

# The Parenting Playbook

A playbook focused on helping companies support parents in the workplace

Written and Researched by

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# Overview

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The Parenting Playbook developed as a series of conversations in the year after launching The Expecting Playbook (2017), a guide and pledge program by Anna Mackenzie and Ella Gorevalov, focused on helping companies in Canada's tech community create and share meaningful parental leave policies. The Expecting Playbook helped launch many a parental leave policy, helping both founders and expecting parents navigate the challenges of balancing work and new babies.

However, we started to wonder: how were these parents adjusting after returning from leave? What were companies doing to support that transition? And for parents with older children, how were companies accommodating, attracting and retaining them? Parenting is an 18+ year gig, and the juggle certainly doesn't end when one goes back to work.

For this guide, we focused our lens beyond leave and dove deeply into how companies can support parents throughout that long journey. Forget foosball - with tech's core millennial workforce now aging into the parenthood years, family friendliness is the new way to attract and retain talent.

## Who Is This Playbook Written For?

- Owners, founders, executives and champions at small to medium sized Canadian tech companies. Many of the legal considerations and data provided is local to Toronto, Ontario, or Canada. That being said, there are plenty of ideas that can be applied by any type of company, in any location. We wrote this playbook for leaders of all kinds who want to leverage the power of parents and earn a reputation as a great place for parents to work.
- Parents or expecting parents who want to be armed with options and ideas to bring to their employer.

## How is it different from the Expecting Playbook?

The Expecting Playbook covers the basics of designing a comprehensive parental leave program, while the Parenting Playbook covers the next 18+ years of supporting parents in the workplace.

## Why should we design the workplace for families?

- You're likely already employing parents. Millennials are now in the 22-36 age range, and while it is true that many are delaying parenthood, these remain the most common years to start a family. Good policies will enable you to retain top performers through this life phase.
- You can't recruit in 2018 and ignore parents. Why wouldn't you cater to such a significant portion of your potential talent pipeline? It is impossible to tell (and illegal to ask) who is and is not a parent during your interviewing process, but mentioning your applicable benefits can only be a net positive.

“Tell me about the parental leave and return plan the same way you tell me about gym benefits or vision coverage. You don't know if I work out or need glasses. Tell someone about parental benefits even if they are 80. You have no idea what someone's circumstances are, so don't assume.”

Melissa Nightingale

Raw Signal Group

- Parents know how to be efficient. The challenges of parenthood can make a good performer a great one!

“Juggling startup life and parenthood is an exercise in ruthless prioritization and focus. Somewhere between my first coffee and my daily sprint to the parking garage, a whole bunch of things have to get done. You think you were efficient before. Just wait.”

Melissa Nightingale

Raw Signal Group, "Family planning while working in a startup."

- If your company values include supporting diversity and inclusion, visibly supporting parents is a great way to “walk the walk.”



"We'll get to it when someone here becomes a parent."

Though it can be tempting to put off writing parental policies, consider that parents may be evaluating joining your organization, and may not want to bring up accommodations during the interview process. Another concern is creating policies around the first parent in the office, which can be an awkward negotiation for everyone involved. Best to have a firm stance in advance.

B E E N   T H E R E  
*Tip*

"If your workplace can't accommodate, maybe the place isn't right for you."

Alisha Patel  
TWG

"I'm proud to talk about my son, and especially as a leader, set an example that it's cool to have a family and to prioritize them."

Margaret Leibovic  
League

"The most important thing a company can do to provide for families is to help break down any stigmas associated with parental leave. Offering parental benefits is important, but encouraging open conversations around parental leave is crucial. Leadership teams must talk openly about families and leave, setting the tone for the entire company to follow suit. And when a member of the leadership team becomes a parent, all eyes are on that executive to model the acceptable behaviour - so leaders must take leave.

Jason Goldlist  
Wealthsimple

# Becoming Parent Friendly

## A Workplace Checklist

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Ensure you have a parental leave policy in place. Don't have one? We know a great resource! ([www.expectingplaybook.com](http://www.expectingplaybook.com))

Ensure you are familiar with need-to-know human rights policies such as:

- The need to provide chestfeeding accommodations ([Page 14](#))
- The duty to prevent harassment and discrimination in your workplace, and to have a policy concerning it
- The duty to ensure parents return to the job they had before the leave began, or a comparable job, if the employee's old job no longer exists
- Not asking a candidate about their family status or plans, or making hiring decisions based on known family status or plans

Review the suggested parenting policies in the sections below. Consider which policies could work for your team. Don't worry if you don't have (or don't think you have) parents in your company yet. If you build it, they will come.

