

# No-Cost/Low-Cost Ways to Support Working Parents

## An Employer's Guide

Family-friendly policies are gaining momentum as a critical component of workplace culture in addition to retirement benefits and insurance plans.

Businesses that are committed to the needs of working parents have a significant edge in anchoring talent and maximizing productivity.

Fortunately, supporting working parents doesn't have to undercut employers' bottom lines.



## Why build a parent-friendly workplace?

Being a working parent is challenging during the best of times, but the pandemic has revealed how much Nebraska's workforce—and employers—depend on a robust early childhood infrastructure. As Nebraska plots its path toward economic recovery and ongoing growth, business leaders are in a unique position to brainstorm solutions that can strengthen this crucial segment of our workforce while boosting our local and state economies.

Family-friendly workplace policies are increasingly recognized as an effective way to encourage productivity as well as recruit and retain talent. While not every employer can invest directly in, or offset the costs of child care, there are many cost-neutral ways businesses can make it easier for their employees to address the needs of their youngest children while remaining focused and fully engaged in their jobs.

## Be a resource for your employees

The demands of raising children while pursuing a career is a heavy responsibility for most parents, often leaving little time to track down information about the supports and resources that may be available to them. Employers can play an important role in supporting these workers by positioning themselves as a source of information related to quality child care, effective parenting, child development and work-life balance.

- **Offer onsite workshops on key issues that matter to working parents.** It's not necessary to be an expert in parenting practice, quality child care or child development to be an information resource for your workers with young children. That expertise can be found in the many organizations that focus on children and families throughout our state, including First Five Nebraska. Simply hosting onsite workshops or presentations by these experts makes it easier for working parents to connect to useful information while showing that your organization values the things that are most important to them.

Consider inviting experts to speak to your workers about:

- ▶ Local child care options in your community and how to recognize a quality setting
- ▶ Children's developmental milestones in the earliest years of life
- ▶ How to use the Nebraska child care subsidy and dependent care tax credit
- ▶ Existing resources within the community to help parents with young children

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35% of workers said a flexible work schedule would make them more likely to stay at a current job, according to a 2020 Care.com Work+Life survey.

15% would leave their current job for one that offered a flexible work schedule as a benefit.

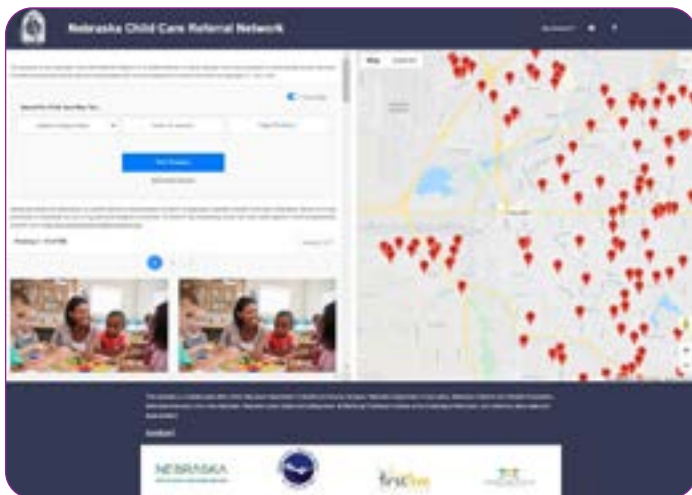
■ **Make parent-oriented information a formal part of your organization's on-boarding process.** Stepping into a new job can be an intense experience for any employee as they learn about benefits packages, workplace policies and procedures and their specific responsibilities. This is especially true when employees are new to a community.

For workers who are joining your team, consider including parent-oriented resources as part of their on-boarding documentation when appropriate:

- ▶ List of local child care providers currently used by your staff, including employee comments, contact information, price ranges and hours of operation
- ▶ Overview of the online Nebraska Child Care Referral Network [<https://nechildcarereferral.org/>]
- ▶ Introduction to Step Up to Quality, Nebraska's child care quality and ratings improvement system [<https://www.education.ne.gov/stepuptoquality/>]

## FEATURED RESOURCE:

Nebraska Child Care Referral Network  
[nechildcarereferral.org](https://nechildcarereferral.org)



The Nebraska Early Child Care Referral Network is a newly launched, online resource to help parents find child care options in their area. The website allows users to search for licensed providers based on program type, children's ages, geographical proximity, participation in the child care subsidy or Step Up to Quality.

Providers listed in the Referral Network are able to directly update their program information so parents can tell immediately if there are open slots available.

Employers can also use the network to identify which providers operate in their area and give their new hires a head start on their own search for child care.

■ **Make information resources accessible on an ongoing basis in the workplace.** It says a lot about workplace culture when employers show that the personal needs of their workers are top-of-mind in their day-to-day operations.

- ▶ Share print or digital copies of parenting resources in breakrooms or other common areas in the workplace, or on the company intranet
- ▶ Include occasional articles on work-life balance, parental stress management, child development and other relevant topics in your organization's newsletter and social media feeds

## Workplace policies that make sense for parents with young children

As an employer, your primary concern is to make sure your organization remains productive and profitable. Happily, that doesn't have to be incompatible with workplace policies that make your organization the right fit for skilled workers with young families—whatever their role or position may be.

■ **Keep schedules consistent and predictable.** When work schedules shift frequently, it puts a large amount of pressure on parents, especially when they have to realign their schedules with that of their child care provider. Stable, reliable working shifts make it easier for parents to remain focused and productive on the job without the anxiety of making adjustments in their personal lives at short notice.

■ **Accommodate shift-swapping.** Shift work is a reality in industries such as retail, manufacturing or health care. Implementing a system where employees can exchange shifts with manager approval allows working parents additional flexibility to deal with medical appointments, child care closures and other family issues.

■ **Be considerate when scheduling meetings.** For parents of young children, drop-off and pick-up times at child care can be particularly hectic, especially with the complications COVID-19 brings to these routines. Avoid setting meetings either at immediate start or end of the day so parents have a little extra breathing room to arrive and leave work in a calm and organized fashion.

FEATURED RESOURCE:

**Learning Begins at Birth**  
[learningbeginsatbirth.org/](https://learningbeginsatbirth.org/)



Few parents can claim that planning for and raising children is easy. For parents participating in the workforce, staying on top of everything you need to know about your child's early development can be especially challenging.

*Learning Begins at Birth* was developed by a collaboration of Nebraska's leading early childhood professionals. This comprehensive guidebook brings together the most current and authoritative information on children's milestones throughout their first five years, physical wellness, food and nutrition, choosing quality child care and more.

Currently, *Learning Begins at Birth* is available as a downloadable PDF in English, Spanish, Vietnamese and Arabic. You can also obtain print copies of the guidebook **free of charge** (except for shipping and handling) in English and Spanish for your workplace. For more information, contact Adam Feser at: [afeser@FirstFiveNebraska.org](mailto:afeser@FirstFiveNebraska.org).

FEATURED RESOURCE:

## Step Up to Quality

[www.education.ne.gov/stepuptoquality/](http://www.education.ne.gov/stepuptoquality/)



Some type of child care arrangement is a fact of life for the majority of Nebraska's working parents. But when it comes to child care programs, quality matters. Step Up to Quality offers guidelines to help families find early childhood professionals who are committed to providing safe, stimulating and nurturing environments for young children so parents can be fully engaged at work without worrying about the well-being of their children throughout the day.

## Workplace policies that make sense (cont.)

### ■ **Create suitable workplace areas for new mothers.**

While not strictly cost-neutral, employers can designate controlled areas of their workplaces where mothers of newborns can pump and store breast milk onsite. A few simple furnishings—such as a comfortable chair, refrigerator and workstation—are all that's needed.

■ **Keep telecommuting on the table.** Although it doesn't work for all types of businesses or workplaces, many Nebraska employers successfully transitioned to remote work arrangements with the onset of COVID-19 early this year. Telecommuting can take some of the pressure off of parents who find themselves temporarily without child care—but keep in mind that such arrangements aren't sustainable replacements for quality child care. Employers need workers who are fully focused on their jobs, just as children need caregivers who are fully focused on supporting their early development.

■ **Establish a level playing field.** Schedule flexibility and other benefits should extend to all employees, not just parents. Be clear with workers on your expectations and measures of accountability as they relate to responsibilities and deadlines.



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