

# How to be a Family Friendly Workplace

## **Policies and Practices that Help Families:**

- Before Pregnancy
- During Pregnancy
- In the Transition to Parenting
- During Breastfeeding



**best start**  
**meilleur départ**

# Work-Family Connection



Today's market is highly competitive.

To compete, workplaces need committed, healthy employees.

In most households, both parents work. Many workers

care for their parents, in addition to their children. Employees, especially if they are new parents, may have difficulty balancing family and work commitments. To stay competitive, workplaces need to recognize and respond to the connection between work and family. In addition there are special workplace considerations around pregnancy and breastfeeding.

There are many ways that non-work obligations can affect the bottom line. Simple changes in the work environment can provide solutions. Some changes that can affect employee health and the work-life balance include flextime, job sharing, working from home and an understanding supervisor. This booklet provides more information about the education, practices and policies that can make a difference.

## The Boss:

Health initiatives send a message to employees that their health is important. They indicate a company commitment to the well being of employees. Each step towards a family friendly workplace says that your company cares about parents and children.

You play a major role in employee health. This is particularly true with pregnant workers and new parents. As a caring employer or supervisor you can:

- ❖ *Look into possible health risks for pregnant workers*
- ❖ *Ensure that changes are made so that pregnant women can work safely*
- ❖ *Be understanding of the challenges in returning to work after a maternity/parental leave*
- ❖ *Provide important health information to staff*
- ❖ *Ensure that managers put policies into practice*

# Before Pregnancy

Don't wait until you have a pregnant worker to put in place healthy policies or practices. Information and a healthy work environment will help all workers, particularly men and women planning a family. Even before a woman conceives, as well as in the early weeks of pregnancy before a woman knows she is pregnant, there are risks at work that could affect the health of her future children. For example, a woman's fertility can be reduced by exposure to certain chemicals or to ionizing radiation.



## Men Too

It takes three months for each sperm to develop. During this time workplace hazards such as radiation, smoke, heat or chemicals can cause low sperm counts, damaged sperm or infertility. If a damaged sperm does fertilize an egg, it can result in a miscarriage or possible health problems in the baby.



**A healthy workplace can help men and women have the healthiest families possible – even before conception.**

# Healthy Pregnancies at Work



## Why be Pregnancy Friendly?

A healthy workplace makes good business sense.

Research has shown that performance ratings

improve during pregnancy, and most workers return to work after their maternity/parental leave. Promoting health can be simple and inexpensive. Perhaps you already have some pregnancy friendly policies or practices. Information and a supportive environment can help a pregnant woman have a healthy pregnancy and healthy baby, while continuing to be a productive worker.

## You May Have a Pregnant Worker Now...

Do you have prospective parents at your workplace? Women in their reproductive years make up almost half of all workers. Eight out of ten will become pregnant during their working life.

## What Are the Benefits?

Employees may:

- ❖ *Be more likely to stay with the company*
- ❖ *Care more about work*
- ❖ *Do a better job*
- ❖ *Work harder*
- ❖ *Be healthier*
- ❖ *Be absent and late less often*
- ❖ *Have healthier pregnancies, babies and families*



# Rights of Pregnant Workers

The Ontario Human Rights Commission clearly identifies the rights of pregnant women. It is illegal to discriminate against workers because of pregnancy. The employer is required to accommodate the special needs of pregnant workers. For more information go to [www.ohrc.on.ca](http://www.ohrc.on.ca)

## Examples of Discrimination Against a Pregnant Woman:

- ❖ *Asking a potential employee if they are pregnant*
- ❖ *Limiting or withholding opportunities or training*
- ❖ *Not assigning her to a major project or team*
- ❖ *Being overly critical of her work*
- ❖ *Docking time for using the washroom more often*
- ❖ *Making inappropriate remarks or jokes related to her pregnancy*
- ❖ *Termination because of pregnancy*
- ❖ *Subjecting her to unwanted transfers*
- ❖ *Denying sick leave benefits*

## Special Requirements During Pregnancy May Include:

- ❖ *Temporary relocation to another workstation*
- ❖ *Temporary alternative duties*
- ❖ *Flexible schedule to accommodate for medical appointments*
- ❖ *More frequent breaks*





# Preventing Problems During Pregnancy



In general, it is safe for most pregnant women to continue to work during pregnancy. Work itself does not increase the risk of having an unhealthy baby. However, there are some specific risks that can be reduced by planning ahead.