Think about your budget. In this playbook, there are many options you can put into place tomorrow with little to no monetary investment. However, consider the impact of supporting parents when deciding where to budget. Given that the areas most likely to be impacted are employee recruitment and retention, can parenting perks share their budget?

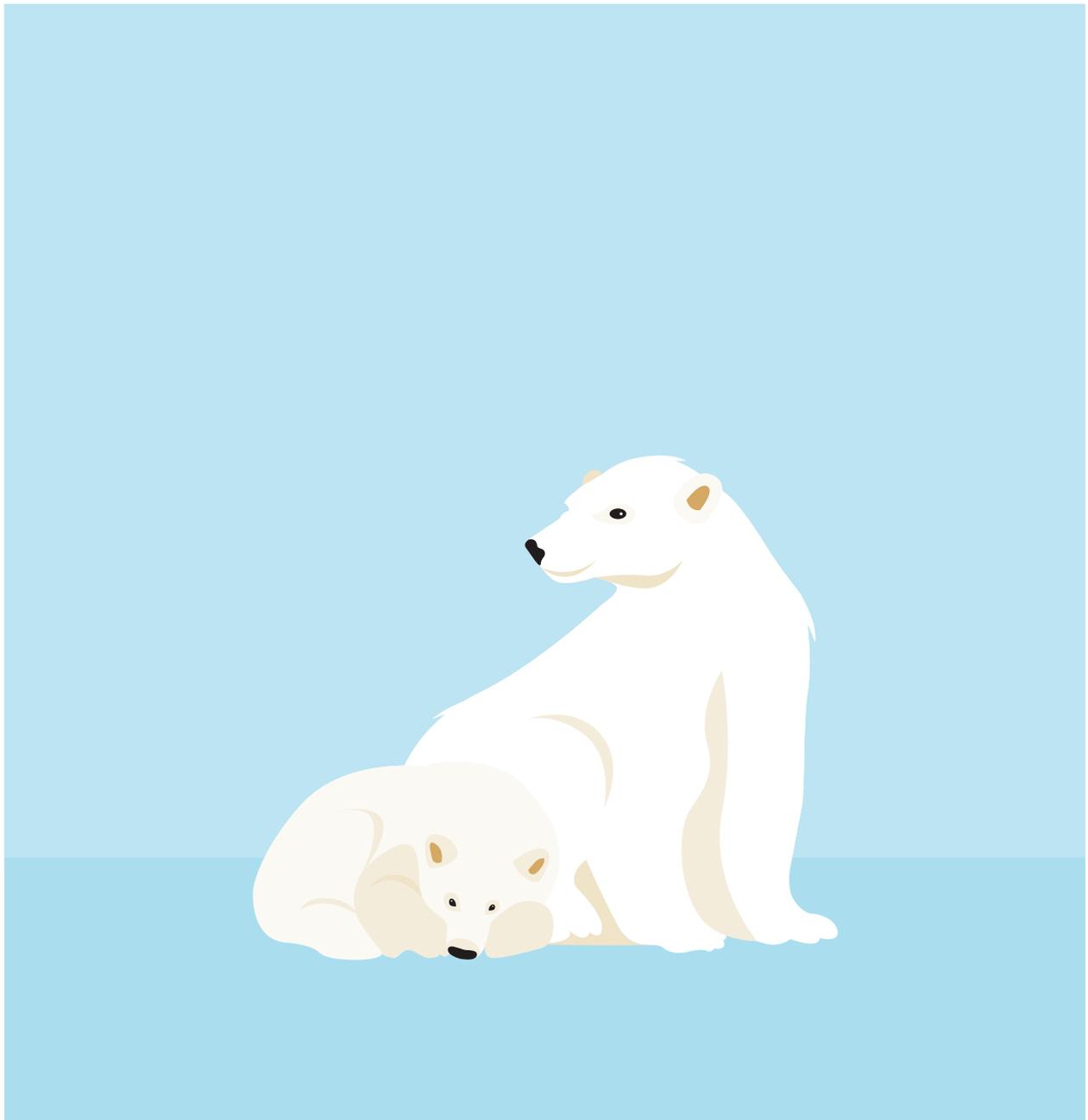
Choose the unique perks and policies that work for your company

Ensure the policies and accommodations you provide are available, in writing:

- Internally to staff, in a spot that is easily found (like an employee handbook or intranet) and available to access without asking. When a benefit or policy is not written down, it becomes discretionary.
- Externally, potentially on your careers page. Don't make candidates ask. Build your reputation and increase their comfort level by having this information readily available.

Celebrate your new perks and policies! Be sure to announce them to your team (and on social media) and talk about why they're a net-positive for your company.

