

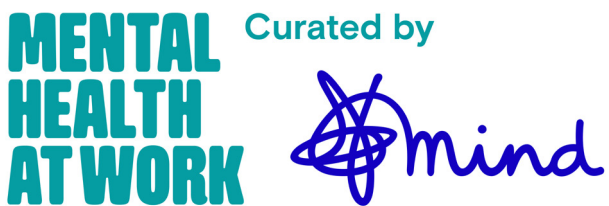


# How to support working parents



## Acknowledgements

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## Foreword

Being an employee and being a parent sometimes seems like an impossible dual responsibility. Juggling priorities in an effort to find a sustainable work-life balance can be hugely challenging, with parents often feeling guilty at work and at home.

As one working parent told us: *“The biggest difficulty of balancing work and parenting is guilt! I feel guilty about my children when I throw myself into work and guilty at work when I’m thinking about what I should do better for my own children. My children’s wellbeing is at the forefront of my mind.”*

Since personal and professional wellbeing are interlinked, this guide asks how employers can support working parents, knowing that mental health and wellbeing are key to a motivated and high-performing workforce. Our recent research shows that one in three employees feel their workplace doesn’t support their needs and that over half (53%) agree that their workplace could do more.

For HR leaders keen to turn these stats around and work towards a mentally healthy workforce, this guide will give you a great place to start, focusing on parents as a significant cohort likely to benefit from greater support aligned to their distinct needs.

**Dr Hannah Wilson**, consultant clinical psychologist and head of clinical governance at Kooth

# Introduction: The parent workforce's contribution to your organisation

According to the [ONS People in Work](#) report, there are around 30 million payrolled people in employment in the UK. Of these, [13 million \(43%\) are parents](#) – of which less than 7% have flexible working arrangements.

The needs of working parents are complex. On a personal level, many working parents face chronic guilt about how they split and prioritise their time: [Mind's Workplace Wellbeing Index](#) reports that more than one in five employees don't think they have a good work-life balance. The mental strain created by multiple demands on time may be exacerbated for groups whose voices tend to fall between the gaps, such as working women, parents with mental health conditions, or who are supporting children with mental health concerns.

[Recent figures](#) show alarming rates of burnout in the workforce, with 37% of working people showing moderate or high levels. Burnout is closely linked to other mental health issues like depression and anxiety, so it's important for HR leaders to consider and implement preventative support.

According to Mike Brazier, head of employer mental wellbeing at Kooth: *“Working parents are especially vulnerable to accumulating stress both at home and in the workplace. Prioritising their mental health and wellbeing is critical to increasing workforce productivity, retention, and overall workplace satisfaction and functioning. [Data shows](#) that a quarter of the workforce have taken time off in the past year due to their mental health, and that a quarter would consider changing jobs to a company with better mental health support.”*

As HR and wellbeing leaders, we cannot solve all the financial, physical, and emotional challenges of being a parent. However, working to better understand this varied cohort can help us develop a more inclusive, adaptive workplace and culture. This guide contains top insights and practical advice from clinical experts, wellbeing executives, and recent research, alongside the voices of working parents. It can help you consider your workforce's needs from several perspectives – and develop an effective wellbeing strategy from the early stages of benchmarking through to implementing and improving support options.

## What should support look like in your organisation?

The data in this guide will help you identify where and how to start addressing support for your working parent employees. This is imperative because every workforce is different. Consider benchmarking and assessing the specific needs in your organisation before you think about solutions.

There are many wellbeing surveys and workforce mental health benchmarking tools that you can use to do this, including the [Mind Workplace Wellbeing Index](#) and [Kooth's Flourish](#). Assessing the mental wellbeing status of your workforce can help you identify risks and correctly align the level of support to the unique needs of your workforce and its various business units.

# Part 1: Understanding the needs of your workforce

## The pressures of parenting

[Kooth research](#) shows that the four primary factors of poor mental wellbeing among employees are high pressure, unmanageable workloads, unrealistic expectations, and unsuitable work hours. These stressors are especially felt by working parents balancing responsibilities at home.

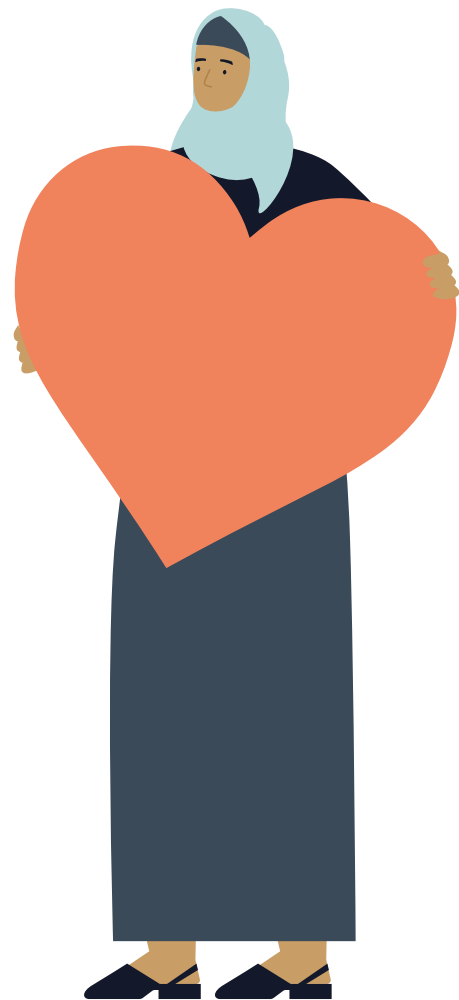
The family assistance organisation, [BlckBx](#) reports that 69% of working parents feel they never have time for themselves. 52% of working parents frequently have to catch up on work during the evenings or weekends because of family and household needs, and 51% have a hard time being mentally present at work because of their mental to-do list. 73% of working parents say they'd like more flexible working options, 33% would like better health and wellbeing support, and 60% would leave their organisation for one that offers better support to working parents.