Modified duties, flexible hours and information about possible risks in the workplace are important ways for you to support pregnant employees.

## Reproductive Health Risks in the Workplace

Examples include:

- ❖ *Heavy lifting and heavy work*
- ❖ *Standing for long periods of time*
- ❖ *Working more than 40 hours a week*
- ❖ *Heavy metals and some chemicals*
- ❖ *Oil based paints*
- ❖ *Radiation and anesthetic gas*
- ❖ *Some infectious diseases*
- ❖ *Excessive heat and noise*
- ❖ *Stress and fatigue*

# Medical Help During Pregnancy

In most cases pregnant women can continue to work with few accommodations. Occasionally a pregnant worker will need urgent medical care. Be prepared.

Help pregnant women get to the hospital right away if they have any of the following symptoms or if they say something does not feel right:

- ❖ Lower back pain or pressure, or a change in lower backache

- ❖ A feeling the baby is pushing down
- ❖ Fever, chills, dizziness, vomiting or a bad headache
- ❖ Blurry vision or spots before the eyes
- ❖ Sudden or severe swelling of the feet, hands or face
- ❖ Contractions, or change in the strength/number of contractions
- ❖ A significant change in the baby's movements
- ❖ Bad cramps or stomach pains that don't go away
- ❖ Bleeding, trickle or gush of fluid from the vagina
- ❖ Increase in the amount of vaginal discharge

It is important for pregnant women with any of these symptoms to get to the hospital or see a doctor. Do not delay.



# Transition Back to Work

Some women are eager to get back to work after their maternity/parental leave. Others may find it difficult to leave their new baby and the routines they established during their maternity/parental leave. In either case, the transition back to work presents new challenges. Parents need to put in place childcare plans, and decide what they will do if the baby is sick. They need to come up with a new daily routine and decide how they will cope with necessary tasks such as packing the supplies the baby will need at childcare, delivering the baby to childcare, picking the baby up from childcare, getting groceries, making meals and spending quality time with their baby, in addition to being productive at work.

Returning to work after a maternity/parental leave is stressful for most parents. Workplaces can help by understanding that this is a difficult period, by listening, and providing options such as flex time or part time work during the transition.

## Transition to Parenting:

New parents may eagerly anticipate their new role as a father or mother of a new baby. But nothing – not advice from grandparents and friends – not information in books or magazines – can fully prepare new parents for the reality of caring for an infant. New parents must access services and resources they have never needed before.

Some workplaces provide new parents with information about parenting, and about community services. This shows that the workplace cares about families.





# Breastfeeding

## What are the Benefits of being a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace?

When a workplace is supportive:

- ❖ *Mothers will be less likely to be absent from work to tend to a sick baby as breastfeeding strengthens the baby's immune system*
- ❖ *Mothers are more likely to stay with the company causing less staff turn-over and costs associated with orientation and training of new employees*
- ❖ *Mothers are more likely to have improved job satisfaction and therefore improved productivity and morale*
- ❖ *The company improves its corporate image and is viewed as a progressive employer*



There are many benefits to breastfeeding – for the baby, the mother, the organization and the community and many of them increase with longer breastfeeding. The World Health Organization and the Canadian Paediatric Society recommend that babies should be breastfed exclusively for the first 6 months and with increasing complementary foods until age 2 or beyond. Returning to a supportive workplace can make a difference to new mothers.