If you or your senior team have kids, walk the walk. Leave work at a reasonable time, talk about your kids, and take advantage of leave and other programs and policies you've built for parents. It gives others permission to do the same.



# Returning to Work

## Return to Work Plans

Before an employee returns to work, collaborate with them on making their transition back to the office as easy as possible. Not all parents want the same thing; the key is to communicate.

## Flexible Returns

Many companies offer flexible returns to ease the transition back to the office. Options include:

### Part time work

- The employee returns to the office on a part time basis. This can be paid at a part time rate, or as an extra retention tool, at full pay.
- Sample Policy: FreshBooks offers 80% workload at 100% pay while new parents transition.

### Working From Home

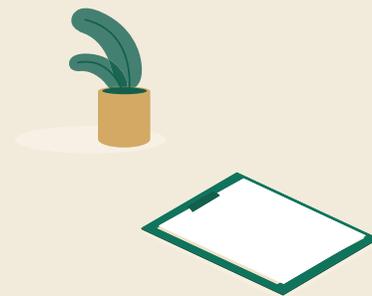
- The employee works from home while transitioning back to the office. This is a good way to ease back into Slack, projects and more.

### Parent-Friendly Co-Working Spaces

- Coworking spaces in some cities are beginning to offer onsite child care. Partnering with such coworking spaces or having your employee expense the cost of one is a great way to help them ease back into a professional environment.

GOLDEN RULE

A returning parent is not walking back into the same context that they left, especially at a fast paced startup. Therefore, the onus is on the company to keep employees informed about the strategic shifts that have happened.



# Checklist

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Does the returning parent have an assigned return to work buddy?

Are they returning to the same role, title and level of responsibility?

Have they been assigned to relevant projects?

Is the office able to support chestfeeding parents?

Have you provided them with:

- An updated org chart?
- Relevant information to projects they will be joining or re-joining upon return?

Have you scheduled a re-onboarding meeting? These should cover:

- Any changes to the organization or their team
- Introductions to new key team members or clients
- Briefings on projects, and invitations to related meetings
- A briefing with HR to update benefits, add new dependant(s) and learn of any new policies

Have you discussed or considered:

- How they'd like to structure their return (full time, part time, remote, etc)?
- Child care and any flexibility they'll need for pickups and dropoffs?
- The significant mental health shift becoming a parent demands, and whether this employee could use additional mental health support and paid benefits during the transition?
- Welcoming them with a special lunch or shoutout, taking care to call out their role and achievements in the company? This can be especially helpful to introduce them to folks who have joined your team during their leave.

“It felt like I had to catch up on one year of missed context, social or otherwise. I asked the management team (at a former place of employment) to do a recap on all the major projects that had happened while I was away, which they did: but I had to ask.”

Ria Lupton  
Growth Genius

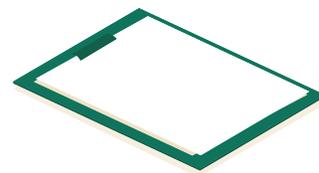
BEEN THERE  
*Tip*

“Talk to your manager about what ‘balance’ looks like to you. Do you want to be doing daycare drop off and come into the office later? Do you want to be offline after a certain time?”

Larissa Holmes  
Borrowell

“So much changed while I was on leave. My team was absorbed into another department, so when I returned, I had an entirely new boss. Before maternity leave, I felt I had some real momentum with my career—I was being mentored by the CEO, and had earned the opportunity to design a strategy for my team. When I came back, it was like starting over. My new boss said, “I don’t know you or how you work, so let’s see how this goes over the next while before we talk career planning.” It took 6 more months before we talked seriously about my career again.”

Anonymous



# The Big C - Child Care

## The Many Challenges of Childcare

In Canada, child care fees are on the rise; the national average cost is approximately \$10,000 a year, and is much higher in urban centres. The average Canadian parents spend a quarter of their income on child care, and child care fees in Ontario are higher than most post secondary tuition fees and expenses.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives recently published that by far the most expensive city for infant care is Toronto, with a median monthly full-time cost of \$1,758 or \$21,096 annually (more than double the national average).

Many families do not qualify for any government subsidies, and waitlists can be years long. In addition, child care costs do not stop once a child starts school. Before and after school care is a necessity for a number of years, to an average of \$700 per month per child.

## Compliance Corner

In most cases, an employee who takes a pregnancy or parental leave is entitled to:

- the same job the employee had before the leave began, or
- a comparable job, if the employee's old job no longer exists

In either case, the employee must be paid at least as much as they were earning before the leave. Also, if the wages for the job went up while the employee was on leave, or would have gone up if they hadn't been on leave, the employer must pay the higher wage when the employee returns from leave.

