

# 7 STEPS FOR EMPLOYERS TO SUPPORT WORKING PARENTS AND FAMILIES IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

The outbreak of Coronavirus is having, and will continue to have, a profound impact on everyone in the UK. For children, particularly those already living in difficult circumstances the effect of measures taken to protect health will have profound and long-term impacts on their lives.

Emergency legislation required the closure of many non-essential businesses and set a number of restrictions on public movement in order to prevent the spread of Coronavirus. As a result of this, working parents are facing enormous challenges, whether finding themselves unable to work or having lost their jobs, working from home and balancing childcare responsibilities alongside their job; or as key workers who must still leave the house, trying to manage out of hours childcare arrangements and manage increased risks of contracting and passing on the virus.

## THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS ON WORKING FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

The anxiety, stress and uncertainty that Coronavirus brings is shared by children of all ages. Children in UK are finding it difficult to access child-friendly information they understand about Coronavirus. Children need their parents and caregivers' support more than ever to help them understand and cope. With school closures, children are now learning at home and many parents and caregivers find themselves needing to support their children's education. Should household income be reduced, children's access to adequate housing and to nutritious food may be impacted. Parents juggling work commitments may feel compelled to leave younger children with limited supervision or to use unregulated childcare, exposing children to health and safety risks, as well as reducing the effectiveness of physical distancing measures. Stress resulting from economic uncertainty and health concerns can impact upon parenting practices and parent-child relationships. Furthermore, children and families of key workers risk being exposed to Coronavirus if workers are not adequately protected in the workplace.

Businesses are a critical part of the response to the Coronavirus crisis. The steps they take to protect employees' health and the support they give to parents looking after children are vital to helping the Government [measures](#) succeed and will contribute to the rebuilding of a sustainable UK business sector and the wider community once the crisis is over. UNICEF, ILO and UN Women have produced interim [recommendations](#) for employers to help protect workers and families, and to mitigate against some of the negative consequences of the Coronavirus outbreak.

Employers should implement these recommendations and engage with workers to ensure their actions and Government's measures benefit workers and their families and ease the burden on children during these challenging times.

Below is a summary of the key recommendations tailored for employers in UK. As guidance on the Coronavirus is updated regularly, it is advised to regularly check the UK Government guidance [webpage](#) and UNICEF's [webpage](#) for further recommendations.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Grant flexible working arrangements:** wherever possible, allow parents to arrange their work around their parenting responsibilities and their needs. Inform workers of their rights and entitlements and encourage them to exercise them without discrimination of any sort. The closure of schools, childcare and educational settings in the UK means that flexible arrangements are critical to parents being able to continue to work, cope with stress and support their children's development and learning.
2. **Support working parents with safe and appropriate childcare options in the context of Coronavirus:** with schools, childcare and educational settings closed (except for children of key workers and vulnerable children) most parents have no option other than to look after their children at home. At the same time, key workers need to find childcare arrangements that work with their shifts and needs. Employers should have direct conversations on how work can be organised and hear the parents' views and preference. While the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme can be used to support parents, who need to take time off to care for their children, it should not be automatically applied to all working parents or be used to discriminate against parents.
3. **Take proactive measures to protect the health of workers, customers, users and others:** consult with workers on the measures to implement. Ensure the presence of handwashing facilities and regular cleaning of the workplace as well as availability of protective equipment as needed. Monitor and communicate the advice provided by the Government and Chief Medical Officer, the Department for Health and Social Care and Public Health England to your workers and support them in adhering to it. Encourage and support your employees to work from home wherever possible, especially those from defined vulnerable groups.
4. **Provide workers with guidance and training on hygiene and occupational health and safety measures:** share information with your workers to support them in protecting themselves, their families and their communities. These materials should be in line with [WHO Guidance](#). For messages around mothers who are breastfeeding, see [UNICEF UK Infant feeding during the COVID-19 outbreak](#). For messages around protection of children see [UNICEF Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\): What parents should know](#).
5. **Encourage workers to seek appropriate medical care, in case of development of symptoms:** provide accurate and up to date information on medical providers and services if your workers are experiencing symptoms of Coronavirus, and to other relevant services such as domestic violence, mental health and psychosocial support. Ensure psychological support to those who present symptoms.
6. **Support workers and their families to cope with stress:** dissemination of accurate information from trustworthy resources about Coronavirus can contribute to reducing stress. Provide workers with advice on how to maintain a healthy lifestyle and information on counselling services, especially for women who are at increased risk of domestic violence and sexual exploitation. Support parents in helping children to cope with stress during the Coronavirus outbreak, by giving them time and resources to comfort and care for their children. UNICEF has developed [recommendations](#) on how to communicate with children about Coronavirus.
7. **Support the Government's social protection measures:** while social protection measures are a Government responsibility, businesses can support them and can play a role in addressing the risks of poverty for workers and their families stemming from COVID-19. Implementing family friendly workplace policies is one way businesses can do this. The UK Government has put in place a number of [measures](#) to protect people's jobs and income that businesses should consider carefully before taking decisions that will have a negative impact on a household income and apply them equally among women and men. For example, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is also applicable to parents who are unable to work due to childcare commitments.