

Supporting Caregivers @ MSU

Resources & Best Practices



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Prepared by: [DEI & HR Subcommittees for Reopening Campus](#)



WHERE WE STAND

The novel coronavirus outbreak continues to have significant impacts on the world. At Michigan State University, we have taken steps to mitigate the risks to our students, employees and our campus community through increased safety measures, increased cleaning and sanitation protocols, and adjusting our operations taking into consideration the guidance of the university administration and federal, state and local officials and public health agencies.

At MSU, we care about people. The health and safety of our students and employees is the top priority and will always be at the forefront of decision-making, especially in response to this public health crisis. We will continue to support their safety in all that we do. This includes acknowledging the additional challenges and burdens that are being placed on dependent caregivers in our population. We commit to working together in supporting creative solutions that help give Spartans the opportunity to continue pursuing excellence in their careers and endeavors, while also supporting their needs in providing dependent care.



SUPPORTING CAREGIVERS DURING COVID-19

This fall, school systems across the country have struggled with how best to return students to school during the international COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the school district decisions have created additional childcare responsibilities for working parents. The most significant challenge comes with balancing full-time work while monitoring and supporting a child's online, remote or hybrid learning. Many families also have multiple children younger than twelve. Other caregivers of elderly or other family members have seen their support facilities close and in-home care availability dwindle. Leaders and supervisors are wondering how to best manage employee workload with the sudden demands on the time of working caregivers at home. Dissecting the data can help provide a fuller picture of the challenges.

Most parents of school-aged children work

- In 2019, 76% of mothers and 92% of fathers with school-aged children were employed (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020).
- Approximately 5,013 MSU faculty and staff members have children under 18 and 3,330 have children under 13 (MSU Human Resources, 2019).
- School is normally about 30 hours per week, so most parents need childcare 13.5 hours per week per child (pre-COVID) (U.S. Department of Education, 1988, 1991, 1994, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012).
- For children undertaking distance learning, parents now need 43.5 hours of care for their children (during COVID) (U.S. Department of Education, 1988, 1991, 1994, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012).



CHILD CARE NEEDS HAVE TRIPLED FOR MOST WORKING PARENTS DUE TO THE PANDEMIC



HOW MUCH COULD THIS COST FAMILIES?

- It is hard to estimate the costs of these additional hours, due to the uncertainty of what kinds of care will be available, how much providers will charge, what caregivers can afford and what caregivers will use.
- **Costs are estimated to double or triple for families.**
- Even before the pandemic parents were struggling to pay for childcare. The estimated childcare cost was \$100-\$125 per week (some costs were much higher), **per school-aged child (NSECE, 2016).**
- On-site child and back-up dependent/elder care providers may not be available at this time.

As an employer or supervisor, it is difficult to know how best to address the many challenges that caregivers face. One approach is to offer equal or the same one-size fits all options to everyone. However, an equitable approach is ultimately a more effective solution as actual practical needs can vary greatly from employee to employee. Equitable options provide support that is tailored to specific types of needs so that every employee can thrive.



SOME CHALLENGES FACING CAREGIVERS

- Program closures, temporary and permanent or reductions in number of children/dependents served due to limitations on group size.
- Loss of facilities, if schools are closed, many on-site before and aftercare programs are closed. Many childcare providers and aides have not returned to the workforce (34% of childcare workers are no longer in the workforce in this industry – April 2020 vs. June 2019) (Adams and Todd, 2020).
- Changing caregiver preferences for safe child and dependent/elder care or safe education options due to concerns about possible exposure in group settings and also health concerns if a member of the family is high risk.
- Different requirements and demands for children (masks for all kids over 2).
- Transportation concerns (bus, hours of transportation needed if hybrid or shortened day, availability) as well as concerns about transporting children/dependents (buses/vans) while maintaining social distancing

- If a child is ill, they must be quarantined at home with the working parent. If a provider is ill, they cannot care for the child or other family member
- Home-based care is more flexible, but more expensive and potentially less available. Pods are increasing in a home-based care system. This system benefits those who have the financial ability to afford care, and safe, available networks to share duties with.
- There is no way to plan ahead or plan for constantly changing demands. For those attending school or other support services in person, the potential or sudden closures due to the pandemic is great. There are also changing demands stemming from caregiver job loss and/or reduced income.
- Feelings of burnout amongst employees who are already reporting an increase in caregiving activities. Mental fatigue, exhaustion, anxiety, and depression are on the rise for dependents and caregivers.