\*Source: Ministry of Labour

## Median Monthly Child Care Costs (Toronto):

Infant \$1,758	Toddler \$1,354	Preschool \$1,212
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Source: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

All amounts are in Canadian dollars

Without a doubt, child care fees across most of Canada are far too costly for most families. Thus, talented employees may make the difficult decision to leave the workforce. How can companies prevent this kind of attrition?

“When I started my career I was advised to regularly contribute to my RRSP. When I started a family, the advice was to regularly contribute to my child’s RESP. At no point did anyone tell me I should have been saving for child care, where the costs exceed university and happen a whole lot sooner.”

Amanda Munday  
The Workaround

### Employer Subsidized Child Care

One of the most impactful things you can do for parents is offer a monthly or annual child care subsidy or stipend. This can have an incredible impact on retention of employees with young families, or those who are planning to have them.

The most prohibitive factor can be the cost, but companies can share the budgeting from other areas of HR, such as recruiting and retention. This is not too much of a stretch: be sure to tell the world about your child care perks, and parents will line up to join you.

“Universe provides a yearly stipend towards child care, since child care is extremely expensive and financially tough for new families.”

Shiera Aryev  
Universe

### Guaranteed Placement

Some daycare centres, particularly larger ones with multiple locations, are able to provide partnerships with employers that offer their staff’s children a guaranteed spot in one of their centres. This can be a huge relief, as childcare waitlists can be months or even years long.

BEEN THERE  
Tip

“Having reliable child care is the most important part. This isn’t as easy as it sounds - you basically have to get on the lists for daycares as soon as you get a positive pregnancy test.”

Kristen Spencer  
HackerYou

## Care for Evening Events

If you ask a parent to stay for an after hours event, consider the burden of finding and paying for child care. Here are some ways you can help:

- Cover the cost of care. Companies like We Need a Date Night and CareGuide can connect you to caregivers for your employees during your evening event
- Ensure employees are given ample notice about events that occur outside of regular business hours, if possible, so that they can have time to arrange for child care and/or give a spouse notice. Last minute Friday night drinks can cause undue stress.
- You could also consider hosting occasional morning or early afternoon team building events that give your parent employees the ability to get home to their family earlier.
- Consider hiring licensed, mobile child care specialists for conferences, meetups and other large community events

## Care for Evening Events

Emergency child care is one of the toughest parts of working parenthood. The average school age child gets sick 9 days per year, and schools require sick children to be home for 48 hours if they have a fever. Does your company have a policy to support these unplanned absences? Here are some ways you can assist parents while ensuring they stay productive:

- Provide “dependent sick days”, which employees

can use to care for any children or other dependents.

- Be easily set up to accommodate employees working from home occasionally
- For emergency child care situations that aren’t illness, partner with a child care company that offers corporate programs. These partnerships allow you to offer employees a handful of occasional emergency child care days at their care centres, so that parents can still attend the office. However, just like school, they cannot attend the centres while sick.

**“What do I want to be different? The difficulty of having to use all your sick days because your kids are sick.”**

Anonymous



# Milking It

Supporting Chestfeeding Parents

## Chestfeeding

Chestfeeding is simply a term. It's not the way anyone has to refer to nursing, but it is a term that can be used by cisgender and transgender parents alike – it's a way to describe feeding your baby. Because breastfeeding isn't exclusive to cisgender women, it's important to have terminology that feels inclusive to all parents, no matter their gender.”

Source: Romper

“I had weaned myself off the daytime feeding but was still nursing at night. My boss decided the project was going to run into the evening. I was leaking right through my beautiful silk shirt and jacket, so that was a pretty traumatic return to work. I think I got home at midnight my first day.”

Anonymous

## Why do workplaces need to support chestfeeding parents?

Chestfeeding parents returning to work may be pumping milk to be stored as food for infants. Parents who are chestfeeding, especially those spending the day away from the baby, must pump at regular intervals to avoid discomfort, maintain supply and to collect the amount of milk their child needs.

## How to create a pumping room:

Ideally, your workplace will have a dedicated pumping room. Even if you do not have chestfeeding employees today, having it ready for when you do, and ready for any visitors, candidates or event attendees is good practice.