Chief people officer and workplace wellbeing lead at Kooth, Angela Kravets, says, *“Supporting working parents is crucial to retaining critical talent, and it requires supporting employees with their mental and overall wellbeing to be able to have a healthy family-life and work-life balance. Support options have to start first off with understanding your staff, and then considering flexibility.”*

## Groups of parents who may need additional support

Consider how you can support and consult with different parent groups who may be more likely to struggle with their mental health and wellbeing. Though there are so many parents in challenging situations, here are a few groups who may need additional consideration when developing a wellbeing strategy:

- Single parents
- Carers and those in the 'sandwich generation' who are caring for children and parents simultaneously
- Parent employees with existing mental health diagnoses
- Pregnant employees
- Employees returning to work after maternity/paternity leave
- Parents with children or family members with disabilities
- Same-sex and LGBTQ+ parents
- Working mothers



## What working parents have to say about the challenges they face:

“You can be the most organised person in the world, but balancing work and parenting is never easy. Both areas of my life require quite a bit of forward planning. However, with parenting, your children’s needs, and mood can change so rapidly it can really throw you off course.”

**Anya**



“The main challenge of parenting is the mental load – there’s just so much to do and think about all the time. Your own free time evaporates and you can often feel trapped in a permanent cycle of schedules, competing needs and pressure to provide and succeed. Meanwhile, you’re trying to be a loving and engaged parent and not be permanently stuck to a laptop or phone. It’s very easy to burnout, and for me, you just get used to a pretty permanent sense of anxiety – there’s always something you’re not doing as well as you could. That’s one of the reasons parents need to find jobs that suit their family’s needs.”

**Dan**





## The experience of working mothers

Working mothers are particularly vulnerable to mental health and work difficulties, likely due to the additional responsibilities they carry at home. According to the [Office of National Statistics](#), three in four mothers are working in the UK, which is the highest ratio in the past 20 years. At the same time, [research shows](#) that women working full-time are nearly twice as likely as men to have a mental health problem.

It is evident that working mothers are not getting the support they need. According to the workers' rights campaign groups, [TUC and Mother Pukka](#), half of all working mothers are not granted the flexibility they request at work, and this refusal costs UK plc around £1.7 billion each year. Of working mothers with flexible arrangements, a huge 86% reported facing discrimination and disadvantage due to it.

According to [BlckBx](#), women are responsible for more household, organisational, and childcare-related tasks, which impacts their wellbeing. Women report having less energy and poorer quality sleep than men: women's average energy level was rated a 4.8 out of 10, while men reported a 5.8 out of 10.

### **A working mum shares her perspective:**

*“As a woman in my house, I am the main care provider for the children. I cook, clean, take the kids to and from school, and plan and host all after-school play dates while also working full-time. This means that I rarely have a rest, and as a result, I am much more vulnerable to burnout. I look around my workplace and notice working dads seem able to progress in their careers more easily.*”

*Looking at my husband’s day compared to mine is also a reminder of the reality for so many working mums, or ‘main carer’ working parents. My husband gets up, goes to work, and comes back to a home-cooked meal. While technically he is a working parent, he doesn’t have to parent before he works, or work while he’s parenting (the tricky side of working from home). Meanwhile, before my working day starts I usually had to prepare multiple lunches, support with any school work, deal with any morning meltdowns, walk the dog, deal with school admin, and take the kids to school. This is before I even think about myself.”*

## The financial strains of childcare

With the rising cost of living, childcare has become an especially pressing issue affecting parents' mental health and ability to work. According to [Working Families and Pinsent Masons](#), Almost 50% of lower-income parents with young children say that their mental health was negatively affected by the financial inaccessibility of childcare. Parents who are struggling financially often have to forfeit work and career opportunities to manage childcare needs, and research shows that this especially affects minority groups such as women and Black, mixed-race, and Asian parents. A [BlckBx](#) survey reports that almost half of working parents say the rising cost of childcare is making them reconsider whether or not they should work.



## What parents have to say about finding childcare:

“My husband and I don’t have the luxury of grandparents, aunts, and uncles lending a helping hand with childcare. My husband has been laid off since February so we’ve been managing living on one income leaving little to pay for the rising costs of childcare, which is often as high as people’s rent. I have anxiety surrounding when he does go back into the office and I’ll be home with our son to balance working and caregiving. It’s been a challenge finding reliable, trustworthy, and affordable childcare options for our son.”

**Amira**



“I currently have my mother-in-law coming over three times a week to help watch my daughter during my meetings. My mum will take her for the full day once a week. On Fridays, I have her to myself, and I have lighter meetings so I’ve been able to manage. However, if my daughter is having a hard time, I make sure to communicate that with my manager to let her know I will need to flex hours and/or make up the time the following day/week.”

