

# HR Insights



## Supporting Employees During the 2023-24 School Year



As summer comes to an end and fall begins, employees with school-age children may have increased caretaking responsibilities as their kids begin a new academic year. In addition to other day-to-day challenges, parents are now dealing with school pick-up and drop-off, unexpected sick days and other occurrences that could affect their work-life balance.

Employers can support employees during this transition into the school year by acknowledging these changes and offering flexibility. This article explores considerations for acknowledging and responding during the back-to-school season.

### Supportive Leave Policies

As Americans continue to live with COVID-19 circulating just like the common cold and flu, illnesses are inevitable. Therefore, employers may want to review their leave policies. While an organization's policies may accommodate employees who become ill, family members could also become sick. Employers should consider offering workplace flexibility that allows them to leave and care for their family members if needed. Some employers have leave policies that allow employees to take time off when they or their family members are sick or when they need to receive vaccines for these illnesses. With the back-to-school season approaching, employers may be reevaluating their current leave offerings to ensure they reflect these realistic needs.

### Flexible Working Arrangements

Remember that life happens, and unexpected circumstances will arise. Employers can consider providing remote and hybrid work models when possible or as needed. Even when remote and hybrid work is not feasible, flexible scheduling can allow employees time for other tasks, such as dropping off or picking up their children from school.

Furthermore, the workplace could implement core hours that allow employees some leniency in when they can start and stop their days. Whichever accommodations an employer chooses, it's important to communicate to employees that the company is willing to work around events that may arise in their lives. This assurance may reduce stress during the back-to-school transition and could positively impact employee retention. However, it's important to note that accountability should come with flexibility, so employees must work out any arrangements with their managers and teams.

### Resources for Caretakers

Family caregivers account for an estimated 18% to 22% of the U.S. labor force, according to the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregivers. Furthermore, nearly one-third of caregiver employees have voluntarily left a job at some point during their careers because of their caregiving responsibilities.

While it may not be feasible for all employers to directly provide caretaking services, they can help ensure their employees have access to such resources. Employers may consider hosting a workshop, distributing a handout or otherwise providing information regarding caretaking resources. Even if there are no specific caregiving benefits available at an organization, managers or supervisors could simply ask working employees how they are doing during the back-to-school season. This kicks off an open dialogue, demonstrating an interest in how they're doing as a person and helping reduce guilt about juggling personal and work responsibilities.

Many schools end between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m., which means working parents might need child care for several hours or leave to handle it themselves. When school is closed due to holidays or professional development, working parents may have to find a secondary plan for those days while they're still working. Helping employees feel supported during their search for caretakers or after-school programs for their children can go a long way in making them feel supported and may boost overall employee retention.

## **Takeaway**

The back-to-school transition may initially seem misplaced to the workplace, but the reality is that many employees have school-age children and associated caretaking responsibilities. As a result, employers should prepare to be flexible, accommodate employees during this transition and provide relevant resources. These efforts can help make a difference and ultimately assist in appealing to and keeping workers during a time when attraction and retention are significant challenges for organizations.

Contact us for additional workplace resources.

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