If you cannot have a dedicated pumping room, you may designate another multipurpose room for pumping as long as it meets the following standards:

# Pumping Room

## A Checklist

- A room with no windows and a lock
- Not a bathroom
- A fridge and freezer for expressed milk
- Comfortable seating
- A desk or table (parents can work while pumping, if they choose to)
- Outlets, for the same reason
- Bookable on the office calendar
- Flexibility: pumping can sometimes take longer than anticipated, and having to clear the room for another meeting can be awkward

### GOLDEN RULE

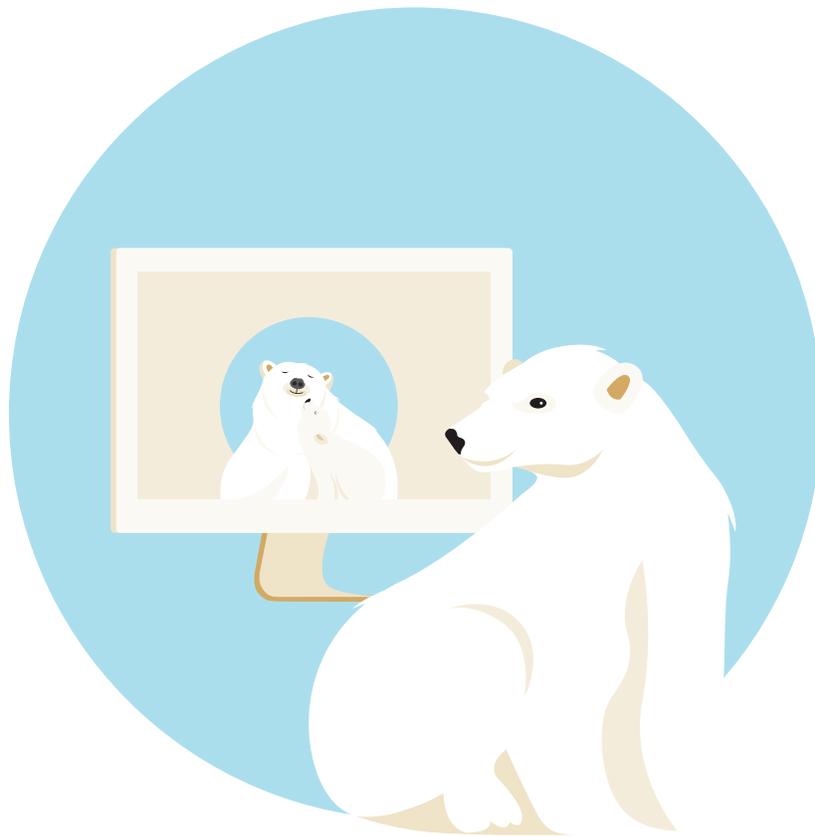
If you cannot have a dedicated pumping room, make rules and have a conversation with non-parent employees about how to be respectful.

“My office had a makeshift pumping room, which was a bit of a pain to try to schedule with other people, but everyone was more accommodating after I complained to my boss about it.”

Anonymous

“When I returned from maternity leave, I asked for a room with a lock on the door to pump twice a day. I was told a lock on the door is overkill, and a post-it note on the outside of the door should be sufficient for keeping other employees from walking in on me topless. I felt like my needs, and legal rights to nursing, were not a priority at this company. I hated having to ask in the first place.”

Anonymous



# Flexibility

## The "F" Word

School and child care drop offs and pickups can happen at hours that are at odds with most core office hours - think 7:00 a.m. drop offs, and 4:00 p.m. pick ups. Parents are still able to do it all, but they may need some flexibility in their schedule. Making flexible work days part of your written policies reduces confusion and guilt and is an integral part of making your employees feel supported through parenthood. Each parent's need for flexibility is different, so be sure to communicate often and stay open minded.