**Carina**



## Dr Hannah's insight into the identity crisis of a working parent

Supporting working parents to be able to have a successful work-life requires an understanding of the different priorities they may have. Dr Hannah Wilson, a consultant clinical psychologist and head of clinical governance at Kooth, lends her insight on how having a child can shift a person's sense of identity and belonging in the workplace:

“Parenting often comes with a crisis of identity that isn't addressed enough in the workplace. Both work and parenting are areas that can greatly impact peoples' self-belief, self-confidence, and sense of accomplishment. While the feedback and success of a career may have been the primary focus before having children, becoming a parent often becomes a person's primary identity and everything must shuffle around it.

“Parents are always attuned to their kids in some way, and there has to be an adjustment of what they can expect from themselves in a work setting while juggling parenting responsibilities. Parents do not want to be seen as any less valuable in the workplace after having a child, but the reality is that they will require more flexibility when it comes to work. Normalising the difficulties parents face, and allowing space for people to be honest and be human is important in the workplace. If parents feel comfortable communicating their needs, this can build trust with their employer, which can help improve retention and prevent burnout.”

## Part 2: Supporting parents in your workforce

What should you consider when developing your support options for working parents?

Individual parent employees	The job	Home life
<p>Employee wellbeing is often a combination of physical health, mental health, and financial wellbeing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the employee have any existing conditions and diagnoses?</li> <li>• What ability do they have to access self-directed support?</li> <li>• Are they aware of the support available to them?</li> <li>• Are they able to ask for greater flexibility in terms of their hours and role?</li> </ul>	<p>Roles have varied responsibilities, workloads, working hours, locations, and associated risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are working hours reasonable for the job's targets and duties?</li> <li>• How may shift working, remote working, and lone working affect employee wellbeing?</li> <li>• Are returning parents expected to do the same job as when they left but with less time?</li> </ul>	<p>Relationships with children, partners, and family at home play a key role in employee mental wellbeing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How may family relationships be affecting employees?</li> <li>• How does your workforce currently access the support offered?</li> <li>• What mental health support is available outside working hours?</li> </ul>
Organisation & Culture	HR & Wellbeing	Clinical Mental Health
<p>Leadership must work to promote a culture of awareness and psychological safety:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are employees made aware of available support options?</li> <li>• How can support options be extended to the whole workforce?</li> <li>• How will support be financed?</li> </ul>	<p>Adapting policies and benefits can help you better support working parents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your company's policies around flexible working?</li> <li>• What financial support options can be provided to help with strains such as childcare?</li> <li>• What physical health support is available?</li> <li>• What support groups are available?</li> </ul>	<p>Providing choice, autonomy, and multiple pathways to support is advisable: there's no one size fits all for mental health:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is prevention and early intervention support available in addition to emergency support?</li> <li>• Can employees access professional mental health support quickly without a referral?</li> <li>• How are workplace and remote/digital support options balanced?</li> </ul>

# What can you do for the working parents in your organisation?

While there are many complex situations and factors that play into the wellbeing of parents in the workforce, here are five points to consider, informed by statistics, working parents' voices, and HR experts.

## 1. Advocate for true flexibility

According to the [ONS](#), when asked about any special working arrangements, such as flexible or term-time hours, a third of mothers reported an agreed special working arrangement in their job, compared with less than a quarter of fathers. With [BlckBx](#) reporting that 73% of working parents would like more flexible working options, the mounting responsibilities parents face, and the rising cost of childcare, real workplace flexibility is needed to sustain a healthy working parent workforce.

Dr Hannah Wilson highlights a distinction between true flexibility offered to parents versus a deviation from the nine-to-five norm: *“Is there that flexibility to be able to work from home if your child has had to be sent home, or to make up hours after a child’s gone to bed? That’s true flexibility rather than the flexibility that means you could start at half eight instead of nine.”* True flexibility in the workplace not only requires trust between management and employees, but also consideration about benefits, holidays, parental leave, and working times.

## What working parents have to say:

“Flexibility is the key. I freelanced for the first three years of my son’s life, which was perfect in terms of flexibility. Since then, the roles I’ve found sustainable are the ones that understand parental needs; that kids aren’t robots and don’t fit into spreadsheets! I, and many parents like me, get back to work after the kids have gone to bed, so employers who don’t freak out if you’re not always available during school pick-up and drop-off, or if your child is sick, really help parental stress levels. We’re doing the best we can!”

**Andy**

“I asked my manager if it would be better to work from seven to four since mornings are easier with my daughter and my husband is able to help more before he heads off to work. Or if she prefers I take it day by day and let her know if I need to work slightly different hours. Her response was that she is a strong believer in making work fit in your life, not the other way around. So as long as I continued to stay communicative and up front, she was absolutely okay with accommodating my work schedule. This meant the world to me. I always struggled with speaking up for myself in the workplace and creating a healthy work/life balance.”

**Jane**

## Three things you can do to increase flexibility for working parents in your organisation:

1. Allow for true flexible working hours and locations.
2. Provide flexible benefit options that can be used to support the costs of childcare.
3. Create policies that ensure flexibility around doctor and medical appointments for employees and their children.



## 2. Train leaders and managers to listen and build trust

Leaders and managers need appropriate training to be able to support their staff. The Mental Health First Aider's (MHFA) handbook provides a clinical model, ALGEE, that informs people of how to spot a crisis or mental health problem:

1. Approach
2. Assess for crisis
3. Assist with crisis
4. Listen and communicate non-judgmentally
5. Give support and information based on what support is available through your organisation
6. Encourage adoption of support options and if in crisis to take appropriate professional help
7. Encourage use of multiple support options

It can be helpful to train leaders on how to use this approach and what preventative, early intervention, and crisis support is available to their staff. Providing training that extends beyond designated MFHAs, can help create a safer, better-informed workplace culture.

## The HR Perspective

Angela Kravets recommends that managers and employees have discussions where the employees can communicate how they work best. Kooth uses a method called contracting, where managers sit down with their employees to answer questions about the best ways to work and manage employees to get the best results from them.

According to Angela, *“Managers play a role in support by creating a psychologically safe environment for their employees, so that if they’re having a really tough day, they can say so and be open. Creating a relationship based on a foundation of trust is one of the biggest things that managers can do. Having that relationship can help employees feel like they don’t have to mask also being a parent.”*

*“If you understand and you know your employees well enough, and you can see changes in their behaviours, it can be helpful to ask questions. For example, if people start missing deadlines, not putting their cameras on in Zoom meetings, being late for meetings or seem disengaged, ask them if they’re okay. It’s not a question of ‘why are you not performing?’, but rather ‘I’ve noticed some changes and are you okay?’ And that comes from a place of trust that you’ve built to allow that person to be open with you if there’s something going on, and if they need additional help or support.”*



### What working parents have to say:

“Managers could support working parents by being understanding – a happy employee would provide so many benefits, such as loyalty, honesty, and improved self-esteem. Managers need to understand that family is the most important thing; you can have happy employees if you understand that respect works both ways.”

**Craig**

“I think it pays for managers to be aware of someone’s personal situation if it impacts work. So, for instance, while my Dad was poorly, it was helpful for me to share that with my manager. It just felt good to be heard and for someone to understand the worry I was bringing to work. I don’t think it’s the job of managers to resolve people’s mental health or wellbeing issues, but there are adjustments that they can help with and support they can point you towards, if that’s appropriate. If you don’t have that kind of relationship with your manager, then for some, work can feel like a lonely place.”

**Sofia**

### Three ways you can help foster psychological safety for parent employees:

1. Provide training for all employees and managers on how to spot the signs of declining mental health and how to communicate with open questions and active listening.
2. Advocate for regular line manager and colleague check-ins.
3. Organise support groups for parents to share their experiences.

### 3. Take time to talk to employees returning from parental leave

Many parents perceive a stigma around having children and taking leave. In a [BlckBx](#) study, 39% of working parents were concerned about the impact of taking parental leave, and after doing so, 92% reported that concern was valid. Additionally, 57% of parents said they'd experienced negative workplace behaviours linked to them having a child, with 22% saying that they were assumed to be less ambitious.

**Laura Johnson, Mind's head of community programmes, says:**

*"It's so important to create time to talk to your employee about how they're feeling about returning to work after parental leave and what you can do to support them with their transition. This made such a huge difference to me when I returned to work after having my son. It helped me with the anxiety I was experiencing about returning to work, enabled me to take my time to settle back in and get back up to speed."*

**Three considerations to help support parents returning from parental leave:**

1. Ensure regular check-ins with managers and conversations reassessing workloads and responsibilities.
2. Signpost to early intervention and crisis support options, as well as support groups.
3. Provide relevant resources for parents who may have a diagnosis, such as postnatal depression.

## 4. Provide emotional support and tools for struggling parent employees

Angela Kravets points out how the impact of poor mental health goes beyond just the individual, affecting the work ecosystem and the family of the individual too. She advocates that people are given tools that they can use to support their mental health outside the nine-to-five. These tools can help them develop awareness around their own mental health and the impact it's having on their work and life. Encouraging this awareness can help a person be aware of their own mental health in the workplace and in their personal life.

*Angela states: "Mental health isn't just nine-to-five, so when it comes to mental health, encouraging employees to understand their own mental health can help them manage both in work settings and in their personal lives. Companies can have tools where people can assess and analyse their mental health, learn to be aware of their triggers, what can relieve their triggers, and what can affect and impact their mental wellbeing."*

Angela points out that everyone in a company has to prioritise wellbeing – from individual employees to management and HR. She says HR must put into place tools structures, foundations and processes to support employees, and empower them to look after their mental health. HR can strive to create a culture within the company where people feel psychologically safe to bring their authentic selves to work and this is done by demonstrating and actively engaging in openness and inclusivity for everyone.

**Here are three things you could do to improve your organisation's mental wellbeing strategy:**

1. Balance prevention, early intervention, and reactive support options.
2. Balance support options that are accessible within the workplace and remotely.
3. Make access to professional support available at all times, in and out of working hours.

## 5. Support the children of parents in your workforce

While companies do not traditionally offer mental health and wellbeing support that extends to the children of employees, doing so can help pave the way for a more holistic approach to supporting employee mental wellbeing.



## Dr Hannah's insight on the link between a parent and a child's mental health

Dr Hannah describes the relationship between a parent's mental health and their child's mental health as "symbiotic". She adds, *"There's obviously a biological link, so it may be that some young people are predisposed to some mental health difficulties. Also, many adults find it difficult to manage their own emotions, and then when they have a child, they're suddenly responsible for both their emotions and their child's."*

*"There's an assumption that parents know how to manage young people's mental health, but no one teaches them how to do that. For parents, knowing there is support there – whether that's helping a parent know how to help their child or directly for the child – can help to reduce the pressure."*

*"Young people don't always want to talk to their parents about what's going on for them, especially if they have particularly tricky thoughts or feelings. So knowing there's a safe place they can go to can be quite important."*

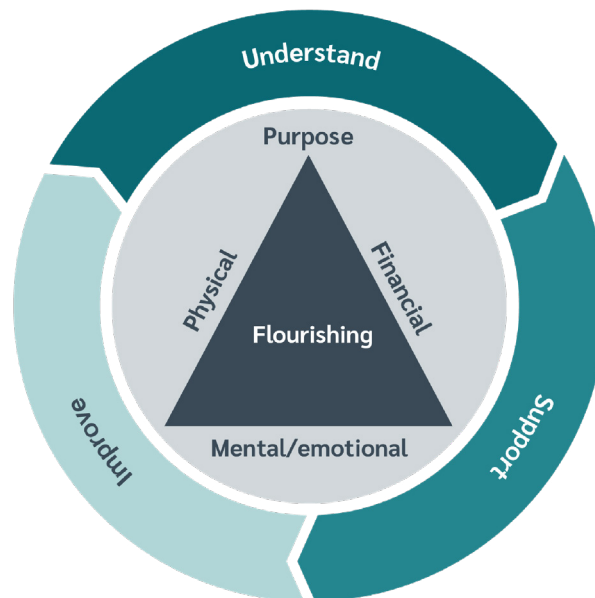
*"From an employee productivity perspective, a holistic, whole-family approach is always considered better. If a young person is more supported and there's less stress on the employee, they can be more present at work, won't need as much time off, and will be able to be more focused."*

### Three things your organisation could do to support the children of employees:

1. Provide resources and support for parents that help them understand their children's needs.
2. Extend mental and physical health support options to the whole family.
3. Provide discounts and vouchers for the family.

## Building these points into your wellbeing strategy

Adopting a framework approach will help you integrate the recommendations above into a holistic plan that links mental health with the other areas of workforce wellbeing, including purpose, physical wellbeing, and financial wellbeing.



By benchmarking and researching the needs of your parent workforce, you can align your programme to the unique profile of the people in your organisation. Here are ten key actions we recommend for building your support programme:



## 1. Establish leadership and organisational buy-in

The visible commitment of senior leadership to better workforce mental wellbeing is key to gaining the support and resources you need across your organisation. It can be helpful to have an executive sponsor and representation from within your organisation to champion the needs of working parents.

## 2. Objective setting

Use your research and the SMART objective setting model to set meaningful targets for improvement. Identify what is a priority and where the greatest gaps are.

## 3. Budget for better mental wellbeing

There are many things you can do to support mental wellbeing that don't require additional expenditure. Where there are gaps requiring investment, this business case builder template can help. Tools such as Flourish, the Mind Workplace Wellbeing Index, and other reporting systems can also provide the data you need to build a case for your budget.



## 4. Wellbeing management systems and reporting

Your wellbeing management system will likely comprise different business and HR information systems. Consider existing procedures you have in place and new ones needed, as well as the data and reporting you require for control purposes. This may include:

- Business productivity performance
- Financial support provisions
- Appraisals
- Insights from your digital mental health platforms
- Use of related support options
- Causes of absence and leavers
- Employee satisfaction levels and feedback
- Referrals and incidents recorded

## 5. Third-party partners

As part of your programme, you will need to outsource some support – especially around specialist areas like training, digital support options, specialist therapy, crisis support, and rehabilitation. Working with these specialist organisations will help provide your wellbeing leadership team with valuable clinical guidance, expertise, and key reporting.

## 6. People and support groups

Establish and train a wellbeing team or committee composed of in-house staff, trusted partners, and representatives from key interest groups. Consider the support groups your workforce needs and volunteers who can lead and represent the needs of these groups when making decisions around your wellbeing programme. Pulse surveys can be used in groups to help gather data on working parents' wants and needs.

## 7. Safeguarding, psychological safety, and specialist advice

It's a legal obligation to have safeguarding processes in place to protect your employees from the risk of 'injury' to their mental health or putting their mental health at risk. Your organisation should consider applying the concept of physical safeguarding to mental health by [ensuring the organisation is psychologically safe](#).

### Safeguarding for mental health may entail:

- Regular audits
- Assessing [the workplace and the person's role for risks](#)
- Taking necessary actions to prevent exposure to risks
- Training the workforce to detect risks and manage risks that are part of their role
- Creating processes for identifying, reporting, and responding to risks
- Recording and reviewing incidents
- Making improvements to avoid the same issues from happening again

It is worth considering that for some roles the risks are unavoidable. For example, working in social services, being a first responder, or a frontline worker. Consider what would be needed to safeguard their mental health. Seeking advice from specialists is advisable when unsure of the right processes.

## 8. Whole company training and communications

As mentioned earlier, training managers is fundamental to the success of a programme. However, extending training and awareness to other members of staff can help create informed change across the wider organisation. Flourish research shows that 40% of employees do not know what support is available to them. If the wider workforce is educated about support options and signs of mental health difficulties, there will be greater awareness and ability to access support.



## 9. Choice and means of access

Everyone is different; some people need absolute anonymity to open up, while others want to be able to talk out loud and in person. People will want to access support at different times, and they will have a range of acuity levels and diagnoses. When developing your support options, consider:

- **The whole person:** Staff are influenced by several factors, including their role in the workplace, personality, health conditions, and relationships with friends and family.
- **The whole organisation:** An insurance company's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) options are only accessed by for 5% of staff and often, only a small percentage of workers are trained in mental wellbeing. Think about what options can be accessed by 100% of your workforce at all times and how you can provide training for all of your workforce in a cost-effective manner.
- **Balance between prevention and crisis:** You will need to have support for when things go wrong, but consider how you can help prevent heavy reliance on crisis support through early detection and training.
- **Balance between being at work and off-duty:** Kooth's data shows that 60% of the time, employees access mental health support outside of work hours. People want access to professional support when it's convenient for them – especially busy working parents. Consider how many of your support options are easily accessible without using company systems, as well as the balance you offer between in-person and remote access options.
- **Support for people with a diagnosis:** [15% of working-age adults have a diagnosed mental health disorder](#). Having prevention and early intervention options in place is essential to prevent employees from falling into a state of crisis and to assist them in getting a diagnosis when needed.

## 10. A framework checklist

Read more about the process of developing your mental wellbeing programme, in Kooth’s [complete mental wellbeing framework toolkit](#), or review our [simple checklist](#).

Understand 	Support 	Improve
<p>Conduct a mental wellbeing data audit</p> <p>Identify the level of commitment within your organisation</p> <p>Benchmark the mental wellbeing status, risks and needs of your workforce</p> <p>Identify and prioritise mental wellbeing risks</p> <p>Complete a Gap Analysis of your current support options</p> <p>Summarise your findings in a SWOT</p> <p>Define your mental wellbeing vision</p> <p>Set your workforce mental health focused SMART objectives</p>	<p><b>Organisation and cultural strategy</b></p> <p>Make a commitment to improve mental health</p> <p>Identify your people organisation &amp; culture fit</p> <p>Budget for better mental wellbeing</p> <p>Publish your mental wellbeing policy</p> <p><b>Clinical and support strategy</b></p> <p>Adopt your clinical model</p> <p>Design your ecosystem</p> <p>Map your wellbeing support</p> <p>Integrate your wellbeing support</p> <p><b>Employee engagement strategy</b></p> <p>Set your communication plan</p> <p>Use data-led engagement themes</p>	<p>Set your KPIs and reporting strategy</p> <p>Monitor workplace mental wellbeing KPIs</p> <p>Focus on continuous improvement</p> <p>Create a business case for mental wellbeing investment</p>

# Building these points into your total employment strategy

Here are six practical considerations for building these points into your wider wellbeing and total employment strategy.

## 1. Review company policies, processes, and benefits

Company policies and procedures underpin your organisation's priorities and can help ensure a company culture that supports parents and caregiving duties. HR and wellbeing partners should review their current policies and guidelines to see what needs to be updated. Policies should reflect the cultural norms and behaviours the organisation wants to uphold. If policies and procedures do not exist, then understanding what the business needs and what employees are requesting is a good starting point for creating the right fit.

It's important to reflect on the benefits your company currently offers and assess whether they support the cultural norms and behaviours your organisation and employees want to be represented. EAPs are a first step to providing support, but there are additional support options that should be considered to help with mental health, financial wellbeing, and legal support. Your organisation may consider extending certain support options to the immediate family of employees, too.

## 2. Communicate your organisation's policies and offerings

There should be consistent communication about your organisation's offerings to develop awareness across the workforce. While support options are often covered during induction periods or when employees are returning from leave, reminders throughout the year by different channels of communication can help ensure this overall awareness. These reminders may be intranet posts or articles, informal Slack or Teams messages, formal meetings, or email reminders at targeted times of the year.

### **3. Provide training and resources for managers to best support staff**

Training is not only key for functional and legislative requirements, but also helps enhance the ‘human’ side of conversations and support. It’s essential to provide formal training to support managers in empathetically engaging in conversations about vulnerable topics. Well-trained managers are a great asset to workforce wellbeing, as they know their employees’ individual needs, what resources are available, and can help employees find the support they need.

### **4. Champion employee support groups**

Employee support groups can provide a safe space for working parents experiencing challenges to openly share and get advice and feedback from others who may be in similar situations. This can help develop psychological safety in the workplace and lighten mental loads. Additionally, support groups are good places for sharing and signposting to appropriate resources.

### **5. Understand what flexibility looks like in your workplace**

Employers are required to offer flexible work arrangements. It’s up to the HR team to understand what’s possible as a business for the specific role, and to work with the manager and employee to agree on appropriate options. Flexible work arrangements may vary from remote or hybrid working, to part-time work, covering core business hours with flexible start and finish times, building in breaks for childcare responsibilities, and more. It can be helpful to have trial periods with regular check-ins to understand the suitability of the work arrangements, gauge progress, and make adjustments if needed.

### **6. Compliance considerations**

HR and wellbeing partners need to make sure that whatever they put in place adheres to relevant legislation, including rules about Flexible Work Arrangements or understanding the different types of statutory family leave. To stay up to date with regulations, HR can subscribe to employment law and HR compliance sites.

**Charlotte Turnbull**

Partner Employment Law & HR at W Legal  
Head of Wellbeing and Sustainability

Stigma is a key issue affecting the mental wellbeing of working parents. Parent employees often wrestle with being labelled by colleagues as ‘not dedicated enough to the business’ simply because they need to take time to be there for their children. This stigma in the workplace, alongside the pressures of thinking they should be able to manage it all, can easily prevent parents from getting the support they need. Employees who are experiencing stress and anxiety, as well as conditions like postnatal depression and PTSD, need to be able to seek support early without feeling that their job will be at risk.

There is a great deal employers can do to help alleviate this ‘career anxiety’. It starts with reducing stigma by building psychologically safe work cultures where parents can talk about their needs and find the right support. Employers and wellbeing leads need to think beyond training a few selected staff members as mental health first aiders. They should also work to educate staff at a wider workforce level. The more people trained around active listening, how to spot early signs of mental health problems, and how to signpost colleagues to available support, the greater the impact.

It’s not enough to implement an EAP, as EAP support normally requires an employee to open up to their workplace about their mental health, which is something they may not feel ready to do. It’s worth considering what anonymous support options can be provided.

Employers, HR, and Wellbeing leaders should look at their legal requirements around supporting employees. The Health and Safety Act 1974 includes requirements regarding employee mental health, the Employment Rights Act 1996 provides employees with a right to request flexible working. Additionally, the [Equality Act 2010](#) enumerates employee rights, stating that employees’ careers should not suffer due to discrimination against any of the nine protected characteristics, which include disability, gender, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity. As organisation leaders, we’re entrusted with an important mission to ensure working parents are properly supported and do not face discrimination and career disadvantages.



## Part 3: Tracking and creating improvement targets

Once you've implemented your support programme, it's important to set up methods that enable you to monitor its effectiveness and make regular course corrections. It is possible to use the same tools and benchmarking measures that you've used as part of the process to first understand the needs of your workforce. Using workplace mental wellbeing assessment and benchmarking tools like [Flourish](#), [Mind's Workplace Wellbeing Index](#), or other options can help you see the impact of your changes over the years.

Monthly insights from additional sources, like third-party mental wellbeing service partners, on-site mental health support, and your own employee feedback systems and internal groups, can provide rich qualitative insights to help you create course corrections. Here are some insights on how you can collect and collate your workforce wellbeing data.

### Setting up regular reporting for course corrections

It's important to consider the data you will need to create a framework for reporting. You can adjust your HR and Wellbeing reporting dashboard to incorporate insights from your organisation, HR systems, and your wellbeing suppliers to build a comprehensive picture of your workforce's mental wellbeing.

### Employee mini polls and employee feedback surveys

Setting up quick and easy polls and surveys to collect employee feedback on a regular basis can help you understand the state of your workforce's wellbeing. Setting up focus groups to take a closer look and discuss the data can provide further insights and help you refine your support options.

Metrics you may wish to measure include:

- Happiness
- Sense of purpose
- Job satisfaction
- How employees are feeling

Using Likert scales and providing additional comments boxes will provide richer insights. Enabling staff to submit feedback anonymously will provide more accurate results.

## Feedback from managers and wellbeing champions

As well as direct employee feedback, speaking with team managers and your wellbeing team can help you gain general feedback on the overall effectiveness and uptake of support options. It's essential to remember that employee confidentiality is fully maintained during these conversations.

## Digital service insights

Anonymous services can be used to track data trends and [wellbeing Key Performance Indicators \(KPIs\)](#) to help you gain a more realistic view of what is going on. Services such as the digital mental health and wellbeing platform, Qwell, can provide detailed reporting and data on levels of engagement, presenting issues, and what's concerning your employees.

## Business and HR reporting

While it's common to track absence records and leavers, it can be especially beneficial to dig deeper and capture data that answers questions such as:

- What are the different causes for absences and leaving?
- How many mental-health absences were reported?
- What is the cost of replacing an employee?

This data can help you calculate costs and set targets for improvements. The cost of replacing an employee is normally much more than the cost of their salary and benefits. It is possible to track the level of risk of employees leaving through staff feedback surveys. It can be beneficial to measure retention levels, too. You can track measures like how long employees stay with your company and what their reasons for staying are.

When considering mental health metrics, it's not only important to track the cost of poor mental health, but also to consider the upside of good mental health. Improved performance can be tracked in terms of improved team productivity or business units; ideal measures differ depending on the industry.

## Clinical scales to track

KPIs should be based on key clinical scales for anxiety (eg GAD-7), burnout risk (eg Copenhagen Burnout Index), and risk of depression (eg WHO-5). Similarly, you can use positive measurement scales like the Flourishing Index. By using standardised clinical scales, you can maintain consistency and accurately measure your KPIs against other businesses using similar scales.

## Usage of support options

Look at analysing referrals to your EAP and Mental Health First Aiders, as well as incident reports, use of digital options, on-site counsellors, virtual support, telephone support, and in-person options. Understanding the use of your support options can help you understand their effectiveness and your company's needs.

