

For Organisations

Parents and Carers During Lockdown – Topics to Talk About with your Employees

Going into lockdown or heightened restrictions can cause unexpected disruptions and additional challenges for parents and carers. In order to support parents and carers to continue working effectively whilst maintaining positive work-life balance during these difficult times, crucial conversations between performing arts workers and their employers or managers can help to ensure that talent is retained and supported. These conversations would benefit from open questions to provide the employee with the opportunity to discuss the areas they feel they might need support in (e.g. how can we make your current working situation better?). It is also a good idea to be ready with some ideas and suggestions as it's possible the employee won't know what to ask for.

From our research, we know many parents and carers have reservations about presenting their caring related needs in case it has a negative impact on their status within the organisation or their job security. It is therefore important that organisations are forthcoming in initiating these conversations providing a safe space for sharing, so that parents and carers feel encouraged to discuss their needs, which will benefit both them and the organisation.

Below is an outline of some suggested prompts that may support these conversations to take place and for parents and carers to receive the support they need.

1. TALK ABOUT – Flexibility

With heightened caring responsibilities and with many parents and carers now homeschooling, it can be extremely difficult to adhere to previous working hours, schedules and workloads. Areas to discuss could include:

- **Core hours:** *How can core hours be altered to support the added pressures of homeschooling?*
- **Change in hours:** *Could temporarily working compressed hours or part-time be explored? The latter could be supported by the furlough scheme (now extended until April 2021)*
- **Adjusting workload:** *How can workload be reduced?*
- **Job Shares:** *How can Job Shares be established to support the flexibility needed to support caring related needs?*
- **'Task completed' roles:** *How can the role be adapted to 'tasks completed' rather than hours completed?*

2. TALK ABOUT – Working from Home

Current Working from Home set-ups are not the norm. Many parents and carers face challenges scheduling work around their caring responsibilities, due to homeschooling and care facility closures. For some there is a shortage of devices or sufficient broadband, and uninterrupted work time is at a premium. Areas to discuss could include:

- **Devices:** *Can additional devices (laptop, tablets) be provided for work?*
- **Working from Home Policy:** *How can supportive communication or Working from Home policies be adapted to state that disruptions or appearances of children or family members is understandable?*
- **Methods of communication:** *What is the best platform for conversations or meetings? Video calls can be good to foster a sense of connection, however, can be stressful if there are other activities going on at home for a parent or carer. Explore the full benefits of a mixed approach to communication platforms (video, phone call, instant messaging etc)*
- **Supportive Working Practices:** *What working practices could be put in place to support home working for parents and carers? These could include advance notice for meetings, meetings not being booked in for certain times of the day, avoiding back-to-back meetings and scheduling shorter meetings.*
- **Leave and Furlough:** *How can Furlough, Part Time Furlough, Parental Leave and/or Time off for Dependents policies support further, and how can they be accessed?*

3. TALK ABOUT – Returning to Work

Returning to work and/or the workplace after an extended period of absence, such as maternity leave, furlough or homeworking can cause heightened anxiety. Parents and carers may be particularly anxious if they are caring for someone vulnerable or shielding, and, once lockdown restrictions ease, schools, care and support provisions don't return at the same rate. Areas to consider could include:

- **Communicating changes in circumstances:** *Having open communication about changes in circumstances, so you understand how an individual's caring responsibilities have changed and how these can be factored in when returning to work.*

- **Phased Return:** Discuss implementing a phased return with an extension of flexible and continued home working to support employees until schools, care and support provisions return.
- **Advance notice of returning:** Set dates for a return to work well in advance, so parents and carers can put suitable care provisions in place.
- **Responding to sudden changes in care provisions:** Discuss, in advance, the organisation's approach to caring related emergencies such as unexpected school or care closures.
- **Local Care Provisions:** Explore contacts and links to local emergency care providers.
- **Budget:** Establish a budget line to respond to caring related emergencies that might affect the capacity to work.

4. TALK ABOUT – Wellbeing

As indicated in the evidence PiPA submitted to DCMS in June, COVID restrictions and lockdown have had a negative impact on the mental health of parents and carers in performing arts, with 43% considering abandoning their career in the sector. Financial concerns, job insecurity, additional stress due to heightened caring responsibilities and isolation due to a disconnect from work and social networks have deeply affected wellbeing. Areas to discuss could include:

- **Staying Connected:** What kind of organisation updates would be useful for to receive whilst on furlough? Ensure any updates are relevant and timely.
- **Staying Social:** Include furloughed workers or associated freelancers in any social activities.
- **External Support:** Establish an Employment Assistance Programme or links to other support or services (coaching, support groups, helplines etc) for staff's mental health and wellbeing.

Further Support:

The [PiPA Charter Programme](#) supports organisations to work towards becoming family friendly employers using a robust monitoring and evaluation framework, supported with a toolkit of Case Studies, How To Guides and other resources, as well as access to events and the UK wide PiPA network, to create lasting change for their parent and carer workforce.

During the pandemic, PiPA has created a dedicated '[Covid-19 Support Hub](#)' providing free resources for individuals, organisations and the wider industry. PiPA seeks to ensure that the industry comes back inclusive of parents and carers and stronger than ever.

For more information [visit our website](#) or contact PiPA Charter Programme Manager matt@pipacampaign.com to discuss further.

PiPA Resources for Managers:

- [Home Working Guidance](#)
- [Reduced Working Guidance](#)
- [Supporting Parents & Carers Through Furlough](#)
- [Supporting Parents & Carers Through Lockdown 3](#)