

# Work Life Program Employer Tool Kit

Prepared for you by:



## **Resource Development Center**

Southern Kennebec Child Development Corporation

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## [ABOUT WORK LIFE PROGRAMS](#)

### **Frequently-Asked Questions**

#### **Why should businesses and workplaces become involved in child care?**

Making it easier for employees to manage both work and home responsibilities is not just a good thing to do, it is good business. Work-family policies and programs can improve profits by increasing employee loyalty and productivity, as well as by reducing absenteeism and turnover.

#### **Why is there so much concern about child care?**

Children are the future of our society. Unless children can grow and learn in safe environments, parents cannot fully concentrate on their responsibilities as employers or employees.

#### **How complex and difficult will it be for the employer to engage in child care assistance?**

The process may entail some changes of employee job responsibilities and some collaboration with other businesses in the community. Not every employer needs to provide child care, but the options do need to be examined.

#### **How expensive will it be for the employer to help with child care issues?**

Adjusting to meet employee needs is not necessarily costly. Often creativity and flexibility may substitute for money, to everyone's benefit.

## EXAMPLES OF WHAT BUSINESSES/WORKPLACES CAN DO

1. A company could subsidize child care for employees' children from birth to one year. A percentage of the cost of child care could be paid directly to the provider by the employer.
2. A service provider could implement an on-site structured one-week program for their employees' children over spring break.
3. A business can provide an on-site emergency back-up care program for employees on days when school is closed due to inclement weather.
4. Several human resource managers located in an industrial park can work together to support an on-site child care facility to meet the needs of their employees'.
5. Employers can initiate a program to provide care for their employees' mildly-ill children. Employers can partner with licensed child care centers/homes to address employee absenteeism.
6. Businesses can contract with licensed child care providers for backup/emergency care when the regular provider is unavailable.
7. Human resource people from several businesses could collaborate to discuss child care issues as critical business considerations.
8. A hospital can provide a program for mildly-ill children. Care could be provided within the hospital's pediatric unit at any time, day or night, for children from infancy through adolescence.
9. Businesses can contract with their local child care resource development center for enhanced counseling with a child care specialist to locate available child care specific to the employee's needs.
10. Private schools can provide year-round onsite child care for the local community, before and after care for students during the school year, and possibly free child care for school employees and volunteers.

## GETTING STARTED

### **What is the current situation in your organization?**

The questions below will help you to develop your strategy for initiating change.

#### **Think about:**

The company.	What are your company's values, goals, and priorities? What are the current business issues that keep senior managers awake at night?
The work force.	How successful is your company in recruiting talent? Are there problems with employee retention or productivity? Is there excessive absenteeism or tardiness? Are accidents frequent? What are the major concerns of the labor unions?
The community.	What is your company's level of involvement in your community? How relevant are community issues to your business? What are the gaps in existing services?
The individual.	What are some of the specific work/life conflicts that employees are facing? How are supervisors dealing with these issues today?

## Support

Marshal support from management. How does your company's vision relate to the day to day work environment in your company? Is there a business case for child care involvement?

- What are some of the specific work/life conflicts that employees are facing? How are supervisors dealing with these issues today?
- To what extent may these conflicts be interfering with your business goals?
- Is your organization considered a "great place to work" in your community? By your employees?
- How much knowledge do the decision makers in your company have of why worker friendly enhancements might make sense.

## Identify Resources and Constraints

Identify the resources and constraints that will shape your company's approach to work/family issues.

- What policies and programs do you currently have in place which assist employees' abilities to fulfill work and home responsibilities?
- Do you already have in place a mechanism for communicating with employees (for example, a newsletter, web site, bulletin board, or intranet)?
- What are the limitations on your decisions? These might include budget constraints, logistical problems that exclude a particular option, or restrictions posed by a labor agreement.
- Consider working with child care professionals in your community or hiring a consultant. These professionals may be able to help you complete a range of actions, from assessing needs through comparing options and offering solutions.

## Conduct an Assessment

Assess your employees' needs.

The two most common ways to learn about employees' perspectives are with surveys and focus groups. Child Care Options offers a consultant to work with employers on conducting confidential child care needs assessments. The consultant will work with each company to structure the survey specifically for its employees. Determine how your organization will respond to employees' needs.

- What constitutes sufficient demand to warrant initiating a service?
- For what programs is there sufficient demand?
- Which programs or policies offer the best return for their costs?
- What will be the cost of not implementing anything new?
- How can an employer effectively prioritize employee needs, some of which cannot be fulfilled?