ACCORDING TO AN URBAN INSTITUTE POLICY PAPER PUBLISHED IN JULY 2020, THE IMPLICATIONS FOR FAILING TO ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES WILL CREATE NEGATIVE OUTCOMES FOR PARENTS, CHILDREN, AFTER-SCHOOL AND CHILDCARE PROVIDERS, EMPLOYERS AND THE LARGER ECONOMY. THE COSTS ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY LIKELY TO BE BORNE BY WOMEN AND COMMUNITIES OF COLOR, BOTH OF WHICH FACE SYSTEMIC INEQUITIES AND BARRIERS.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS & SUPERVISORS

While there are no one-size-fits-all recommendations to “fix” every caregiving need (there are not enough providers nor resources to go around), there are several recommendations that may be able to assist with many of the concerns raised by employees and employers. Given that the individual differences of each situation may create anxiety or tension for people, we ask for everyone involved to creatively problem-solve each situation by being flexible and compassionate in order to protect our collective well-being. Recommendations include:

- Lead with compassion and put employees first.
- Support a caregiver’s ability to make the choices they believe are the best for their family and circumstances.
- Check in with faculty, staff, and graduate students to listen and see if there are ways that the University can help them to better balance their work and caregiving challenges.
- Prioritize strategies that support working families who face the greatest risks and inequities including:
 - Parents who must continue to work outside the home.
 - Parents who have individual or family risk factors for COVID.
 - Parents of children with special needs.

- Support the ability of caregivers to care for their dependents/elders without jeopardizing their employment. Provide flexible options for work schedules and locations. Accommodate changing schedules/hours of required work.
- Understand and apply the recommended [decision-making model](#) for employee requests for flexible work arrangements.
- Administrators and supervisors should regularly communicate campus COVID-19 resources to their faculty, staff, and students such as the [MSU Backup Dependent Care](#) program and [Care.com](#) (free to search and communicate with caregivers with MSU NetID. Search for students who list themselves as MSU students). Refer them to the [WorkLife Office](#) for family, workplace, career or resource referral assistance and see the extensive website, including [WorkLife Office webinars](#) and [caregiver resources](#). Provide information on other relevant university policies ([Childcare Flex Savings Plan](#), [FMLA](#), [EPSL](#)), and resources such as the following as they come available: [WKAR videos](#), [MSU Extension](#), [College of Human Medicine Online Learning Resources](#)), [Employee Assistance Program](#), [MSU Teledoc](#), [MSU Counseling and Psychiatric Services](#), [CAL Culture of Care Resource Page](#).
- Consider that it might take longer for some to respond to e-mail. Many are not able to keep a traditional 8:00 am – 5:00 pm schedule. Plan ahead when corresponding with faculty, staff, and students. Be mindful of preserving time for yourself and for others away from work and avoid e-mail on the weekends. Consider utilizing an out-of-office message as a communication method that details your work schedule and informs people when they can expect a response from you.
- Revisit priorities set before the onset of Covid-19. Each unit should undergo a review of its service demands and plans for the year and postpone any committee work, task forces, projects, programming, or plans that are not obligatory personnel functions (i.e. annual review and promotion review) or otherwise vital to the success of the unit and its faculty, staff, and students. Move deadlines that can be moved. Remove low priority tasks from the to-do list. Have a unit-wide conversation and waive non-essential service requirements for the year.
- Units should refrain from scheduling meetings between the hours of 8:00 am and 12:00 pm so as not to interfere with virtual K-12 education schedules. Consider that participants might need to leave their cameras off due to background distractions and should not be required to turn them on. Large virtual meetings should be recorded and made available for later viewing. If possible, create asynchronous meeting opportunities where work can take place in a Google Doc or in a Teams discussion to reduce the time spent in a synchronous forum.
- In course planning, evaluate teaching loads and student enrollments. Consider establishing a course rotation that enables those with heavier caregiving loads to take the larger course obligations (e.g., higher enrollments, more credit hours) at a later time.
- Consider rethinking performance reviews in a holistic way that makes room for the different types of work that are being done during the novel coronavirus and the projects that had to be put on hold or cancelled. Encourage all employees to document the work they are doing for future reference/performance evaluations.
- Provide information on [quaran-teaming](#).
- Work together as a unit to establish strategies for a culture of care in the pandemic that establishes a support system for those in need. Consider identifying teaching “buddies” or establishing a “sick day” banking system so that someone can find a last-minute replacement for a class or other responsibility on short notice. Consider establishing community caregiving pods whether for shared instruction, social skills, or self-care.
- Communicate transparently and openly and create inclusive opportunities for all in your community to provide feedback and suggestions.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CAREGIVERS

