



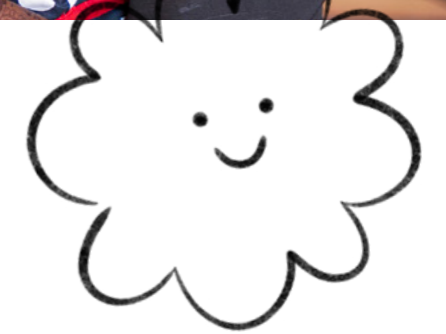
Global Coalition for
YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

unicef 
for every child



Practical Guide for Business Influence on Mental Health **01**

Care at work: Nurturing caregiver mental health in the workplace



01 Introduction

Mental health affects how we think, feel and act. It determines our ability to manage stress, relate to others and make choices that affect our health. For children and youth, a stable foundation of emotional well-being is crucial for their development, allowing them to form meaningful relationships, learn and grow. The prevalence of mental health conditions among adolescents, however, and the significant number of children living with parents who have mental health conditions or are experiencing significant stress underscore the critical link between caregiver mental health and the mental health and psychosocial well-being of children and youth.

The demanding nature of workplaces often places caregivers in a difficult position, juggling their professional responsibilities with caregiving duties. The resulting stress, fatigue and burnout can impact caregivers' ability to provide a nurturing environment for children and youth, potentially affecting their long-term emotional and physical development. Additionally, untreated mental health issues among caregivers can strain family relationships and increase the risk of adverse childhood experiences, further exacerbating mental health challenges for children and youth.

The social ecological model in figure 1 demonstrates the trickle-down effect of systems, communities and business on caregivers and their children. It highlights the significance of networks and structures surrounding a child, safeguarding their well-being and supporting their optimal development.



Global Coalition for
YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH



Authors: Global Coalition for Youth Mental Health led by UNICEF

The Global Coalition for Youth Mental health, led by UNICEF, acknowledges the gaps in evidence and our role in strategically contributing to the discourse on mental health in the workplace. While we recognize our limitations, we remain committed to collaboration with partners and advocate for further research to address this crucial subject.

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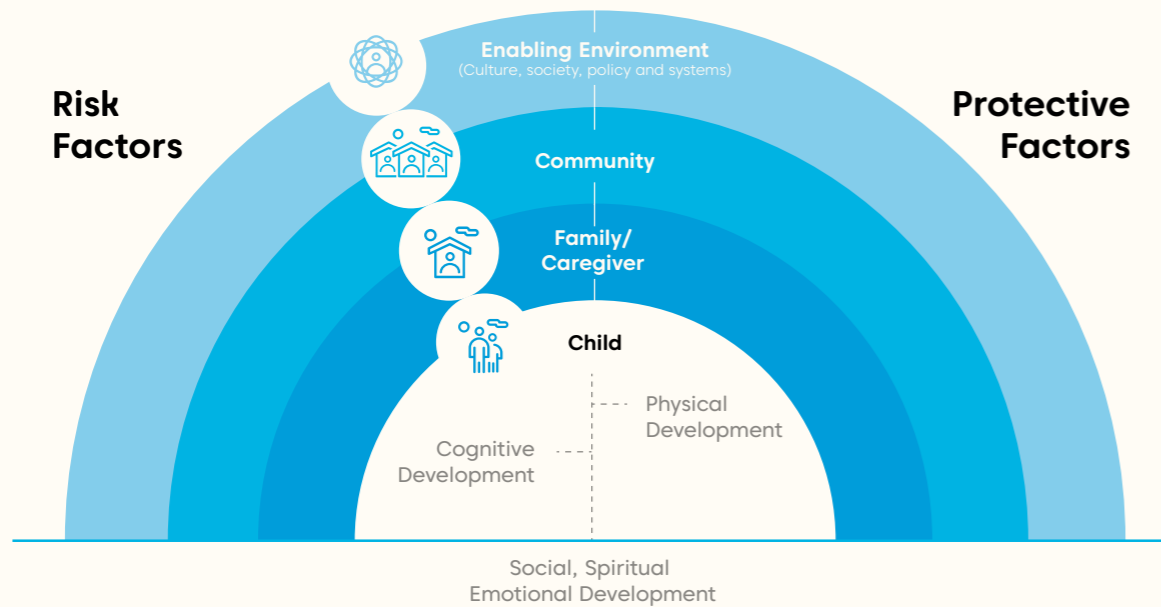


Figure 1 - The social ecological model has the child at its centre
For more information, see [UNICEF's Brief on the Social Ecological Model](#).

