

National Work Life Week 2021: Getting the balance right for parents and carers

This National Work Life Week, we wanted to get a snapshot of how the UK’s working parents and carers are feeling about their wellbeing at work, and their ability to get a good, healthy balance between their work lives and their home lives.

We carried out a YouGov survey of 755 British parents with children 18 or under, who were either working or on flexi-furlough¹ in August 2021. What we found was a wide gulf in peoples’ experiences of flexible, family-friendly working, and consequently how being a parent impacts on their working life. We also delved into how those with additional caring responsibilities for sick, elderly or disabled family members were finding their work-life balance, finding that in many cases they are the group most sharply affected by some of the negative practices and cultures we uncovered.

Over half of working parents agree that their organisation supports parents and people with caring responsibilities effectively (54%). Many working parents believe the pandemic has brought beneficial to their place of work, with two fifths (41%) agreeing that the pandemic has had a positive impact on workplace culture at their organisation, and half (50%) saying open conversations about wellbeing

and mental health are now more accepted. However, others aren’t so lucky, and our polling exposes a set of working parents and carers who are still battling outdated workplace cultures – almost two fifths (38%) report that those at their organisation who work the longest hours are most respected by senior leaders, more than one in five (22%) admit to hiding time off for childcare from their manager, and a third (35%) agree that being a parent and having caring responsibilities holds them back from promotion at work, rising to 41% of women.

This National Work Life Week we want to highlight how important the role of senior leaders and managers is in creating a flexible, family-friendly workplace culture that allows all their employees to thrive: including the need for them to visibly role-model those good behaviours themselves.

¹ Working some contracted hours, and being on the Furlough scheme for the remainder.

Our polling: the state of work-life balance for parents and carers in 2021

It is clear from our new research that there is a lot to celebrate in UK workplaces today. Many organisations have positive cultures, and parents and carers who work within them are benefiting. 67% of working parents agree

that they are satisfied with the balance between work and their home life in their current role, and over half of working parents (54%) say their organisation supports parents and people with caring responsibilities effectively.



Open conversations about wellbeing and mental health are more accepted at my place of work now than they were before the pandemic

Parents agree



Carers agree



The pandemic has, inevitably, had a major impact on wellbeing at work – bringing some benefits but also some additional stresses to many parents. We can see that the move to widespread home working has thrown up challenges. Nearly half (49%) of working parents say that home working can be challenging as it is hard to switch off and relax.

However, the pandemic is seen to have brought some significant benefits to working parents, with 41% saying that the pandemic has had a positive impact on workplace culture at their organisation, and over half (50%) saying that open conversations about wellbeing and mental health are more accepted at their place of work now than they were before the pandemic. This rises to 61% for people who have caring responsibilities for other family members, positive news for carers who have been hit particularly hard by the impact of the pandemic on sources of support and access to healthcare.

Looking ahead

What is clear from our polling is that getting a good balance between work and home life is hugely important to working parents.

In fact, 85% of working parents agree that work-life balance is a top priority, and say that it will influence their next choice of job. Employers who want to attract the best and most diverse talent need to sit up and take note if they are to appeal to, and retain, employees who have caring responsibilities.



85% of working parents say work-life balance is a top priority and will influence their next choice of job

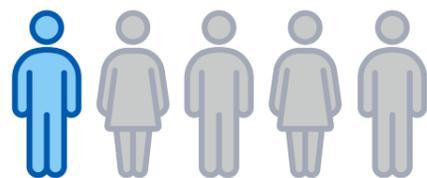
Working parents and carers reported feeling concern that the benefits to work-life balance they'd gained over the pandemic are at risk of being lost, now government mandated lockdowns are over and we are moving towards a new 'normal'. Over a third (36%) of working parents, and half (48%) of carers, said that now that lockdown is over, they are concerned that taking time off for caring needs will be frowned upon at work.

Our polling: the role of senior leaders

The results of our polling highlights just how important the role of managers and senior leaders is in setting the tone for a good workplace culture, and makes clear there is still a long way to go for many.

Nearly half (44%) of working parents disagreed that the senior leaders in their organisation are positive role models for achieving a good work-life balance. More concerningly, not only are senior leaders not acting as good role models, they're encouraging a long hours culture. Over a third (38%) said that the people who

work the longest hours in their workplace are the most respected by senior leaders in their organisation. Over 1 in 5 (22%) said that there have been occasions when they have felt the need to hide the fact that they have taken time away from work for childcare reasons from their manager.



1 in 5 (22%) of working parents say they have felt the need to hide the fact that they have taken time away from work for childcare reasons from their manager

Most worryingly, being a parent and having caring responsibilities is still seen as having a negative effect on career progression by a significant proportion of working parents – showing the long-established 'motherhood penalty' is now spreading to become a 'parenthood penalty'. 30% of men who responded said that being a parent and having caring responsibilities holds them back from promotion at work. This goes up to 41% of women, and rises to half (50%) of respondents who had additional caring responsibilities for another family member.

This finding reflects our wider concerns about the ability of parents and carers to progress in their careers, and the impact this has upon workplace diversity and gender inequality

Being a parent and having caring responsibilities holds me back from promotion at work

Men agree



Women agree



NWLW 2021:

Recommendations for employers

For employers who want to improve their flexible, family-friendly policies and culture, there is no better time to start than National Work Life Week.

While culture change won't happen overnight, there are some clear, straightforward things that every employer should look to do to support their teams and create a culture of wellbeing at work.

- Employers should make sure that the culture of the organisation, and the performance management processes used, value and reward outputs, rather than focusing on hours worked or place of work, and actively discourage presenteeism
- Make sure they're providing training specifically for line managers in how to support parents and carers, and how to get the best from teams working in a variety of flexible ways
- Actively work to raise awareness of wellbeing in your staff teams, and have a range of support available for staff to access
- Become a Working Families Employer Member – we will work closely with you to help you adopt best practice for flexible, family-friendly working in a way that fits with your organisation and culture. In addition you'll get access to workshops, webinars and an annual benchmark.

Information about the survey and figures included in this briefing

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Sample size was 755 GB parents with children 18 or under, who were either working or on flexi-furlough, of which 105 had additional caring responsibilities. Fieldwork was undertaken between 25th - 26th August 2021. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

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For more information on our work and mission, please visit

[workingfamilies.org.uk](https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk)