



ORGANIZATIONAL SOLUTIONS AROUND SUPPORTING CAREGIVERS DURING THE PANDEMIC

Organizations are planning how/when to reopen their offices as states are easing restrictions around the COVID-19 pandemic. As we enter the hybrid stage (i.e. the phase prior to a vaccine and complete reopening of schools), some employees will return to the office and others will continue to work remotely. This raises complications for many employees, especially caregivers, since several schools, childcare centers, and camps have remained closed. During this time, it's particularly important for leaders to demonstrate empathy and appreciation for employees, including caregivers, who have been working hard while juggling personal responsibilities. Organizations can help caregivers succeed during this time and reduce their stress in a number of ways:

1. **Survey to Understand Needs.** Survey your entire workforce to understand what worked and what didn't during the pandemic. It should include questions specific to caregiving needs: What was the biggest challenge with managing work and caregiving obligations? Did your supervisor do anything that helped manage work and caregiving obligations? What additional resources would help you manage caregiving needs in the future?
2. **Create a Reason-Neutral Process for Remote Work.** We strongly encourage organizations to allow employees to continue working remotely during this hybrid stage on a **reason-neutral basis**. This shows organizational support for employees during this time of continued uncertainty (lack of childcare/eldercare; vulnerability of elderly relatives; anxiety over getting sick; public transportation exposure, etc.). For caregivers, the ability to work remotely is crucial to maintaining work and personal obligations.
3. **Make a Wide Variety of Flexible Work Options Available.** Because every business is in a different stage with their flexible work policies, we strongly encourage organizations to make *all types of flexible work* (i.e. reduced hours/part-time; annualized hours; telecommuting; flexible start-end times; job sharing; compressed work weeks; sabbatical programs) available to all employees at this time. Talent management and D&I professionals should also meet with employees, especially caregivers, to understand their scheduling needs and coordinate individually tailored flex options. For example, employees with elderly parents may have different flex needs than employees with young children. By being truly flexible now, organizations can help reduce employee stress and unwanted attrition.
4. **Provide Training/Support to Reduce Bias.** Caregivers will likely face unconscious bias especially while continuing to work remotely during the hybrid stage. Utilize your talent management team's expertise to closely monitor work allocation and conduct check-

in meetings with caregivers to help overcome any challenges. Consider instituting measures that proactively lead to more equity between those working remotely and those working in the office. Continue to hold all meetings virtually, review employee productivity on a monthly basis, and launch a team availability tracker. Provide trainings for all employees/leaders around unconscious bias and best practices on managing/working in hybrid and remote teams. Managers should be trained to ask their team's availability before scheduling meetings and not assume that caregivers are unavailable for projects. Organizations should also create an ombudsperson where employees can raise concerns as unconscious bias will still likely take place despite measures to counteract it.

5. **Provide Resources.** Use all available resources to help caregivers and make sure to communicate their availability. Do you have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) with counseling or coaching services? Does your benefits plan include back-up childcare? Think about adding additional resources for caregivers such as stipends and coaching services to create better work-life control.
6. **Create Support Structures.** Leverage caregiver affinity groups to launch programs to support the needs of its constituents. Host a panel discussion where caregivers discuss practices that helped them succeed during the pandemic and ways they overcame challenges. Encourage mentors to discuss work-life control challenges with mentees.

The Alliance is here to provide you with expert advice about supporting caregivers when bringing your workforce back to the office. Members can access our [Business Continuity, Success \(and Sanity\) During COVID-19 Telecommuting](#) webinar recording which includes suggestions on caregiving matters. Members also have access to several Alliance resources as part of their benefits: the [Resource Library](#), [Strategy Calls](#), [Policy Reviews](#), [Advisory Hours](#) and [Signature Seminars](#). To further discuss ways to best support caregivers during this stage, contact [Manar Morales](#).