

Vitality!

EFAP NEWSLETTER



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Human Solutions™

The Working Parent

Dual roles have an impact on employees and your bottom line



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For employers: Dual employee/parent roles and their impact

Two out of every three Canadian women with children hold jobs¹. In fact, the overwhelming majority of Canadian families have both parents in the workplace. The dual role of employee and parent is a challenging balancing act, and the stress it generates has a negative impact on work and productivity.

A survey conducted in 2001 found that absenteeism due to work-life conflicts cost Canadian companies more than \$3 billion a year and the health care system up to \$425 million². For many working parents, the continual stress of maintaining an active household while holding down a job leads to missed workdays, fatigue, and a reduced capacity to focus and do their best work.

As employers adapt to a changing workforce where labour shortages are expected in practically every industry and sector, a key HR focus will be attracting and retaining quality staff. Given how many of those workers will have children at home, it's in the best interest of the organization to establish programs and work arrangements which enable parents to effectively balance career demands with parenting duties.

How employers can support employees with children

Many working parents struggle to manage a busy schedule that includes a constant flow of child care needs, medical appointments, school visits and social activities. Workplace flexibility is one of the key elements required to ensure that staff with children are able to balance their parenting and work tasks.

1. Women in Canada: Work Chapter Updates, 2003. Statistics Canada, Housing, Family and Social Statistics Division.
2. A Work Life Balance in the New Millennium, Duxbury & Higgins, 2001.

In their 2001 *National Work-Life Conflict Study*, Higgins and Duxbury created a list of options employers might consider to help their employees effectively balance work and family responsibilities:

- Identify ways of reducing employee workloads;
- Identify ways to reduce the amount of time employees spend in job-related travel;
- Recognize and reward overtime work (ideally, reducing reliance on overtime);
- Give employees the opportunity to say “no” when asked to work overtime. Saying “no” should not be a career-limiting move;
- Make alternative work arrangements more widely available within your organization;
- Look at career development and career advancement opportunities through a “work-life” lens. Employees should not have to choose between having a family and career advancement;
- Examine work expectations, rewards and benefits through a “life-cycle” lens. A long-term employee might start with your company as a single person, get married, raise children, become an “empty-nester”, then slowly phase into retirement. Every one of those life stages has different stresses and opportunities, and a fixed, inflexible work arrangement will not suit them throughout their career.

For employees: Being an effective parent

Raising a healthy, well-adjusted child is arguably the most important thing a person can accomplish in their lifetime, but there is no “How To” manual provided, nor is there an in-home HR Department somebody can approach when parenting gets confusing or overwhelming—which it inevitably does.

It’s not possible to live inside your child’s mind and anticipate his or her every need. There is no magic solution for every challenge, nor an ideal response for each learning opportunity. If you’ve set the bar that high, relax. The desire to do the best for your children is a good indication that you are consciously working at being a good parent.

However, there are skills to be learned which, when combined with a caring and patient heart, will go a long way towards become an effective parent. This in turn enables you to better balance parenting with work duties.

Below is a brief overview drawn from the Human Solutions’ elearning course *The Foundations of Effective Parenting*. (If your company offers ecourses as part of the EFAP, you can learn more about this course online in the Members area of www.humansolutions.ca).

About attachment

Children don’t choose their parents but they do choose who they look up to and model their behaviour after.

Gordon Neufeld³, a Canadian psychologist and expert in attachment and parenting issues, comments that “your power as a parent stems from your child being open to being parented by you.” He remarks that all the parenting skills in the world will not help a parent until they have successfully established a connection and attachment with their child.

From the attachment theory perspective, parental ‘power’ (i.e. the ability to influence and direct a child’s behaviour, decision-making, and development) is not a power of force or coercion. Instead, parental ‘power’ is the ability to command a child’s attention, encourage their best behaviour, and stimulate their learning and development.

Ways to facilitate attachment

Attract your child’s attention in positive ways. Be approachable and involved during your child’s best behavior times. Show how pleased you are. Find ways to attract your child’s attention and keep the interaction positive and warm.

Spend time with your child when they’re watching a favourite television show or playing a computer game. Ask what it is they like about the activity, praise their skills, make physical contact, engage them in conversation.

Give your child signs that they matter to you and that they are wanted, special, significant, appreciated, missed, and enjoyed. Give them something to want to hold on to. Use the warmth of your voice or a sincere expression. Invite a connection that your child cannot turn down.

3. *Hold On to Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More Than Peers*, by Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Mate, Ballantine Books, 2005.

Make your time together quality time. No matter what age your child or whether you live in the same household or not there are many ways to spend time with your child and show them you are interested in what they are doing.

Shaping behaviour

Children can misbehave for any number of reasons. They may not know any better. They may be acting out of frustration or be looking for your attention. They may simply be curious about something and uncertain what the consequences will be.

Be a Role Model. The best way to teach your child how to behave in the world is to model that behaviour for them. Children are born copycats. You need to hold yourself accountable and maintain standards that you want your child to emulate. You are the child's first role model. Be a good one.

Learn How To Listen. If your child asks "When will dinner be ready?", it's possible to interpret the meaning behind the question in several ways. Is she hungry? Does she want to know if she has time to watch a cartoon? Does she want to eat quickly and go play with her friends?

Until you check it out, any of those interpretations could be incorrect, and your responses will vary. This is the basis of many failures of communication. (This holds true for adults as well.)

Nurturing your child's self-image and self-worth

Children with a positive self-image values the person they see when they look inside. And they carry this sense of well-being with them in every situation. Here are some key values that promote a strong self-image and feelings of self-worth, all of which parents can help nurture.

Empathy and compassion.

Children who are empathic can get behind the eyes of another person. In other words, they can identify with them and understand why they feel and act the way they do. Children with compassion can help someone feel better because they understand that the person is unhappy or suffering in some way.

The ability to make wise choices and problem-solve.

Children of all ages face many choices and have many problems to solve. By learning to problem-solve and make good decisions your child can choose pathways in life that lead to success and happiness.

Good communication skills.

The ability to communicate well is a quality associated with children who feel understood, have good relationships, and have success at school. Poor communicators not only have difficulty getting their point across, they often don't understand why they are misunderstood.

Accountability and responsibility. Children who are responsible and accountable understand the consequences that their behavior has for themselves and for others, and they learn that their choices affect others beside themselves. These are valuable tools for living and getting along with others, and for contributing meaningfully to your family, their relationships, and your community.

Self-confidence and self-belief are effective ways to help your child:

- protect themselves from others who belittle or bully them;
- stand up to peers who are tempting them with drugs or alcohol;
- say "no" to verbal abuse from others; and
- form healthy and rewarding friendships.



Employee orientations online

Your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) is designed to assist employees as well as supervisors, managers and leaders through a full suite of counselling, self-development and health management services. However, the EFAP is only useful to the extent that each of your staff is aware of its availability and how to access it.

To help raise awareness of the EFAP, we've created an online orientation that provides detailed information about what the EFAP is and how it can help. The orientation is available through our Member Services area at humansolutions.ca and it can be viewed online with audio or downloaded as a pdf document for offline reading.

Tell your staff about the orientation today!

Key person support

In today's fast-paced work environment, managers and supervisors often face people-related issues that make advancing your company's mission a challenge—an employee is consistently late for work, a valued team member passes away unexpectedly, conflict arises between two employees, etc.

The good news is that we can help. Your EFAP includes several resources for anyone in a position of responsibility for leading others (e.g. union representatives, managers, supervisors, leaders). These include:

- **Key Person orientation sessions** presented by a Human Solutions representative. Sessions include the Key Person manual which explains the do's and don'ts of making helpful EFAP referrals, how to deal with traumatic workplace incidents, how to use the Key Person Advice Line, and more. To arrange for one of these sessions, contact your Account Manager.
- an **electronic multimedia version of the Key Person orientation** is available. Contact your Account Manager for details.
- the **Key Person Advice Line** which connects callers to workplace intervention specialist who can assist with sensitive employee issues (e.g. conflict, performance problems, concern for safety or well-being, etc.). The Advice Line is available by contacting our Call Centre. And,
- later this year, a **new ecourse** specifically developed to assist managers and supervisors with how to best handle sensitive employee issues and make helpful referrals (watch for announcements of the course launch in a future issue of *Vitality!*)

Website changes

In 2007, we are undertaking a detailed review of our website in order to ensure that it meets the needs of our customers and clients. If you have any feedback or comments that you think would help us improve our website experience write us: vitality@humansolutions.ca.

**Want to know about these new developments?
Contact your Human Solutions™ Account Manager.**

About *Vitality!*

Vitality! is a publication of Human Solutions™.

For more information on issues presented here feel free to contact your EFAP provider.

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Contact Us

English
1.800.663.1142

French
1.866.398.9505

International Access:
1.604.689.1717 (Call collect)

www.humansolutions.ca

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vitality@humansolutions.ca



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