings from reduced medical, disability, and workers' compensation claims as well as potential losses related to personal problems that may decrease employee productivity.^{9,10}



Small Business Tip

Take a comprehensive approach to employee wellness with a modest investment:

- Compile an informal list of helplines, mental and other health resources, and services in your community.

Example:

Experient Health Insurance, an advocate for total health, hosts a community blog covering various topics related to workplace health and wellness.¹¹ For example, they have gathered resources for preventing substance abuse in the workplace, and strategies include:

- Resources for self-screening;
- Telephone hotlines;
- Changing workplace alcohol use policies (e.g., at holiday parties); and
- Advocating for insurance companies to cover screening, intervention, and treatment referral services.

4. Provide parenting resources for employees.

Providing employees with the tools to handle parenting issues may help to reduce stress and worrying and allow employees to be more productive in the long run.

Several organizations have pulled together extensive research on child development and helpful parenting skills. Sharing this information with your employees can equip them with the necessary tools to understand their child and to respond appropriately to their behaviors. Reducing parental stress can have a positive effect on family functioning and a parent's health and mood. Here are several free resources you can share:

CDC's Positive Parenting Tips

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/positiveparenting/index.html>

CDC's Essentials for Parenting Toddlers and Preschoolers

<http://www.cdc.gov/parents/essentials/>

CDC's Learn the Signs. Act Early.

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/>

Bright Futures

<http://brightfutures.aap.org/>

Extension's "Just in Time" Newsletters and Resources

<http://www.extension.org/parenting>

Text4Babies

<https://www.text4baby.org/>

Approximately 60% of Fortune 500 Companies offer parenting education programs for employees.¹² Many organizations offer parenting education programs as part of a comprehensive approach to employee wellness.

Examples:

- San Francisco-based Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) has partnered with local agencies to bring doctoral-level child development experts to talk about issues parents might face at different developmental stages. For example, one workshop discussed how to parent children differently by stage of their development (e.g., a toddler having a tantrum vs. a teen's poor report card).
- Apple, Inc. offers classes on topics such as infant and toddler sleep problems, kindergarten preparedness, and behavior management for all age groups.

Small Business Tip



Provide parenting resources with modest investments:

- Develop a list of resources (including those listed on page 7), helplines, and other services in your community and make them available to your employees.
- Offer “lunch and learn” sessions around parenting topics; explore resources for expert presenters at organizations, colleges or universities in your area.

5. Consider the role of state and local policy in improving employees' and their children's access to safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments.

Emerging evidence points to several promising policies that promote safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for families, and prevent child abuse and neglect. Employers can get more involved by partnering with various types of organizations in your community, including: state and local health departments, media, schools, and faith- and community-based organizations. Options to consider include:

- Look for opportunities to connect with others in your community. When you become an integral part of the community, you'll be able to understand the unique needs and issues of those who live there.
- Use your networks to provide community leaders and decision-makers with information on how policy changes can directly benefit children, families, communities, and local businesses.
- Share your organization's stories about how policy change has positively impacted your employees, their families, and your bottom line.



Selected State/Local Policies Associated with Impact on Child Abuse and Neglect

- **Access to quality child care:** Child care can bolster parents' ability to work and support a family as well as increase children's exposure to safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments. Access to affordable child care also reduces parents' stress (a risk factor for physical abuse).^{13,14}
- **Paid parental leave:** Policies that provide new parents with the freedom to spend time away from work caring for their newborn without the stress associated with adverse economic experiences (unemployment or long periods without pay) can help parents and allow them to be better employees when they return to work. Parental stress is a risk factor for physical child abuse. Paid maternity leave is also associated with increased breastfeeding and some research has shown that breastfeeding is associated with substantially lower risk for child abuse and neglect.¹⁵
- **Easier access to support services:** Policies that streamline complicated application processes for public assistance programs, such as Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), may reduce parental stress associated with child abuse and neglect.^{16,17,18}
- **Enhance Economic Self-Sufficiency:** Policies that increase economic self-sufficiency for lower income families (e.g. livable wages, subsidies for basic needs) may alleviate some of the parental stress associated with child abuse and neglect.^{19,20}

Examples:

- In July 2013, Rhode Island's Governor signed the Paid Family Leave bill into law. This was accomplished through a broad partnership including Family Values at Work, Main Street Alliance, the American Sustainable Business Council, the Small Business Majority, and the US Women's Chamber of Commerce, and with support from Moms Rising. The partnership chose to frame the need for paid family leave as an economic issue (i.e. excess costs to businesses when they lose valued employees and have to recruit and retrain new ones and lost revenue for the state due to women being out of the workforce). The partnership also chose to deal with paid family leave as a caregiver issue (i.e. not a women's issue), which affects caregivers of newborns through the elderly.²¹
- In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the New Hope Project offered low-income individuals and families the opportunity to use a comprehensive set of integrated program services designed to increase income, financial security, and access to full-time employment, and showed positive impacts on children's environments and improvements in their social behavior and school performance.²²
- ReadyNation is a business membership organization that works to strengthen business and improve the economy and workforce through public and private policies and investments for children and youth. In 2015, ReadyNation members across the U.S. informed efforts that led to more than \$2 billion in new state and federal funding for policies and programs for children and youth. ReadyNation also works at the international level, helping countries build networks of business champions for children.²³



Small Business Tip

Consider the role of state and local policy with modest investments:

- Learn about policies that support safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for families and children and have positive impact on your community and business.
- Join small business associations, the Chamber of Commerce, and/or your specific industry groups.

When children and their families have access to safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments, individuals and communities flourish and businesses prosper. For more information on promoting safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments and preventing child abuse and neglect, visit CDC's Essentials for Childhood Web site at:
<http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/childmaltreatment/essentials/index.html>.

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“For a company to be successful over time and create value for shareholders, it must also create value for society.”

– Peter Brabeck,
Nestle Chairman
and Former CEO