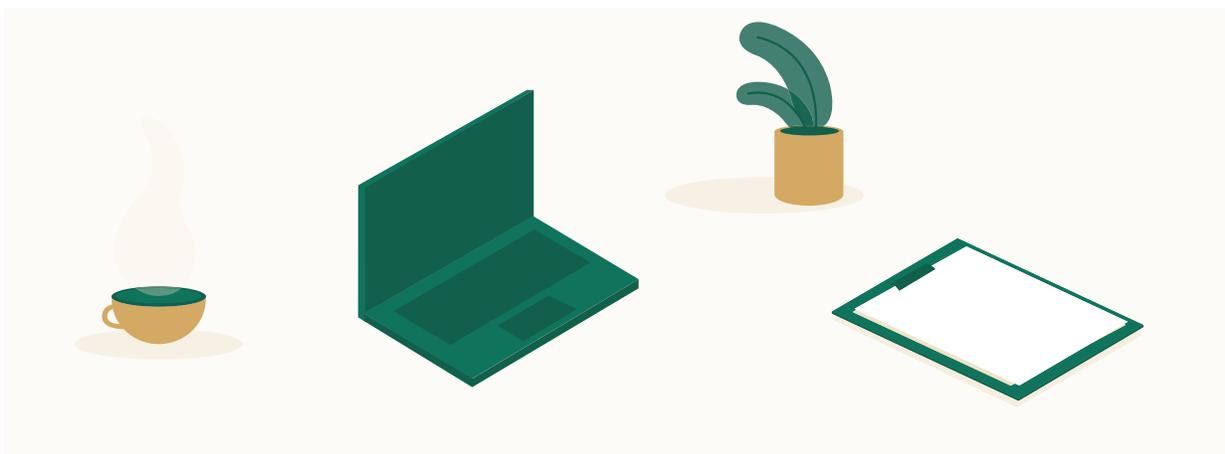
### Example

Dave's partner handles before school care drop-off, but pick up at 4:00 p.m. is his responsibility. Dave makes an arrangement with his employer to begin his day at 8:00 a.m. instead of 9.

BEEN THERE  
*Tip*

“Try to still keep work at work, and not slip into the habit of "making up" hours in the late evening.”

Margaret Leibovic  
League



“Focus on performance. It shouldn’t be about when someone is in the office or how long they appear to be working, it should be about impact and value delivered.”

Larissa Holmes  
Borrowell

“Understanding that a parent may need to make changes to the typical workday to accommodate (their) partner and children is crucial.”

Neil Chudleigh  
GrowSumo

“Modified work schedules. Flexibility is key - the ability to support your family and be at home during key times like dinner, kids events is important. Having the flexibility to do this and be emotionally and physically present for [your children] and yourself is important and necessary.”

Alisha Patel  
TWG

GOLDEN RULE

Be flexible about employee arrival and departure times. Schedule all regular recurring meetings inside of 10:00 a.m - 4:00 p.m.

B E E N T H E R E  
*Tip*

“Set boundaries about your schedule.”

Alisha Patel  
TWG

## Don't Assume Someone's Care Role

Families come in all forms. You may have single moms, single dads, non-binary parents, and LGBTQ+ parents on your team. In addition, over 69% of families in Canada are dual income, meaning both parents share earning and child care responsibilities.

Avoid:

- Assuming, based on someone's presented gender, whether they are the birthing parent or chestfeeding. Ideally, if you have your policies and pumping room properly set up, these should not factor into a professional discussion.
- Assuming, based on someone's presented gender, what amount of child care responsibility they take on at home.

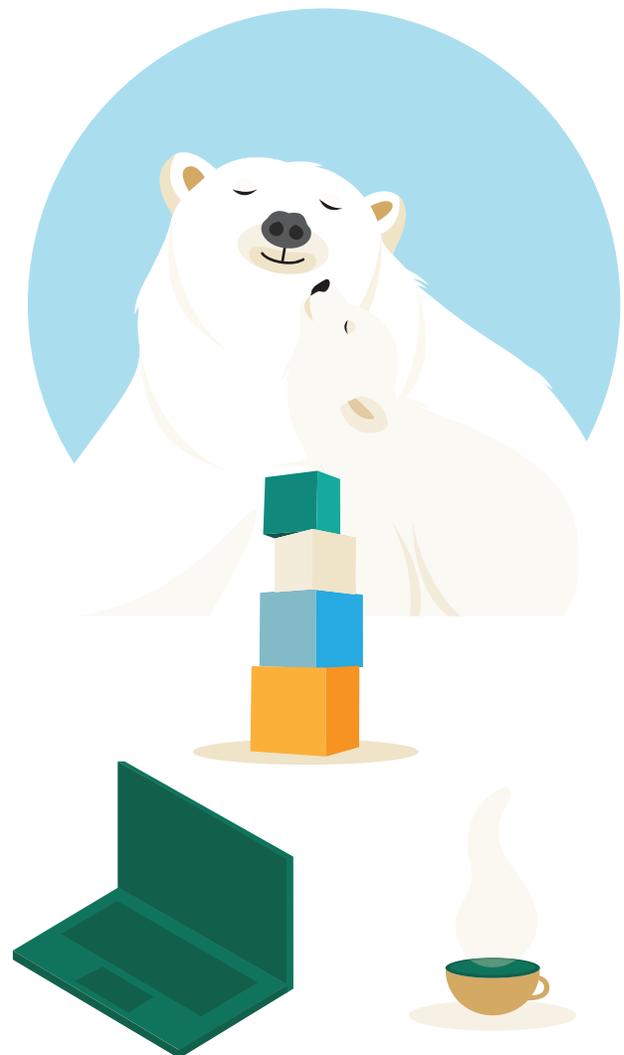
“My wife and I are two women who are expecting. She is carrying and I am not, but I still have the option of breastfeeding. Although it is something I have wanted to do, I have so far decided against it, largely because I am not comfortable asking for accommodations at work and having to explain why I, someone who is not pregnant, would need these kinds of accommodations.”

