

PiPA Info Sheet:

Why is it so tricky for parents to change their working hours at the last minute?

We get it – sometimes meetings overrun, or you need your team to just stay a bit longer to finish off that piece of work, or swap their working day on that occasion due to some really important reason.

If you aren't a parent yourself, it can be difficult to understand why it is not easy for parents and carers to change their working hours. To help you better understand the challenges faced by parents and carers, PiPA has outlined what they are up against when you ask them to stay at work a little later, or change their working day.

Can you work an extra 10 minutes today to finish this meeting?

[According to the NSPCC](#) there's no legal age a child can be left home alone, but it's against the law to leave a child alone if it puts them at risk.

- children under 12 are rarely mature enough to be left alone for a long period of time
- children under 16 should not be left alone overnightbabies, toddlers and very young children should never be left alone

So, in the vast majority of cases, parents must arrange childcare for when they are at work. This means that they become subject to the rules of the childcare provider, which are not conducive to last minute changes.

In order to protect children, nurseries and schools have very strict rules around collection times. A child cannot simply be left alone – therefore if a parent or guardian is late to collect a child, the nursery or school has to remain open later, at an expense to their business.

If a child is not collected on time, under the 1996 Education Act, nurseries and schools reserve the right to:

- **Charge late collection fees.** A £50 fine for being 10 minutes late for a collection is not uncommon.
- **Contact Social Services.** If a child has not been collected one hour after school/nursery closure, or if late collections become frequent, staff can contact Social Services.

Can another family member or friend collect the child in an exceptional circumstance?

Can't another family member or friend collect the child in an exceptional circumstance?

In many schools and nurseries children must be collected by a designated adult. Staff will not release children into the care of an unknown adult – in most cases parents will need to provide detailed a description of the collecting adult in advance.

Additionally, reliance on other family members suggests a significant level of social capital - many are not fortunate enough to have these support networks geographically close enough to depend on. PiPA Balancing Act revealed that:

- 60% of parents and carers in performing arts rely on support from family and partners
- Less than 10% said that supportive employers and/ or colleagues had helped them working

If the arts is going to attract people with a diverse range of lived experience, then this needs to change.

For most schools and nurseries, the above rules apply until a child is 10 years old.

Can you work Tuesday instead of Wednesday next week?

Formal childcare (i.e. a nursery or qualified nanny/childminder) is not flexible. Provision must be booked (and often paid for) months in advance. In most cases, parents have to book the same childcare days for an entire term. Therefore, even if you give a staff member advance warning, they will be unable to switch their working days.

- ***‘One parent [...] had to pay £300 non-refundable deposit to a nursery when she was six weeks pregnant to secure a place. This included telling them exactly what days and times her unborn child would be attending.’ - Pregnant then Screwed.***

This is because childcare providers must make sure they maintain the legal ratio of staff to children - they cannot simply accept another child last minute.

As outlined by the National Standards for Day Care and Childminding, current legal ratio requirements are:

Age of children	Staff ratio
Up to 2 years old	One to three children
2 - 3 years old	One to four children
3 – 7 years old	One to eight children

“Having to juggle child care especially during turnarounds and production periods. Having calls changed or cancelled with no notice when child care has been arranged is the hardest. Also the most costly.” - PiPA Backstage Report

This lack of flexibility is a key contributor to 76% of parents and carers in performing arts having to turn down work because of childcare responsibilities. PiPA’s Balancing Act found that 40% of parents and carers would prefer to boost their income by working an additional two days per week, but are currently unable to do so.

Turning down work then inevitably has a direct impact on the amount of childcare hours a parent or carer can afford, creating a domino effect.

Can't you just book more childcare?

Nurseries, childminders and nannies are very expensive. The Family and Childcare Trust's 2020 [Childcare Report](#) found that in the UK, the average cost of sending a child under the age of two to nursery is:

- £138 a week part-time (25 hours)
- £263 a week full-time (50 hours).

The average cost for families using an after-school club for five days is £62 a week.

When you take into consideration that the median earnings for parents and carers in performing arts is £20,000 per annum, (13% lower than for those without caring responsibilities)¹ you can see how childcare is a luxury many simply can't afford.

The UK government does run a [30 hours a week free childcare scheme](#), but a child only become eligible for this when they turn 3.

A particular challenge for parents and carers in performing arts is finding childcare for evening and weekend work.

- Nurseries and schools are only open weekdays and usually shut at 4pm, and it is very rare for After-school Clubs to run later than 6pm.
- Weekend childcare is expensive and hard to come by. Average Nanny and Babysitter costs are between £12-15 per hour.

“When both my wife and I work full time, we struggle to find additional childcare to top up our 3 days a week (outside of school hours) that we normally use. Unexpected changes to schedules, expectations of late working, and expectation of additional work outside of normal working hours is most intrusive, unsettling and undermining in our aims to be present and available for our children.” - PiPA Balancing Act

PiPA hopes that the above information can help you better understand the challenges facing parents and carers, and that productive, supportive solutions to scheduling conflicts can be found. If you would like any further information, or support in planning work patterns that are inclusive of parent and carers, please contact PiPA Charter Programme Manager Matt on matt@pipacampaign.com, or the PiPA Representative at your organisation.

¹ PiPA Balancing Act