

**2025**

**The Working  
Families Index  
Employer  
Briefing**

**Key findings and  
actions for employers**



# The Working Families Index: What is it and why does it matter?

The *Working Families Index* provides a valuable tool to understand work and family life. We surveyed over 3,000 parents from diverse backgrounds, gathering their stories to capture a snapshot of their lived experience. Hearing the voice of real families is crucial in informing working practices, shaping policy, and ultimately improving the wellbeing of the wider population. Employers have a leading role to play in catalysing change in workplaces, by instigating best practice for others to follow.

## Flex and grow: Take the lead and benefit from flexible and family-friendly working

Whether your organisation is large or small, parents and carers will make up a significant proportion of your workforce. As the population ages, and caring responsibilities increase, working to connect with and support your employees will be ever more important. In this briefing we highlight the key findings of the 2025 *Working Families Index* alongside actions that can be introduced in your workplace to empower employees to meet their caring and work responsibilities and fulfil their potential within your organisation.



## Key finding: Parental leave is lacking

Parents aren't taking the time they need with their baby, often due to financial pressures and job security. The research found that 4 in 10 mothers didn't feel they took the time they needed. Among those mothers, 8 in 10 said the reason was money-driven, and it was a similar story (65%) for fathers. Mothers who had financial concerns returned to work eight weeks sooner than others and 7 in 10 fathers who took less than two weeks leave said it was because they were worried about money.



**4 in 10 mothers** didn't feel they took the time they needed with their new baby.

Enhancing parental leave made a marked difference to the experience of new parents. Mothers who had enhanced leave took on average six weeks more than those who didn't, and amongst fathers who took more than six weeks leave, 6 in 10 had enhanced leave.



**6 in 10 fathers** taking more than six weeks leave had enhanced leave.



"My partner was only entitled to two weeks paternity leave which is nowhere near enough, especially as I had a c-section."

## Action plan

### Get the message out

Make sure employees, particularly fathers, are aware of their statutory and organisational leave entitlement by making information visible and easy to understand, and make parental leave part of the conversation with line-managers to encourage take-up.

### Enhance, and flex, leave

Wherever possible, make enhanced leave a day one right and make it available on a flexible basis. For example, to be used at any time during the child's first year and allowing the number of weeks to be split rather than taken in one block.

### Make it culturally acceptable

Senior leaders sharing their experience of parental leave sends a powerful message that it's ok to take the leave on offer. Parental leave transition coaching and returner programmes reinforce that being a working parent is valued and provide assurances of job security.

### Equip managers

Training ensures support is consistent across an organisation and can transform an individual's experience. Equip managers with tools such as checklists to help with preparation and ensure support at every stage.

## Key finding: Finances are holding families back

As the cost-of-living crisis grinds on, there are many families for whom financial pressure is impacting how they manage their caring responsibilities. Almost half of new parents (47%) reported they were not able to take as much time with their baby as they would have liked. In addition, paying for childcare is draining resources, with childcare costs putting the finances of 6 in 10 parents under strain, and pushing 2 in 10 parents into debt.

Whilst there is now some government-funded support for childcare, the message isn't reaching all the parents that need it, with 4 in 10 of those unaware of the government-funded free childcare scheme using less childcare than they need due to cost.



**4 in 10** of those who said they were unaware of the government funded free childcare hours scheme were using less childcare due to cost.



"I had to use all my savings (to buy a home) to pay for the nursery to continue being able to attend work."

## Action plan

### **Look at a Living Wage**

Minimising the stress of money worries means employees are better able to focus whilst at work. Help employees at every level of your business meet rising costs by ensuring they receive the Living Wage. Carry out a cost-of-living audit in each region to ensure wages meet living expenses.

### **Support childcare costs**

Subsidies for ongoing childcare, holiday club provision, or loans to cover nursery deposits can all help your people manage the prohibitive cost of childcare. It's also worth discussing with expectant parents the need to find a nursery that offers free childcare, as competition for places can be fierce.

### **Enable sound advice**

Enabling access to professional financial advice can be a life-changer for employees who are struggling with debt. Set up regular sessions to empower people to tackle their financial challenges.

### **Think flex solutions**

Working around childcare responsibilities can save families money on childcare costs. Consider whether employees could work at different times, especially around the holidays, so they can reduce costs, or reduce the obligation to be in the office for those who need it to save money on transport.

## Key finding: Accessing childcare can be a challenge

Gaping holes in the childcare system mean that less than half of parents (45%) are finding they can easily access the formal childcare they need. The strain of finding quality, affordable childcare has negatively impacted the mental health of 4 in 10 parents and over half of solo- and co-parents.

Moreover, parents are finding that childcare challenges are preventing them from progressing in the workplace, with a third of parents having reduced their hours to manage childcare, and almost 9 in 10 parents having to carefully consider childcare options before applying for a promotion or a new job.



**Almost 9 in 10 (87%) of parents** agreed they would carefully consider childcare options before applying for a promotion or a new job, with mothers more likely to feel this way.

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“It’s just that there [are] not enough services or they are not what you are looking for, for example in the case of the free childcare, they fill up really quickly in the area I live and there are not enough for the demand.”



## Action plan

### Find the flex that fits

There are countless ways to be flexible. Hybrid working, reduced or compressed hours, flexitime, job share - the list goes on. Find a solution that works for both the business and the employee which unlocks the flexibility that may help families manage childcare.

### Provide advice and guidance

Childcare costs and entitlements can feel like a minefield when you've had a baby. Help ease the stress by creating an easy-to-understand guide on the help available with childcare costs and rights such as [Time off for Dependents](#). Working Families' [advice pages](#) are a good place to start.

### Help get a head start on waiting lists

Those new to parenthood may not know what lies ahead in terms of accessing childcare. Employers can help by highlighting the need to take action early as part of discussions around taking maternity, paternity or shared parental leave, or returning to work.


### Look at language

The words we use can have a big impact, and so talking about caring responsibilities in a gender-neutral way helps to normalise men taking a more active role in sharing childcare.



## Key finding: Flex isn't working for everyone

Although flexible working is widespread, there is still an unmet demand, with almost three-quarters of those not currently working flexibly saying they would like to. Over half of these parents were unaware of the new day one right to request flexible working, and 60% of these parents said they would be likely to use it in the future.

 **60%** Of those who weren't aware of this right, **60% would be likely** to use it in the future.

There is a clear need for more transparency when advertising flexible jobs, with half of parents having not applied for a job because it didn't offer flexibility in the advert, and almost 7 in 10 parents staying put in a role for fear they won't get flexibility elsewhere.



**68% of parents** said they're likely to stay in their job because they won't be able to get the flexibility elsewhere.

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“As a single dad I've never known what any of my rights are. When I applied for flexible working I was informed I could be moved store due to this and it upset me so I withdrew my application. A better working schedule would benefit me having better times.”

# Action plan

## Find the flex in every role

Every role will have an element of flexibility within it. Consider the elements and tasks of each role and how and where they can be completed to determine where there is scope for flexibility, and design roles with this in mind, using our [Flex-fit Job Analysis toolkit](#).

## Signal openness to flex

Make it clear that the organisation is open to flexible working by stating the flexible options available in job adverts and using the [Happy to Talk Flexible Working](#) logo. Make family-friendly and flexible working policies visible and explain the 'why' to give prospective hires a feel for the organisation's core values.

## Start with a 'yes'

Shifting to a default positive response to flexible working requests will foster a more solutions-based approach. Training managers to understand the business benefits of family-friendly working will encourage positive attitudes to flex requests. A trial period will prove whether a flexible working arrangement is working and what might need adjusting.

## Lead from the top

Leaders can have a big influence on the perceived ability to work flexibly so encourage them to be open about utilising flexible working policies, for example sharing experiences or using their calendar to show when they're working flexibly.

## Think creatively about frontline workers

Help frontline workers to access flexible working, for example, team rostering where the team decide together the schedule and cover to make sure everyone's needs are taken into account. Offering a minimum of 16 hours per week to shift workers and compensation for last minute shift changes will give shift workers predictability so they can better manage their caring responsibilities.

## Key finding: Culture is key

Working additional hours was commonplace, with 7 in 10 mothers and 8 in 10 fathers reporting working over their contracted hours. Almost a third (29%) of parents do so to increase their earnings whilst 1 in 5 mothers and 1 in 4 fathers say working additional hours is the only way to manage their workloads. 1 in 5 fathers felt this practice was valued at their organisations and important for career progression, and almost half (46%) of parents reported finding it hard to maintain boundaries between work and home life.



**8 in 10 fathers** report  
working additional hours.



## Action plan

### Set the limits

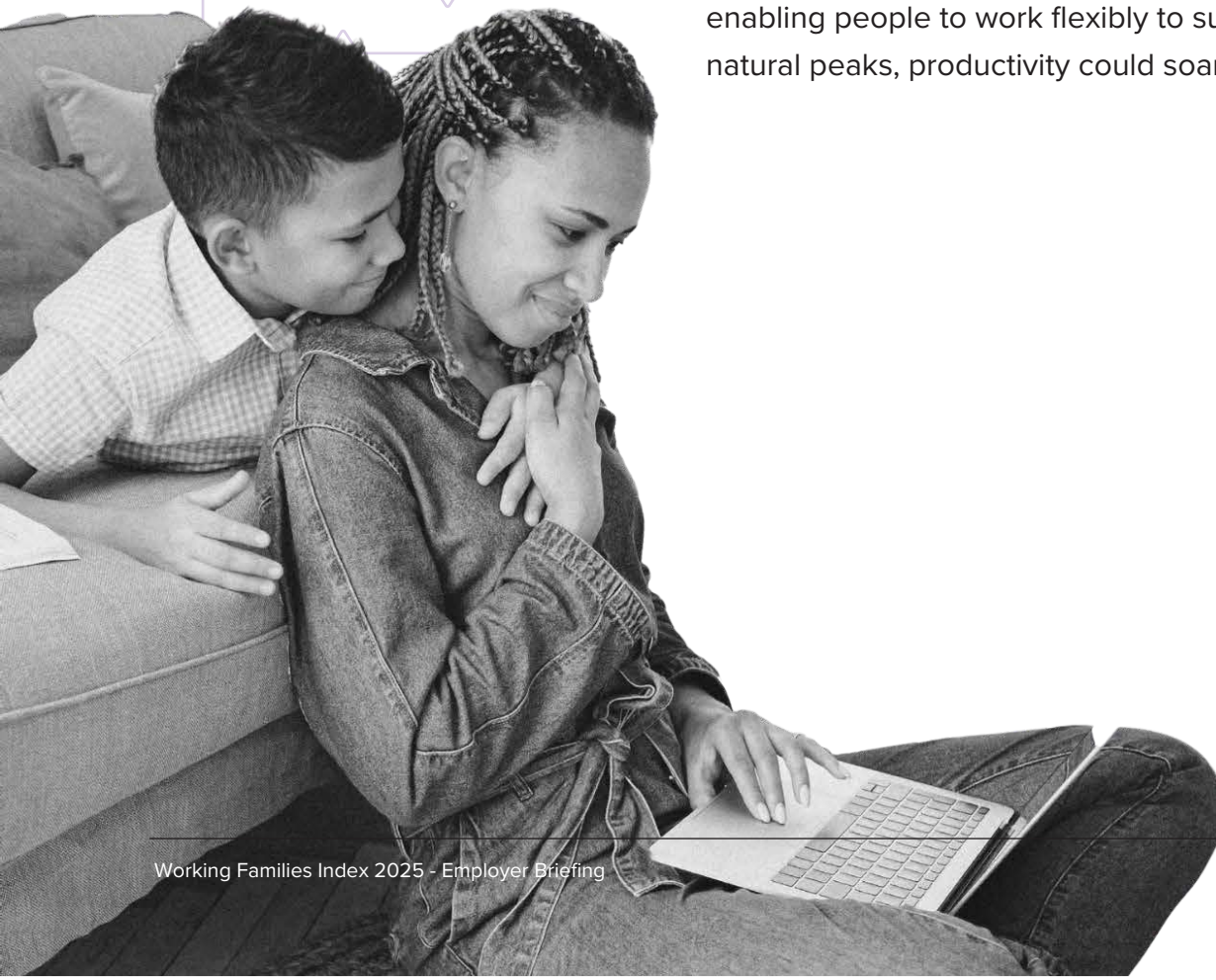
Agree 'ways of working' protocols that move away from the 'always on' mentality by not having any expectation to respond to emails outside working hours. Normalise adding working hours on email signatures so that expectations about responses are managed.

### Make sure the hours fit the job

Consider the workload of roles to ensure demands and expectations are realistic. Can the tasks allocated in a role be completed within the given hours?

### Let people work to their natural rhythm

We're all unique and have different times of the day when we're at our most productive. By enabling people to work flexibly to suit their natural peaks, productivity could soar.



## Taking it forward

A Working Families membership unlocks the tools, resources and guidance to create a family-friendly work culture where everyone can be their best. If you'd like to discuss how our team of experts can support your organisation to make family-friendly working work for you, get in touch:

[employers@workingfamilies.org.uk](mailto:employers@workingfamilies.org.uk).

And to solidify your standing as a family-friendly organisation, you can now become a Family Friendly Workplaces certified employer. Delivered in partnership with Working Families, Family Friendly Workplaces is the first certification scheme of its kind in the UK, providing employers with a framework to assess and enhance family-friendly policies, and raising global standards to build workplaces of the future.



Get in touch

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