Anonymous

“My partner’s job involves her being away 2-5 nights a week and most people give me a “how do you do it?” reaction, which I don’t think I’d get if I were a mom. I drop off and pick up my daughter from school and make most of the meals.”

Gerry Hubley

Homestars



# Walking the Walk

Fitting Kids into Work Life

## Celebrations and Socials

Having work socials and events that allow for employees to bring their children makes them feel that their whole self is welcome in the workplace.

- Have pre-events or separate events for children
- Make sure that deals and major decisions aren't happening over Friday night drinks
- Consider making things like corporate retreats family friendly, so that spouses and children can attend.
- Don't hold all your fun events after work. Celebrate milestones during office hours or plan an event on the weekend and invite families. What about a waffle breakfast bonanza for your next sales celebration?

**“I’ve taken it upon myself to organize lunch hangs at work, since not being available for the majority of after-work social time has probably set me back.”**

Anonymous

## Work Travel

Positions that require regular travel are tough but doable for parents. Here is how to make it easy:

- Give lots of advance notice for business trips
- Encourage employees to book travel and accommodations during times that work for child care drop-off and pick-up, even if the cost of the plane ticket is higher. Provide lieu time for travel days to give employees more time with their families after a business trip.
- Consider covering child care costs or the travel costs for the child to accompany the parent if appropriate for the trip, or, even better, the cost of a spouse or second caregiver to join.

GOLDEN RULE

**Don't rule parents out of opportunities like business trips. It may come from a place of kindness, but let them decide what works (and doesn't work) for them.**

## Kids in the Office

There are going to be certain circumstances where an employee might have to bring their child to the workplace. Encouraging a safe space for them to do so is going to alleviate their guilt and allow them to do their best work.

Consider providing a space for children to enjoy the day during planned and unplanned “kids on site” days like PA days, March Break or a city-wide snow day. Each parent employee could rotate sharing the planning of a bimonthly activity that welcomes children at work.

**“At Universe we can take our children to work during take your kids to work day, even if they're 2 years old - there will be crayons and their favourite snacks.”**

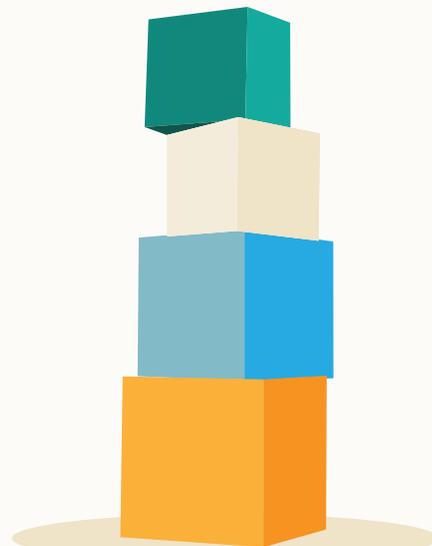
Shiera Aryev  
Universe

**“We invite children into the office on PA days (or any other day!) – we even have a little scavenger hunt for them to do, in addition to the ping pong and video games we have onsite.”**

Kristy Schweizer  
FreshBooks

## Compliance Corner

Children in the office are not an insurance liability as long as the visits are occasional and supervised by a parent.



# The Extras

## Small Things That Matter

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### Celebrations and Socials

There are many low cost things a company can do to provide a more supportive environment to their parent employees.

1) Consider giving parents a week of work from home or half day schedules when their child is going through a significant transition, like starting at a new child care centre or beginning kindergarten or changing schools. It smoothes the transition for child and parent. This might also be a deeply meaningful offer to an employee whose child is struggling at school, facing bullying or dealing with a difficult teacher.

2) Consider sending brand new parents prepared meals instead of flowers to welcome baby - they'll appreciate not having to cook!

3) Consider a "baby bonus" that employees can use for post-baby expenses of their choosing, no expense receipts required. All babies are different and can require different forms of help. Some ways it can be used:

- A sleep coach, for tired parents and babies
- A lactation consultant, for parents still mastering chestfeeding (it's harder than you think)
- Postpartum depression support and therapy
- Gear, extra diapers and supplies they didn't plan for before the baby arrived

- Meal kit or food delivery boxes to make meals easier
- Home cleaning service to ease the burden of household chores

**“The corporate onesie is cute, the sleep coach is life changing.”**

Melissa Nightingale

Raw Signal Group

4) Create a parents Slack channel and/or committee. Bonus points if a non-parent senior leader is on the committee to hear directly from parent employees and their needs.