## What are a Breastfeeding Woman's Rights?

The Ontario Human Rights Code indicates that an employer must take steps to meet the needs of breastfeeding mothers unless they are extremely costly or present a danger to the health and safety of employees and employers. Women are legally protected from discrimination and harassment because of their gender, and this includes breastfeeding. For more information go to [www.ohrc.on.ca](http://www.ohrc.on.ca)

# How Can You Create a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace?

It is important to offer breastfeeding employees:

- ❖ Flexible schedules to accommodate their feeding or pumping needs. Some women may express their breastmilk, some may have the baby brought in for feeds during their breaks.
- ❖ An area that is clean and comfortable with hand washing facilities nearby. Some women may choose a private area to express breastmilk, others may do so at their office or in a common space.
- ❖ Access to an electrical outlet for mothers who use an electric breastpump
- ❖ Access to a refrigerator or a space where mothers can keep a cooler bag to store breastmilk
- ❖ Education on breastfeeding and work to all employees to increase support and understanding
- ❖ A policy that demonstrates that breastfeeding is valued and breastfeeding mothers are supported

## Some employers have also been able to provide:

- ❖ *Extended maternity/parental leave*
- ❖ *Part-time or job-sharing*
- ❖ *Work from home*
- ❖ *Onsite or nearby child care*
- ❖ *Support and education from resource personnel*



# What Would Help Most?



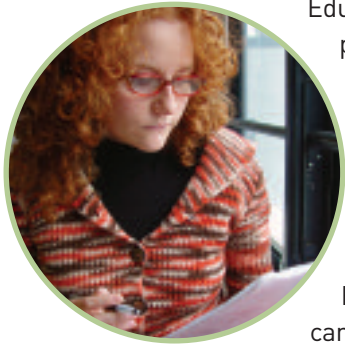
Determining employee needs is very important. This can be done in a variety of ways including surveys, individual interviews, suggestion boxes or focus groups. Whatever the method used, employees will get the feeling that the company cares about them. Once you have identified employee needs, you can develop a plan or program that is affordable, workable and meets the needs of workers.

## Baby Steps to a Family Friendly Workplace:

1. Involve workers in planning for a healthier workplace
2. Find out about needs and concerns of employees
3. Determine potential risks in the workplace
4. Find out what other companies do
5. Establish priorities
6. Develop a plan
7. Consider how to phase in changes
8. Decide who will be responsible
9. Raise awareness about the new policy or program
10. Implement the changes
11. Follow-up to make sure initiatives meet needs
12. Decide on further actions



# Education that Makes a Difference



Education programs are often the easiest change that a workplace can make. Education can take many

forms including posters, brochures, lunch and learns, displays, information packages, newsletters or workshops. Combinations of these approaches will have a stronger impact than a single approach.

During pregnancy, and as new parents, workers are highly motivated to improve their health. Timely information may be enough for women and their partners to make significant health changes. Proactive workplaces have packages of information ready for pregnant workers and new parents. Encourage women to check Material Safety Data Sheets and to call Motherisk (see page 15) about specific concerns. Due to literacy and language barriers, you may need to help some workers to understand the information in written materials.

## Examples of Family Friendly Education:

- ❖ *Talk to pregnant workers about ways to reduce risks*
- ❖ *Have quit smoking resources on hand*
- ❖ *Put up displays and posters about healthy choices*
- ❖ *Give information about healthy pregnancies to pregnant workers*
- ❖ *Bring in community agencies for presentations*
- ❖ *Put together a binder of community services*
- ❖ *Provide peer support training for co-workers*
- ❖ *Train supervisors to be supportive and sensitive to needs*
- ❖ *Talk to pregnant workers about options for maternity/parental leave*
- ❖ *Provide information about parenting, breastfeeding and child care services*

# Practices that Make a Difference

Policies and education are not enough on their own. Good policies need to come into practice to be helpful to workers. A supportive workplace environment has a great impact on producing lasting changes in employee health.

## Supportive workplaces:

- ❖ Provide positive feedback and encouragement
- ❖ Engage in two way communication
- ❖ Show respect, mentor and empower employees
- ❖ Recognize that employees have a life outside of work
- ❖ Offer support and flexibility to balance conflicting demands

## Employees in supportive workplaces are:

- ❖ Less likely to be stressed
- ❖ More satisfied and committed to their jobs
- ❖ More likely to agree with company policies
- ❖ More likely to trust management
- ❖ Absent fewer days and work more hours in a week