Businesses have a role to play in supporting systems and creating communities that promote caregiver mental health and well-being, with direct and indirect impacts on child and adolescent mental health at the centre. They also have a vital role to play in recognizing the importance of addressing caregiver mental health in implementing family-friendly policies and other good business practices that support caregivers in balancing their work and caregiving responsibilities.

They will not only alleviate the burden on caregivers, but also contribute to improved mental health outcomes. Moreover, evidence suggests that such policies enhance employee retention, productivity, and overall well-being, fostering a positive workplace culture and benefiting businesses, families, children and young people alike.

This guide is the first instalment in a series of three, **focusing on workplace practices in promoting caregiver mental health and its impact on child and youth well-being**. The second guide will explore the impact of businesses through their products and services on mental health, while the third will emphasize the influence of businesses on communities and their mental health.

This guide focuses on the role of the private sector; however, collaboration among businesses, policymakers and society is crucial. It is a shared responsibility to nurture caregiver mental health and create supportive environments for children and youth.



02 The role of businesses

Businesses have long been recognized as influential agents for societal change and responsibility, with a growing expectation to prioritize the holistic well-being of their employees. Beyond financial profit, businesses wield significant influence and resources to shape workplace cultures, and policies and practices that prioritize caregiver mental health and well-being.

In 2019, the World Health Organization estimated that globally:



15% of working-age adults were estimated to have a mental disorder.



12 billion working days were lost annually due to depression and anxiety.



US\$ 1 trillion in lost productivity due to depression and anxiety.

The young workforce, aged 18 to 25, is entering with elevated mental health concerns, which underscores the urgent need for businesses to address mental health problems among their employees.

Furthermore, individuals affected by mental health conditions often face exclusion from opportunities. A mentally healthy workplace fosters self-worth, purpose and fulfilment, as indicated by the 2023 Health, Happiness and Wellness Economy analysis.

By championing family-friendly policies and fostering inclusive work environments, businesses serve as catalysts for societal progress and equitable opportunities for all members of their staff. Investing in caregiver mental health and psychosocial well-being initiatives enhances the productivity of the workforce and contributes to long-term economic growth by promoting stability and prosperity.

Moreover, businesses play a crucial role in fostering diverse and inclusive workplaces where caregivers feel valued, respected and supported. Discriminatory, stigmatizing or exclusionary experiences can significantly affect mental health negatively. This highlights the importance of championing diversity and inclusion initiatives alongside family-friendly policies to cultivate environments where caregivers can thrive both professionally and personally.

Beyond their internal operations, businesses can serve as partners in community engagement and social impact initiatives. By extending support to caregivers through family-friendly policies, businesses can contribute to the well-being of families, neighbourhoods and society, thereby fulfilling broader social goals related to health equity, gender equality and work-life balance.



03 Family first: Policies that empower caregivers

3.1 Paid parental leave: Supporting caregivers and child development

Adequate paid parental leave is essential for caregivers to have the time and resources to bond with their newborns or newly adopted children and to meet their children's health, nutrition and developmental needs. This foundational care is critical for the cognitive, physical, social, emotional and spiritual development and the future mental health outcomes of children and adolescents throughout life.

Research consistently demonstrates the positive impact of paid parental leave on caregiver mental health and child development, particularly during the critical early stages of life. Paid parental leave reduces stress, anxiety and depression among caregivers, especially among women, as well as improves maternal physical and mental health outcomes.

Moreover, paid parental leave is pivotal in promoting child development during the critical first 1,000 days of life. Consistent and nurturing caregiving during this period is essential for healthy brain development, emotional regulation and attachment formation, laying the foundation for lifelong mental health and well-being.

Businesses have a crucial role in implementing and advocating for paid parental leave and maternity protection policies. By offering generous paid parental leave as part of their benefits package and engaging in advocacy efforts to promote family-friendly policies, businesses signal their commitment to supporting the mental health and well-being of employees and their families.



Example of what businesses are doing



Spotify

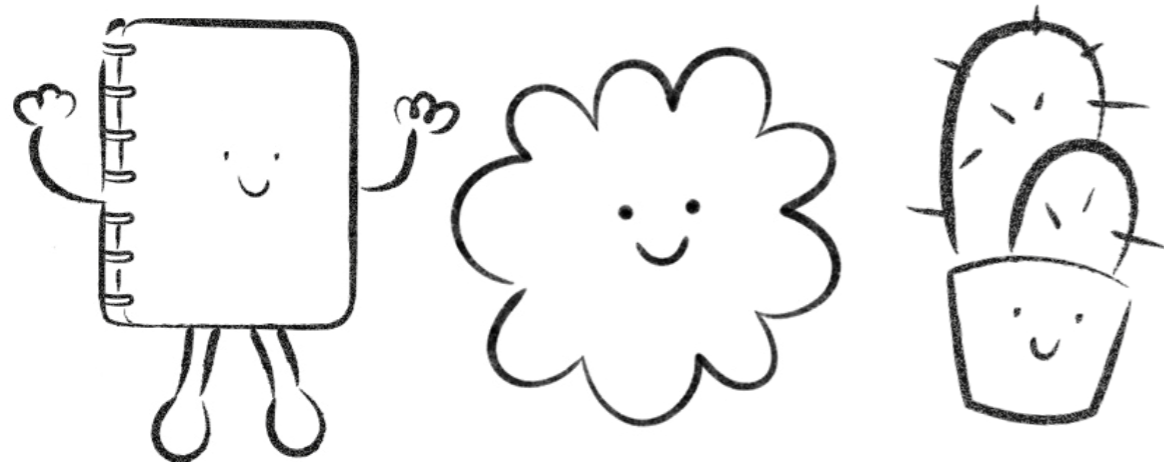
Spotify offers all permanent employees who are new parents and have completed any probation period to take up to six months (180 calendar days) of paid parental leave. Employees have the flexibility to use all of the leave at once or to break it up into a maximum of three separate intervals. The leave can be used at any time up to the child's third birthday, or up to the third anniversary of adoption.

Spotify also offers a one month 'Welcome Back!' program to help new parents adjust to coming back to work after their first period of parental leave. The Welcome Back program gives new parents the possibility to ease back into work through flexible work arrangements such as working part-time.

The parental leave policy best defines who Spotify is as a company, born out of a Swedish culture that emphasizes a healthy work-family balance, gender equality and the ability for every parent to spend quality time with the people who matter the most in their lives. The Swedish-inspired culture proves that Spotify has an environment where a rich time-off policy can be successful.

This is what makes Spotify unique and why its employees all around the world feel comfortable taking their full parental leave with the support of their peers, managers and leaders.

[Read more on the Spotify HR Blog](#)



Examples of what businesses can do

- Implement or expand paid parental leave policies to provide caregivers with adequate time off to bond with their children and adjust to their new family responsibilities.
- Ensure that parental leave policies are inclusive of all types of families, including families created through adoption or surrogacy.
- Allow new parents to gradually return to work, starting with part-time hours and increasing to full-time or offering remote work options to reduce the need for daily commuting, and provide flexibility for new parents when possible.
- Advocate for public policies that mandate paid parental leave and strengthen maternity and paternity protections at the national level, thereby promoting family-friendly workplaces and supporting the mental health and well-being of caregivers and their children.



3.2 Support for breastfeeding: Promoting caregiver mental health and infant well-being

Support for breastfeeding mothers encompasses measures that can ensure exclusive breastfeeding for six months and the option to continue breastfeeding for as long as mothers choose. Breastfeeding support initiatives can promote caregiver mental health and well-being, with far-reaching benefits for both caregivers and infants.



Research consistently demonstrates the positive impact of breastfeeding on caregiver mental health. The act of breastfeeding stimulates the release of hormones such as oxytocin, which promotes feelings of relaxation, bonding and emotional well-being. Caregivers who are supported to breastfeed often report lower levels of stress and anxiety compared to those who do not.

Moreover, breastfeeding support services, such as lactation consultation and peer support groups, help to reduce barriers to breastfeeding and enhance caregiver confidence. By providing comprehensive breastfeeding support services, businesses can contribute to the overall well-being of caregivers and infants, promoting optimal infant nutrition, low rates of childhood illnesses and chronic diseases, and improved brain development.



Businesses have a significant role to play in supporting breastfeeding caregivers by implementing breastfeeding-friendly policies and providing resources to facilitate continued breastfeeding. By creating a supportive environment for breastfeeding, businesses demonstrate their commitment to employee well-being and family-friendly practices, ultimately improving their reputation and fostering a positive workplace culture.

Examples of what businesses can do

- Recognize the importance of breastfeeding support as a key component of family-friendly practices and take proactive steps to create environments where caregivers feel empowered to provide optimal nutrition and care for their infants while maintaining their own mental health and well-being.
- Provide lactation consultation services, peer support groups and workplace accommodations for nursing mothers, such as designated lactation rooms and flexible break times for breastfeeding.
- Offer breastfeeding education materials and resources to empower breastfeeding caregivers and facilitate their continued breastfeeding after returning to work.

3.3 Affordable, accessible and quality early education and childcare: Promoting caregiver and child mental health

Affordable, accessible and quality early education and childcare services are crucial components of a supportive workplace environment that promotes caregiver and child mental health and well-being. Ensuring universal access to quality, affordable early education and childcare from the end of parental leave to children's entry into grade 1 is essential for every child's right to education, learning and development.



Research indicates that affordable, accessible and quality childcare has a positive impact on caregiver mental health. Caregivers who have access to reliable childcare services report lower levels of stress, anxiety and work-family conflict compared to those who struggle to secure childcare arrangements. Reliable early education and childcare enable caregivers to balance their work and family responsibilities, reducing the risks of being overwhelmed and of burnout.

Moreover, affordable, accessible and quality childcare support systems contribute to positive outcomes for children, promoting their cognitive, social and emotional development. Trusted relationships with early education professionals can strengthen children's early development and mental health throughout life, laying the foundation for their future success.



By advocating and investing in childcare support systems, **businesses demonstrate their commitment** to employee well-being, family-friendly practices and community development. These efforts not only benefit caregivers and children, but also contribute to a more supportive and inclusive workplace culture.

Examples of what businesses can do

- Offer childcare benefits or subsidies to employees, such as on-site childcare facilities, childcare assistance programmes or flexible work arrangements that accommodate caregivers' childcare needs.
- Offer backup childcare support when childcare providers call in sick.
- Collaborate with policymakers, community organizations and childcare providers to advocate for public investments in childcare infrastructure, subsidies for low-income families and professional development opportunities for childcare providers.

3.4 Child benefits: Empowering caregivers and supporting child well-being

Child benefits, which are regular cash transfers provided to identified caregivers of children in a defined jurisdiction, support caregiver well-being and promote child development. These benefits should be part of a broader system of social protection for young children, including access to quality social services. While businesses are not typically the providers of these cash transfers, they can advocate and support the implementation of such benefits through various means.



Research shows that child benefits contribute to broad social and economic development by facilitating access to education and labour markets. Financial assistance from child benefits enables families to invest in their children's education, breaking the cycle of poverty and providing opportunities for upward mobility. Moreover, child benefits empower caregivers, particularly women, to participate in the labour force, contributing to economic growth and stability.

By alleviating financial strain, child benefits enable caregivers to focus on providing a nurturing and supportive environment for their children, leading to improved family dynamics and well-being. Furthermore, research suggests that babies and young children of parents not receiving benefits or on low incomes are more likely to suffer from mental health problems later in life.



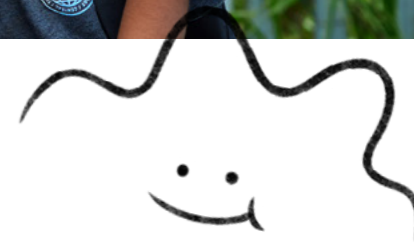
In conclusion, **businesses have a role to play in supporting child benefits and collaborating with governments to ensure equitable access for all children**, especially the most vulnerable. By advocating policies that expand access to child benefits and remove barriers to participation, businesses can contribute to the well-being of their employees and their families, as well as promote child development and mental health.

Examples of what businesses can do

- Collaborate with governments to ensure equitable access to child benefits for all children, especially the most vulnerable, by advocating for policies that expand eligibility criteria and increase benefit amounts.
- Partner with government agencies and community organizations to raise awareness about child benefit programmes and ensure that caregivers have access to information and support services, thereby creating a supportive environment where all children can thrive and reach their potential.



04 Leading with care: Good business practices for supporting caregivers mental health



In addition to formal family-friendly policies, businesses can implement practices and initiatives that contribute to mental health in their organizations. These practices, rooted in empathy, flexibility and support, foster a positive work environment conducive to balancing caregiving responsibilities with professional obligations. By prioritizing caregiver mental health, businesses enhance employee morale and retention while promoting a culture of compassion and inclusivity. The most common ones are shared below. Many other initiatives also support employee and caregiver mental health, and by extension has an impact on children and youth's mental health.

4.1

Flexible work arrangements and remote working options: Empowering caregivers

Promoting inclusive, flexible work arrangements is essential for supporting the mental health and well-being of caregivers in the workplace. These arrangements allow employees to adjust their work schedules or locations to accommodate their caregiving responsibilities, reducing stress and promoting work-life balance. By offering flexible work options, **businesses can empower caregivers to balance their personal and professional commitments effectively**, leading to improved mental health outcomes.



Example of what businesses are doing



Zurich Insurance Company Ltd

The Austrian entity of the Zurich Insurance Company Ltd has been supporting its employees for years with a series of measures to reconcile work and family life. These include, for example, modern framework conditions in the workplace that are women- and family-friendly and are shaped by the employees themselves. Flexible working time models, uncomplicated home office options and childcare during the holidays relieve the burden on employees and contribute to greater satisfaction and motivation. In an internal parent buddy program, expectant parents can exchange ideas with mothers and fathers in a trusting manner and talk about everyday challenges on a personal level.

Examples of what businesses can do

- Establish clear policies and procedures for flexible hours or remote working arrangements, ensuring consistency and fairness for all employees.
- Advertise the success of flexible work arrangements to normalize atypical working patterns and reduce stigma associated with caregiving responsibilities.
- Provide training for managers on how to effectively support caregivers in their teams, including offering resources for managing workloads effectively and planning professional development opportunities.

4.2

Employee assistance programmes and mental health resources: Providing supportive services

Providing employees who are caregivers access to mental health resources and psychosocial support can be helpful in strengthening caregivers' mental health. For instance, businesses can establish employee assistance programmes or enable access to additional resources for caregivers facing mental health or psychosocial problems. These programmes typically offer counselling services, mental health assessments and referrals to external support networks. By normalizing discussions on mental health and destigmatizing seeking help, businesses create a supportive environment where caregivers feel valued and backed in improving their well-being.

Establishing employee assistance programmes and providing access to mental health resources are essential steps in supporting caregivers' mental health and well-being in the workplace. By normalizing discussions on mental health and providing access to support services, **businesses create a culture of care and compassion** in which caregivers feel valued and supported.

Example of what businesses are doing



Z Zurich Foundation

As part of the Z Zurich Foundation's partnership with UNICEF, a comprehensive caregivers' package for adults to be agents of change for youth's mental well-being was developed. This package was adapted to be transformed into a tool that can be rolled out in the workplace. The '[Connecting Generations](#)' tool focuses on developing three sets of skills through a series of workshops, sessions and activities:

Navigating caregiving in the adolescent years

- Managing stress and how it affects the caregiver-adolescent relationship
- Supporting social and emotional change
- Setting limits and building autonomy

Nurturing the connection with the adolescent in your life

- Managing your emotions and how they impact the relationship
- Developing communication strategies and managing conflict in adolescence
- Ensuring affection, encouragement and quality time

Supporting the adolescent's mental health

- Enabling self-care, a supportive network, a safe home environment and seeking help
- Supporting adolescents in managing difficult emotions and coping with stress
- Helping adolescents build self-esteem

The workplace is the entry point of this initiative. It is where employees who are caregivers can be trained to engage and support adolescents to speak up about mental well-being. Workplaces can range from private sector organizations to non-governmental organizations and government offices and can contribute to system change on how mental well-being is being addressed at work and with youth.

Each workplace – through their employees – can be part of a global movement to promote youth mental well-being, reduce stigma and support adolescents to live a full, productive and healthy life.



Examples of what businesses can do

- Promote awareness of employee assistance programmes and mental health resources through regular communication channels, ensuring that caregivers know how to access support when needed.
- Provide training for managers on how to recognize signs of distress and refer employees to appropriate resources for support.
- Offer confidential counselling services through employee assistance programmes, providing caregivers with a safe space to address their mental health concerns. Mindfulness programmes can support caregivers in managing stress and improving their mental well-being.

4.3

Mentoring and peer support networks: Building community and resilience

Establishing mentoring programmes and peer support networks for caregivers creates avenues for professional development, mentorship and mutual support. Pairing caregivers with mentors who have navigated similar challenges or with other caregivers can provide valuable guidance, resources and encouragement. Peer support networks offer caregivers a sense of community, camaraderie and solidarity, fostering connections that alleviate feelings of isolation and promote resilience.

Workplaces play a crucial role in supporting caregivers with mental health conditions. It may be that caregivers with mental health conditions do not want to disclose their condition to their colleagues, but creating caregiver support groups could help individuals to provide support to others in similar circumstances within a confidential space. They can support them by addressing the stigma associated with mental health, fostering an inclusive environment and involving caregivers in designing responses, thereby reducing isolation and promoting well-being.

Establishing mentoring and peer support networks is essential for building community and resilience among caregivers in the workplace. By providing opportunities for caregivers to connect, share experiences and support one another, **businesses foster a culture of collaboration and mutual support** that contributes to the well-being of all employees.

Example of what businesses are doing

JO MALONE
LONDON

Jo Malone London

Jo Malone London colleagues based in the United Kingdom can join the 'Families at Work' employee resource group. The aim of the resource group is to create an inclusive, diverse and supportive community of colleagues in Estée Lauder Companies, welcoming all types of families and caregivers and being an embodiment of the Estée Lauder family philosophy.

THE MAIN PILLARS ARE:

1 Professional development

Professional development empowers employees by providing resources and opportunities for growth in both personal and professional capacities. This pillar aims to enhance skills, knowledge and overall well-being through thought-provoking events, discussions and networking opportunities.

2 Community

Community is about building relationships across brands and locations through events and internal communication platforms to “find your people”.

Additionally, the **Women’s Leadership Network** is a community of employees focused on providing women in the Estée Lauder Companies the tools, resources and network they need to succeed. The network’s mission is to support, encourage and engage all women across the company to reach their potential and emerge as leaders, both personally and professionally.

Examples of what businesses can do

- Facilitate mentorship programmes where experienced caregivers mentor those who are new to balancing work and caregiving responsibilities.
- Suggest reverse-mentoring and peer support programmes by promoting awareness of their benefits and providing opportunities for caregivers to get involved.
- Facilitate networking events and workshops to help caregivers build connections and develop their support networks.
- Establish peer support groups where caregivers can connect with others facing similar challenges, share experiences and offer support.

4.4

Managerial support and empowerment: Fostering a supportive work environment

One of the most effective practices for supporting caregiver mental health is providing managerial support and empowerment within the workforce. Managers play an important role in shaping the work experience of their team members and can significantly affect caregiver mental health through the language they use, decisions they make and encouragement they provide. By training managers on mental health awareness and caregiver support, businesses equip them with the tools to effectively address the needs of their teams.

Providing managerial support and empowerment is essential for fostering a supportive work environment where caregivers feel valued, supported and able to thrive, both personally and professionally.

Example of what businesses are doing



Spotify

Data suggests that for almost 70 per cent of people, their manager has more impact on their mental health than their therapist or their doctor – and it is equal to the impact of their partner.¹

Collective care is viewing well-being as a shared responsibility. Creating healthy and thriving workplaces starts with leadership. When leaders prioritize employee well-being and lead with compassion, the well-being of the whole staff is elevated.

To acknowledge World Mental Health Day 2023, Spotify asked all managers to host a mental-health-centred workshop with their team sometime before the end of the year, to help teammates come together to help one another. The workshops were designed to support and develop emotionally aware teams. They covered topics such as vulnerability, respect of boundaries, empathetic leadership, inclusive mindset, collective resilience and collective joy.

In collaboration with managers, Spotify wanted to bring teams together in new ways with the goal of reducing stigma and opening conversations about mental health.

¹ - Forbes, 'Managers Have Major Impact On Mental Health: How To Lead For Wellbeing', accessed 21 June 2024

Examples of what businesses can do

- Provide ongoing training and development opportunities for managers to enhance their skills in supporting caregiver well-being and creating a supportive work environment.
- Provide training for managers on how to recognize signs of caregiver stress and offer resources for managing workloads effectively.
- Encourage open communication between managers and caregivers, fostering a supportive work environment where employees feel valued and supported.

4.5 Additional business practices that support caregivers' mental health

These additional practices, along with the ones outlined above, can contribute to creating a workplace culture that prioritizes and supports caregivers' mental health and well-being.

Example of what businesses are doing

JO MALONE
LONDON

Jo Malone London

One in six people experiences mental health problems in the workplace, and in the United Kingdom, evidence suggests that 12.7 per cent of all sickness absence days can be attributed to mental health conditions.² The Mental Health and Well-being Employee Resource Group is a safe, open and inclusive community aimed at raising awareness and reducing stigma around mental health through listening, learning and sharing. Colleagues support each other in attaining positive mental health and well-being in the workplace and beyond.

2 - Mental Health Foundation, 'Mental Health at Work', [mentalhealth.org.uk](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk), accessed 21 June 24

As part of this resource group, Jo Malone London has a team of **Mental Health First Aiders** who have undertaken training with St. John's Ambulance Service to recognize signs of distress among colleagues and provide them with the tools to start supportive conversations.

The company believes that encouraging conversations on mental health is central to fostering a kind and accepting environment. Every employee is encouraged to **"lead with kindness, embrace diversity of thought and have courageous conversations to enable a positive and collaborative working environment"**. The Estée Lauder Companies employee assistance programme is available to employees based in the United Kingdom and Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

The EAP provider is independent and provides support and care for any problems or issues that may affect employees' health or well-being. The services offer employees and their families support, in many languages, with any work or personal issue. They include short-term professional counselling and connecting employees to local resources to help them manage emotional, practical or physical needs.

Examples of what businesses can do ³

- Adopt outcome-based working.
- Work with employees to find creative solutions.
- Clearly categorize communication, such as urgent, and share clear deadlines.
- Emphasize quality of work over quantity of hours.
- Ask parents about their top challenges to find solutions on insights.
- Offer training sessions or workshops on topics such as stress management, time management and effective communication to equip caregivers with valuable skills to navigate their dual roles effectively.

3 - If circumstances allow and when not hours-based

Some family-friendly benefits that companies are adding to their compensation packages

- **Fertility benefits:** Offering comprehensive fertility benefits, such as IVF treatment, fertility preservation coverage and diagnostic testing, is critical for organizations striving to be inclusive, as both men and women can struggle with fertility issues.
- **Adoption assistance:** A benefits package should include all types of parents, including LGBTQ+ individuals, single parents and infertile employees. Offering benefits, such as a health reimbursement arrangements, to pay for adoption medical expenses and related fees is a great way to be inclusive.



05 Conclusion

This guide underscores the importance of supporting caregivers in the workplace and beyond. **Caregivers require time, resources and services to thrive, and businesses can facilitate this support.** Extensive research consistently emphasizes the profound impact of family-friendly policies and supportive workplace practices on caregiver mental health, which directly influences the mental health and well-being of children and young people. UNICEF strongly urges businesses to prioritize the implementation of family-friendly policies and other beneficial practices.