Lead with Kindness & Embrace the Moment

- Have compassion for yourself and your dependent(s), this is hard. You are doing your best.
- Remember everyone should always take time out for self-care. It helps you and those you care for to stay healthy and safe. Many of us are operating already on low energy reserves, so check in with yourself frequently to see how you are coping. Be mindful of the need for yourself and others to take a spontaneous break between meetings. If you need a break, take one, even if for 15 minutes. Get up, move around, go for a walk. If you can't take care of yourself, you can't take care of anyone else.
- Be flexible. There may be times when your child isn't able to complete something without your support.
- Utilize teachers and peers for help with schoolwork.
- Divide and conquer if there are others that can assist, set a schedule. Even older children can help younger children with some tasks.
- If remote learning is new for your student and for you, you'll have to give yourselves time to adjust to a new schedule and a new way of working together. But by being patient, you'll get to see your child make progress.
- Use [family care resources](#) available through MSU to search for caregivers. MSU faculty and staff have free access to premium memberships and you can search for MSU students through the site as well.

Establish Routines

- Utilize transparent communication and let your supervisor know what your needs are.
- Create designated workspaces for each person at home.
- Set a schedule. Most people do better on a schedule, including wake and sleep times, meals, etc.
- Discuss boundaries, when can children ask for things, when are you not available except for emergencies.
- Set times to check in on the emotional well-being of everyone in your family. This is a hard time and a new experience for most of us.
- Get a head start, many caregivers who work from home say they get their best work done early in the morning.
- Where possible, plan your child's learning schedule around your work schedule.
- Make sure the activities that require the most support and input from you are done during the times you're available to help your student.
- Designate your working hours for independent reading and subjects your child has an easier time digesting.

Practice Planning

- Utilize to-do lists. Without clearly defined to-do lists, your child has a higher likelihood of becoming distracted or straying from his or her studies.
- Make use of planning tools. Get your child used to managing their planner early.
- For full-time working parents, evenings and weekends are usually the best times to dedicate to be a hands-on Learning Coach.

- For part-time workers, it may be mornings, afternoons, or evenings that work best.
- Set aside another time to work on that assignment and encourage your child to continue working on the things that come more easily when you are not readily available.

Other helpful resources: Webinars

- [Household Employment: Trends, Considerations & Resources](#) by Care.com and HomePay
- [Hiring Household Employees and Various Tax Responsibilities](#) by D. Craig Godfrey, CPA with Rehmann Advisory and Tax Services



FINAL THOUGHTS

Every family has different stressors, needs and unique circumstances. These strategies are intended to be a **starting point** and have proven helpful for many families to navigate their situations. You and your family will know best which strategies to use to continue to adjust to these uncertain times. Similarly, every workplace at MSU has different missions, priorities and personnel structures. These strategies are intended to assist in developing an operating framework that supports the people in your organizations while enabling workplace success.

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