Giving parents a space to share experiences and ask for support creates psychological safety for your employees and helps you direct resources to how parents will use them best.

**“Most of all (my company is) emotionally supportive, and even on Slack if my child is sick and I need to take a day off everyone is sending me positive messages hoping he feels better.”**

Shiera Aryev

Universe

“Ultimately, a benefit is just window-dressing unless the company culture actually encourages and celebrates its use. Wealhsimple has created an employee resource group called Parents at Wealhsimple (PAW) which helps to set this culture, and supports semi-annual events for the company's parents and their children to get together.”

Jason Goldlist  
Wealhsimple

#### 5) Connect Employee Volunteerism and Schools in Need

Encouraging your employees to be involved in volunteer work is a good idea, but it is an even better idea for parents, who can use those days to volunteer at their child's school.

“Universe provided 5 volunteer days that I can use towards being a volunteer for field trip my child goes on with school, which allows me to spend quality time and not miss those special moments.”

Shiera Aryev  
Universe

#### 6. Celebrate Milestones and Holidays

Giving parents a paid day off for graduations, school performances or their child's birthday is an easy kindness that goes a long way.

Ask your parent employees how they prefer to recognize Mother's Day and Father's Day in their home. For some LGBTQ+ families, these binary holidays are problematic and reenforce heterosexual family definitions. Before throwing a Mother's Day brunch or sending around Father's Day heartfelt messages, ask your parent employees how they approach these emotional days. Better yet, try a more inclusive parent celebration at a different time.

If your team is looking for new organizations to support company wide, consider a “classroom clean-up” overhaul night where a team shows up at a classroom after hours (with the teacher's permission!) to clean, supply new books or assemble a new toy storage container. Many schools and non-profit child care centers across Ontario are very resource constricted. Cases of Kleenex and art supplies go much further than you think.



# Resources

## Policy Resources

### Bright + Early

[brightandearly.ca](http://brightandearly.ca)

Founded and managed by playbook co-author Nora Jenkins Townson, Bright + Early is a modern Human Resources Consultancy focused on early to midstage startups in Toronto. They provide fractional HR leadership and design unique HR programs and policies (including parental benefits).

### Raw Signal Group

[rawsignal.ca](http://rawsignal.ca)

Well-trained and empathetic managers are your best defense in creating parent-friendly workplaces. Managed by startup veterans Melissa and Johnathan Nightingale, Raw Signal Group builds better bosses.

## Coworking Resources

### The Workaround

[theworkaround.ca](http://theworkaround.ca)

The Workaround is Toronto's parent friendly workspace, providing child care, a lactation suite, meditation room, parent friendly hours, blazing fast wifi and excellent coffee. It's coworking and child care built by parents.

## Home Resources

### Meal Delivery

Freshly · [freshly.com](http://freshly.com)

Green Zebra · [greenzebrakitchen.com](http://greenzebrakitchen.com)

HomeBistro · [homebistro.com](http://homebistro.com)

### Home Cleaning

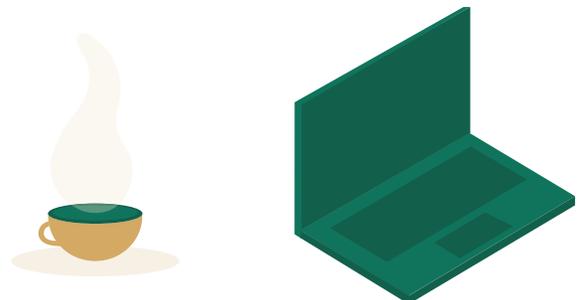
HurrahHome · [hurrahhome.com](http://hurrahhome.com)

Dhyana Cleaning · [dhyanacleaning.com](http://dhyanacleaning.com)

### Child Care Centres Offering Corporate Partnerships

Kids and Company (guaranteed placement, emergency days) · [kidsandcompany.com](http://kidsandcompany.com)

Network Child Care (child care for special events) · [networkchildcare.com](http://networkchildcare.com)



# Special Thanks

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## Andréa Crofts

Website and report design

## Daniel Levine and Steven Pulver

and the team at Fireside Conference

## Ella Gorevalov

Co-Author of The Expecting Playbook

We are very grateful for the help and contributions of the following parents for sharing their stories.

## Melissa Nightingale

Raw Signal Group

## Shiera Aryev

Universe

## Neil Chudleigh

GrowSumo

## Ria Lupton

Growth Genius

## Margaret Leibovic

League

## Alisha Patel

TWG

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