## Examples of Family Friendly Practices:

- ❖ *Protect your workers from reproductive hazards*
- ❖ *Encourage pregnant women to check Material Safety Data Sheets*
- ❖ *Provide appropriate protective equipment*
- ❖ *Ensure good ventilation, safe temperatures and noise levels*
- ❖ *Be flexible to accommodate medical appointments*
- ❖ *Schedule breaks as required*
- ❖ *Provide a place where pregnant women can rest on their breaks*
- ❖ *Have a positive attitude towards pregnant and parenting employees*
- ❖ *Discuss options for transitioning back to work after maternity/parental leave*
- ❖ *Provide time for breastfeeding or expressing breastmilk*
- ❖ *Provide access to a refrigerator to store breastmilk*



# Policies that Make a Difference



Policies set the tone of the workplace. They are a means of keeping in place important programs that reflect workplace values. Many general policies impact on the health of pregnant women and new parents. Perhaps you already have some in place. Every additional change you make has the potential to help pregnant women and new parents.

Involve workers in policy development whenever possible. Those most directly affected by the policy must buy into it for it to be effective.

## Examples of Family Friendly Policies:

- ❖ *Transportation Plan for emergency medical care*
- ❖ *Emergency First Aid Plan*
- ❖ *Light Duty Policy*
- ❖ *Flex-time and Part-time Options*
- ❖ *Job Sharing Options*
- ❖ *Policies that reflect the rights of pregnant and breastfeeding women*
- ❖ *Employee and Family Assistance Program*



# Resources and Services

## Additional Information:

- ❖ Ontario Human Rights Commission, [www.ohrc.on.ca](http://www.ohrc.on.ca)
- ❖ Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, [www.ccohs.ca](http://www.ccohs.ca)
- ❖ The Workers Health and Safety Centre, [www.whsc.on.ca](http://www.whsc.on.ca)
- ❖ Health Canada, [www.healthcanada.gc.ca](http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca)
- ❖ Maternity and Parental Leave Benefits, [www.labour.gov.on.ca](http://www.labour.gov.on.ca)
- ❖ Ontario Public Health Association, [www.opha.on.ca/our\\_voice/workgroups/breastfeeding.shtml](http://www.opha.on.ca/our_voice/workgroups/breastfeeding.shtml)
- ❖ Key Studies on Work-Life Balance, [www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/lp/spila/wlb/15key\\_studies.shtml](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/lp/spila/wlb/15key_studies.shtml)

## Print Resources:

Best Start Resource Centre has produced several resources about work and pregnancy, parenting and about breastfeeding. Many are available in both French and English. To view or order these resources, visit [www.beststart.org](http://www.beststart.org). Resources include posters, displays, brochures, manuals, magnets and desk references.

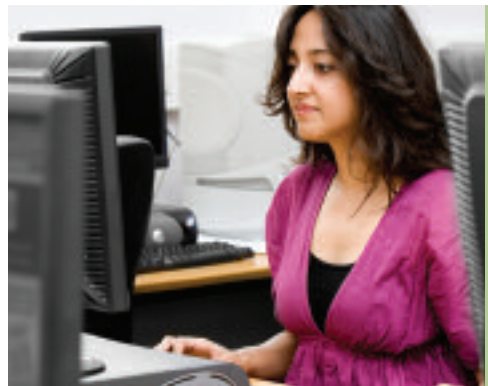
## Specific Concerns:

- ❖ Motherisk 1-416-813-6780 or [www.motherisk.org](http://www.motherisk.org)
- ❖ Material Safety Data Sheets, [www.msdsonline.com](http://www.msdsonline.com)

## Reference Manual:

Workplace Reproductive Health: Research and Strategies

Best Start Resource Centre, [www.beststart.org](http://www.beststart.org)



**Best Start: Ontario's Maternal, Newborn  
and Early Child Development Resource Centre**

Tel: 1-800-397-9567 or 416-408-2249

Fax: 416-408-2122

beststart@healthnexus.ca • [www.beststart.org](http://www.beststart.org)

**best start**  
**meilleur départ** 

by/par health **nexus** santé

*The Best Start Resource Centre supports service providers across Ontario through consultation, training and resources, in the area of preconception, prenatal and child health. The Best Start Resource Centre is a key program of Health Nexus.*

*This document has been prepared with funds provided by the Government of Ontario.*