## Presenting issues tracking

Anonymous digital mental health services such as [Kooth's CYP](#) and [Qwell](#) adult support platforms can give you detailed visibility of presenting issues amongst your workforce without identifying users. Tracking key search terms such as 'relationships', 'financial problems', and 'problems with my children' can help guide your employee engagement communications and campaigns.

## Data-led employee engagement communication campaigns

You can use the data from your insights to create employee communication campaigns that reach and capture the attention of working parents using the following steps:

1. Look for themes that will resonate with parent employees.
2. Find the most effective communication channels for reaching parent employees – consider email, intranet, notice boards, office meetings, collaboration systems, and the company’s social channels.
3. Include managers and support groups in your outreach.
4. Talk to your marketing team to see how they can help increase the awareness of the issue and the support available.
5. Check to see if usage increases after a campaign.

## Reviewing and setting improvement targets

Through your regular reporting and review process, you can track progress towards your KPIs and objectives. At the end of the period, you may have surpassed some of your targets, in which case you may look to make incremental improvements. You may have also identified new needs and wish to set new objectives for these accordingly.

## Summary

The stretched time and resources parents that working parents face puts them at higher risk of burnout, which is where company procedures, policies, and practices need to step in.

Having the right systems and procedures in place is critical to developing an appropriate support strategy that fits into the whole organisation. You need the ability to assess your workforce's needs, and the data and insights to inform your strategy, set targets, and drive communication campaigns that result in the increase of awareness and uptake of support options.

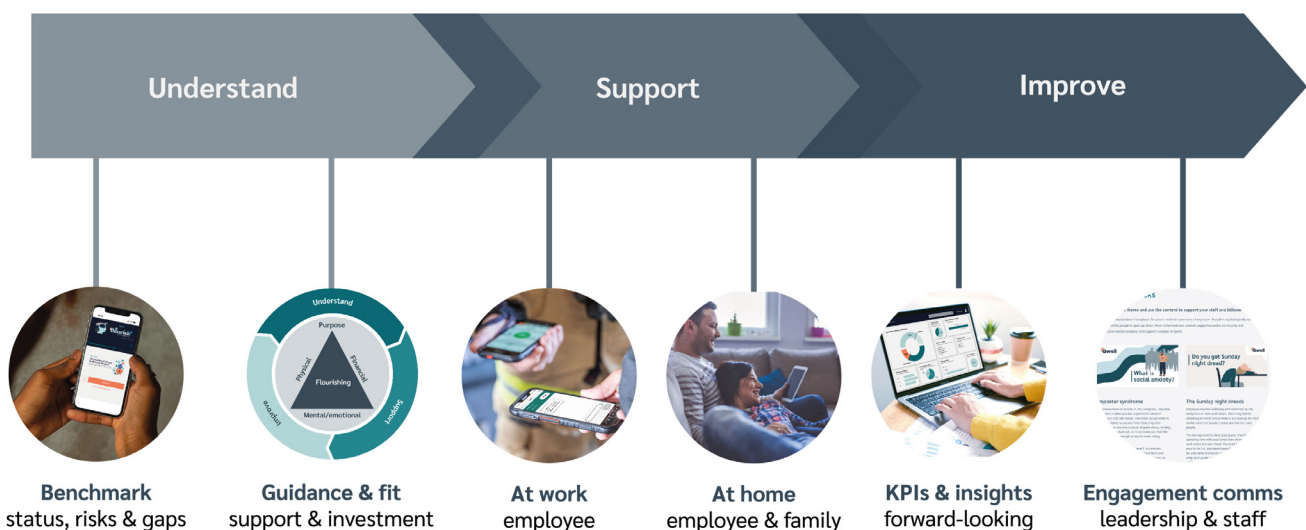
With a firm commitment from your company and the drive to improve situations for working parents, you can make positive changes in your organisation that significantly impact your workplace, the parents behind it, and the families beyond.



# About Kooth

Mentally healthy workforces work better. Kooth helps employers measurably improve the mental health of their workforces and the communities that they integrate with. Kooth’s workplace mental health specialists and nationwide community engagement teams are working together to create a healthier nation. Kooth offers a complete, BACP-accredited digital mental health platform to support employees, adults, and young people across the UK. We work with business and workplace wellbeing leaders to provide the tools, insights, and expertise you need to better understand, support, and improve the mental health of your workforce.

For more information contact: [work@kooth.com](mailto:work@kooth.com).



## Useful links and additional resources

ONS Families and the labour market, UK – Office for National Statistics [click here](#)

Kooth Flourish research findings Missing the Mark 2023 [click here](#)

Mind Workplace Wellbeing Index 2021/22 Index Insights [click here](#)

Gingerbread Single Parents in 2023 report [click here](#)

The TUC and Mother Pukka survey report – Denied and discriminated against: The reality of flexible working for working mums [click here](#)

BlckBx Having it all or doing it all? The real cost of the domestic mental load on working parents 2023 [click here](#)

BITC Prioritise People: Unlock the Value of a Thriving Workforce [click here](#)

Pinsent Mason Working Families Index 2023 Spotlight on lower-income families [click here](#)



**Better workforce mental health starts here**

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Understand. Support. Improve.