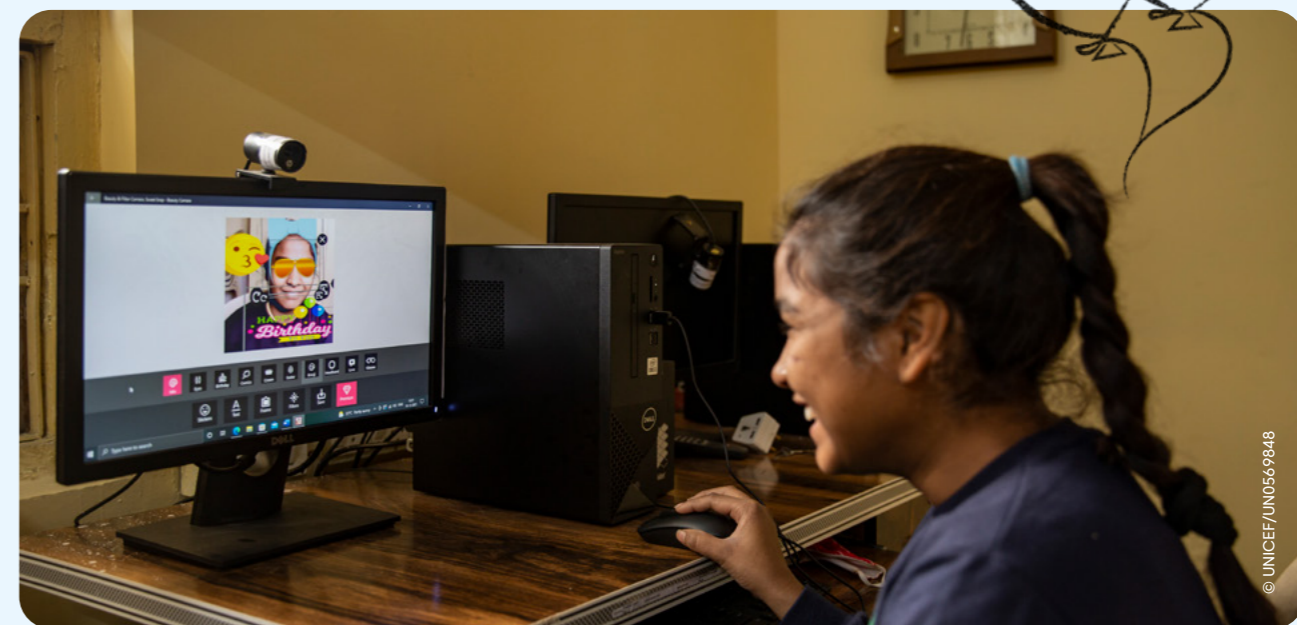
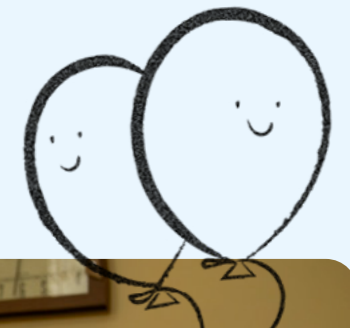
By embracing family-friendly policies and fostering a supportive work environment through other good business practices, businesses not only demonstrate their commitment to employee well-being and mental health, but also contribute to positive outcomes for families. These initiatives improve the lives of caregivers and create a ripple effect, positively affecting the mental health and resilience of future generations.

Furthermore, businesses must extend their efforts beyond internal initiatives and engage in advocacy for supportive policies at the governmental level. Collaborating with policymakers and other stakeholders is crucial to ensure equitable access to family-friendly benefits for all caregivers. This collaborative approach, involving businesses, policymakers and society, is essential in fostering a supportive and inclusive environment that promotes the mental health and resilience of caregivers and future generations. Together, they can create a workplace and a society where caregivers feel valued, supported and empowered to thrive, which, in turn, will have a considerable impact on child and adolescent mental health.



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United Nations Children's Fund
Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division
Route des Morillons 4, 1211 Genève, Switzerland

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