## OPTIONS

### Free & Inexpensive Programs

#### Doing More with Less: Free and Almost-free Work/Family Programs

- Contact community resources (Child Care Resource Development Centers, child care providers, extension educators, health maintenance organizations) for free materials, referral numbers, and presentations to employees.
- Use existing company resources, such as newsletters, bulletin boards, or e-mail, to publicize resources and information.
- Post articles on bulletin boards near the start and end of the school year suggesting ways to manage the transition of children's returning to school or beginning summer vacation.
- Set up a brown bag lunch series with local speakers.
- Compile a library of free materials for employees to use.
- Include information about child care options in new employee orientation packets.
- Recognize births and adoptions in your newsletter.
- Send notes of congratulation to new parents. Include a packet with coupons, information, and numbers to call for answers to frequently-asked questions.
- Organize networks that meet regularly to discuss ways to balance work and home responsibilities (for example, child care, elder care).
- Provide activities for younger children and for youth at company recreational events.
- Include spouses and partners on committees planning events such as the annual picnic. Request volunteers through your newsletter.
- Host an annual "Kids are Special" Day. Use free resources such as the library, United Way agencies, and the Parks Department to provide activities for young children.
- Include family members in wellness activities such as "Healthy Cooking" and "Improving Back Strength" classes. Sponsor a "Family Fun Run" to coincide with a local festival, ethnic celebration, fair, or other community event.
- Organize a joint forum with other employers in your community to discuss workplace / child care connections.
- Develop information fairs using local resources. Provide entertainment (clowns? music? magic?) during the fair.
- Organize periodic Open Houses for employees and their family members. Encourage departments to create child-friendly displays and demonstrations. Provide an area for socializing after the tour.

- Designate one day a year for inviting employees to bring their families to work for lunch.
  - Host a meeting twice a year for single parents to discuss their unique needs. Provide child care during the meeting.
  - Update restrooms to allow for nursing infants in a safe, comfortable environment.
  - Invite suggestions from employees.
- Create time in department head meetings to discuss employees' challenges in managing work and home responsibilities. Identify positive ways to address these concerns.
  - Adjust company policies to promote flexible work arrangements.
  - Develop a consortium with other employers to share the cost of work / family training for managers and personnel staff

## Resource & Referral Services

Resource and referral services offered through Child Care Options-Resource Development Center provide families with information about how to locate and select a suitable child care program. This includes educating parents to recognize the best programs, as well as training child care professionals to improve the programs in which they work.

Resource and referral programs (R&R) can suggest a variety of child care arrangements depending on parents' needs and preferences. The primary functions of R&Rs are to:

1. assist parents in locating and selecting child care
2. improve the quality and supply of child care by training and assisting providers
3. disseminate educational materials and information about child care and parenting
4. document trends in, and demands of child care
5. facilitate the expansion of child care services

Some R&Rs offer additional services. Examples of these include:

- ~Providing a lending library of toys, books and videos for child care programs, parents and members of the community
- ~Recruiting providers for specific needs (such as infant care, mildly-ill child care, and school-age child care)
- ~Providing additional parent education beyond what takes place during the referral process

R&R's are involved with the entire range of child care providers, not just those licensed by the state or those who care for infants and toddlers. This range includes Family, Friend, and Neighbor unregulated caregivers, regulated family child-care homes, non-profit and for-profit child care centers, Head Start, and after school care.

Businesses can use R&Rs to assist employees by:

1. distributing information on local resource and referral services
2. purchasing R&R services for employees as part of an employee benefits package
3. donating money or awarding grants to R&Rs as a way of improving the quality and availability of the child care offered in their area

Surveys show that the most frequent users of R&R services are female employees with infants, followed by parents with preschool and school-age children. Depending on the demographics of a workforce, approximately 4-7% of the total employee population, particularly those with young children, may use such services.

To contact the R&R agency serving Kennebec and Somerset counties:

**Child Care Options-Resource Development Center**

**337 Maine Avenue, Farmingdale, Maine 04344**

**207-582-3110 or 1-800-525-2229**

**Visit us at [www.cordc.org](http://www.cordc.org) - email us at [rita@skcdc.org](mailto:rita@skcdc.org)**

## On-Site / Near-Site Child Care Center

Such a facility is sponsored by an employer and offers care for employees' children at or near the workplace. Typically, employers subsidize the cost of the center, though it may be run by an outside provider.

These centers usually serve infants to 5-year-old children. Some admit school-age children before and after school, on school holidays, and during the summer, if transportation is available and the children are nearby. These centers also can include emergency or drop-in care for employees who normally use other child care services but whose arrangements have fallen through for the day.

Hours of operation typically accommodate employees' work hours. Usually centers operate within the hours of 6:30 A.M. and 6:30 P.M., although those sponsored by employers are sometimes open during evenings, weekends, and legal holidays as well.

Child care centers are licensed by the state of Maine. Legally, they can be structured in various ways -- as a department of the company operated either as an in-house division or by an outside operator, as a wholly-owned subsidiary, or as a separate nonprofit corporation. Each approach has advantages and disadvantages and should be considered in terms of how it best meets the company's goals and the employees' needs.

The center can be operated either by the employer or by a non-profit or for-profit child care provider. Employers usually pay all start-up costs, the operating losses occurring in the early stages of the center before it is fully enrolled, and some portion of ongoing operational expenses. Parent fees cover the balance of the center's operating expenses.

## Child Care Consortia

A group of companies in geographic proximity may form a new company (generally not-for-profit) or share the expenses of operating a child care center for their employees. This helps small employers who cannot afford such an endeavor alone.

Consortium members generally share start-up costs and receive in return priority enrollment for their employees' children. Sometimes specific numbers of slots are set aside for each company; in other instances, arrangements for consortium members are less formal. Operating costs are usually funded through a combination of parent fees and contributions from the employers. Member corporations may choose to subsidize their employees' fees through a voucher/reimbursement program.

The amount of control that a corporate consortium member wishes to exert over the child care program may have implications for corporate liability. A new nonprofit corporation may be established to provide the child care, and contributing corporations may provide board members to the child care corporation if they wish.

## Back-up / Mildly Ill Programs

**Back-up or Emergency Care:** Employers work in the community or individually to offer choices for short-term care of employees' children when normal care arrangements collapse. Back-up child care can help during unscheduled school closures, when a regular care provider is sick or on vacation, or when an employee's work schedule suddenly changes.

**Sick Child Care:** This specialized program furnishes in-home or center-based care for children who are mildly ill or are recovering from a health problem that prevents participation in their usual school or care situations.

## School-Age Programs

School-age child care programs serve children between the ages of 5 and 12 during times when school is not in session. They provide supervision before school, after school, and during school holidays and vacations, including summer. Such programs can be housed in school buildings, recreation facilities, religious institutions, social or community service facilities, and existing child care centers. Enrollment may be limited to school-age children or may include a combination of school-age and younger children.

Well-planned activities are essential. The program should be organized so that children view it as distinctly different from the regular school day. The developmental needs of the children should also be kept in mind. For example, activities should include different forms of physical exercise (since the children have been sitting in school much of the day) as well as time for homework and other quiet activities. The range of activities can encompass science experiments, art projects, games, or playground time. Nutritious snacks after school are important; some before school-programs offer breakfast.

An alternative to full care is an option called "Phonefriend" or "warm lines" -- a program of volunteers who can provide, via the telephone, comfort and support to children who are at home without adult supervision. Phonefriend is particularly helpful to parents whose work environment is not conducive to their receiving phone calls from their children who are at home alone.

Summer camp programs are another form of school-age child care and can be developed to operate for the full working day instead of just from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., as in a usual school day. Some corporations lease space for the summer months in order to run day camp programs for their employees' children. Other programs, particularly those with modest space, utilize public parks and pools for sports and recreation activities for the children of workers.

### **Aside from creating an entirely new program, employers can improve the availability and quality of existing school-age child care by:**

- financially supporting after-school programs in family day care homes, public schools, and community agencies
- providing start-up grants to schools, community agencies, and family day care networks to begin new school-age child care programs
- participating in coalitions and collaborative efforts in the community
- making in-kind donations, such as an executive's time and business expertise or space for meetings or provider training

Employers who are considering this option might work with existing summer camp programs to create extended-day sessions to match the needs of working parents. An employer might contract with a local community agency (such as 4-H, YMCA, or YWCA) to provide summer care. Alternatively, an employer might work with such agencies to develop agency programs to meet the needs of the employer's workers. Such arrangements may require only a modest investment by the employer.

## Parent Seminars

**Parent seminars:** "Brown bag" lunch-time meetings can inform working parents about available resources and support for child care issues. Workshops can also be presented on a variety of parenting issues or common concerns of working parents. The local Child Care Resource Development Center can be invited to make presentations about their programs to a meeting of interested workers. To arrange a "Parent Seminar" contact Child Care Options at 207-582-3110 or 1-800-525-2229 or email us at [rita@skcdc.org](mailto:rita@skcdc.org).

## Financial Options

Employers interested in supporting excellent child care have a number of financial options

Individually, your business may participate in a pre-tax salary deduction program which enables employees to pay for child care expenses with money set aside for that purpose.

Your company may offer child care scholarship assistance, based on guidelines established by an internal committee.

A consortium of businesses may begin a child care center. To learn about creative financing tools designed to help businesses and communities grow, contact FAME (Finance Authority of Maine) at 207-623-3263 or 1-800-228-3734 or visit their website at [www.famemaine.org](http://www.famemaine.org).

Your company may join with other employers to provide support for the childcare options needed by your employees.

Businesses may form or support a non-profit (501-c-3) organization which provides financial support to either families or child care providers.

For children with special needs, the State of Maine provides the "Child Care+ME" program through the University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies. You may contact the program at 207-581-1084 or visit their web site at [www.ccids.umaine.edu](http://www.ccids.umaine.edu).

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If you have questions about licensure of child care programs, call the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Child Care Licensing Unit at 207-287-9300.

For general information about resources in your region, call Child Care Options-Resource Development Center at 207-582-3110 or 1-800-525-2229 or visit us at [www.ccordc.org](http://www.ccordc.org)

To find out what kinds of care already exist in your community, call the Child Care Options, Resource and Referral Specialist at 207-582-3110 ext. 29 or 1-800-525-2229.

To learn about low-cost training opportunities for parents or for child care providers, contact Child Care Options Training Coordinator at 207-582-3110 ext. 25 or 1-800-525-2229.

## Dependent Care Spending Assistance

Dependent Care Spending Assistance Plan (DCAP) is a plan set up according to Section 125 of the IRS tax code. The employer and the employee agree to reduce the employee's income by a certain amount, which is placed in a dependent care assistance fund for the employee. The money is not taxed at either the federal or state level for employers or employees, but it must be used within a given year for the designated purpose, or the balance is forfeited.

The child care services allowed under a dependent care assistance program include care at the employee's home, at another person's home, or at a child care center. The child care program must either be licensed or exempt from license such as an employer-operated child care center, a community child care center, or a family child care home. The employer also can provide additional funds to cover any eligible services that the parent might choose. Employer programs that do not involve actual care for the child, such as parent seminars or information and referral services, do not qualify as dependent care assistance programs.

The economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981 (Section 129, IRS Code) established child care services as a fringe benefit that is not included in the employee's taxable income. However, the employer's program must qualify as a DCAP as described in Section 129 of the Internal Revenue Code. The IRS Code, in Sections 125 and 129, now clarifies and supports these options as forms of child care support.

The employees' rights under the plan must be legally enforceable, and the employer must intend to maintain the plan indefinitely. Although nondiscrimination guidelines require that the plan cannot discriminate in favor of highly paid employees, the plan can favor low-income employees, and can provide extra subsidies for those parents who have the hardest time covering their child care costs. Employers can exclude employees covered by a collective bargaining agreement as long as child care benefits were negotiated in good faith by the employer with the union. Length of service is not an issue in determining employee eligibility for a DCAP plan. The Internal Revenue Service will not issue regulations on IRC Section 129, but will provide clarification through notices and Revenue rulings.

There are restrictions to the use of salary set aside in a DCAP. At the beginning of a plan year, the employee must agree to have a specific amount of compensation set aside for that year in a DCAP that can be used for eligible child care expenses. The amount can be deducted through regular payroll deductions, but the total to be withheld cannot be increased or decreased during that year. In addition, the employee cannot change or revoke "elections" of the benefit unless there is a change in family status, such as

marriage, divorce, death of a spouse or child, etc. Since employees cannot carry over any unused portion of the DCAP to the next year, all unused moneys during the specified year are forfeited to the employer. To avoid forfeiting money, the employee should use conservative estimates for child care costs.

The employer should estimate how many employees with dependent care expenses could save money through a salary reduction agreement. Since minimum wage or low income employees probably would not benefit from a salary reduction agreement, the employer might provide a subsidy to assist these parents with their child care expenses, and provide a DCAP for higher income employees.

## Child Care Center Discounts

Employers can negotiate with existing local child care providers to obtain price discounts for their employees. In exchange, providers will receive free publicity to new employees and periodical mention in company publications or at meetings.

## Child Care Reimbursements

Employers may offer workers a child care allowance or subsidy that lets them choose their own child care arrangement and assess its quality for themselves. The employer contribution varies; it can be a percentage of the total cost of the care, a flat amount for all participating employees, or a scaled amount based on the family's annual income.

In a voucher/reimbursement plan, the employee chooses the child care arrangement best suited to his or her needs (child care center, family child care home, after school program) and then receives a reimbursement from the company for some portion of the costs. The employer contribution varies from company to company as noted above. Vouchers or reimbursements may be added to the employee's paycheck, reimbursed as other "expense account" costs, or paid directly to the provider by a check or a voucher redeemable by the provider upon presentation.

## Cafeteria-style Benefit Plans

These plans allow employers to offer workers a range of benefits without necessarily increasing costs. Usually, employees are allowed to allocate a set amount of benefit dollars as they wish among several options. Employees who already have one kind of coverage through a spouse's employer can use the flexibility of a cafeteria plan to choose options they could not otherwise afford.

## Flexible Work Arrangements

Instead of a traditional 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. workday or the usual five-day week, employees gain flexibility regarding where and when they work. Depending on the option(s) permitted by the employer, employees may adjust arrival and departure times, work load, hours, or work location to suit their individual needs.

**Flextime:** Allows employees to adjust their arrival and departure times around designated "core hours" or a certain number of hours per day or week. Flex-time is the most commonly known of the alternative work schedule options. The federal government began flex-time on an experimental basis in 1979; the program was permanently authorized by Congress in 1985. The private sector also has increasingly adopted the use of flex-time, not just to help employees balance their work and family lives, but also for better use of equipment and buildings; decreased traffic congestion; and improved attendance, punctuality, and productivity among employees.

**Compressed Work Week:** Employees work longer hours each day but fewer days per week. For example, employees can work four ten-hour days, with the fifth day off. Another arrangement is called the "9/80," where employees work 9 hours per day but can take half a day off per week. Compressed work week schedules can be individually designed to fit the needs of the workplace and the employee.

**Telecommuting:** For many workers, working from home for two or three days a week is more convenient, cheaper, and more productive than working in an office. This arrangement also can reduce costs associated with leasing office space.

**Part-time or reduced workload programs:** These provide an option enabling employees to reduce their work time. Salary, benefits, vacation, and other time-off programs are prorated. This option can help employees meet family, personal, or schooling needs.

**Job sharing:** Two employees share the responsibilities of one full-time position. As with other part-time programs, salary and benefits are prorated.

## Family Leave Policies

Parental leave may be paid or unpaid leave, with job security, for new parents or parents with dependents experiencing serious health trouble. Federal laws (such as the Family and Medical Leave Act) and state laws guide policies regarding parental leave. For instance, employers with 50 or more workers must let employees take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for newborns or newly adopted/placed children or other dependents of any age with serious health problems. Employers with fewer than 50 employees offer varying amounts of leave, some paid.

**Use of Sick Leave for Family Illness:** Employees who receive a varying number of paid days off during their own illnesses can use these days when family members are ill, as well.

**Personal leave:** This allows employees a specified number of days yearly (with or without pay) to deal with urgent short-term needs, such as school conferences, that cannot be scheduled outside the normal work week.

**Paid-time-off (PTO) Programs:** Employees receive a fixed number of days off per year to use when and for whatever reasons they choose. In some of these programs, employees may save their unused days in banks that can be used for extended illness.

## Community Partnerships

In Maine, more and more businesses are finding value in collaborating with other businesses, child care providers, advocates, and community planners to improve child care at local and state levels.

### **Business partnering in the community:**

- Working as a partner can be an expedient and cost-effective way to support employees while supporting the community at the same time.
- The important role of businesses in these partnerships is not only to provide financial assistance, but also to connect the team to the unique perspectives of the business community in areas such as team-building, communications, fundraising, and strategic planning.
- Business/community partnerships offer the opportunity to effect a substantial and lasting change in the community's ability to provide needed services. By working together, employers not only serve the needs of their employees, they also make the community a better place to live and work.

This Toolkit describes a number of potential child care partnerships. Employers may find it valuable to explore the development of their own child care project. The following list outlines some examples of projects you could become involved in:

- **Project Collaborations:** Employers can team up with local community organizations to offer such programs as summer camps or school vacation programs to children of employees. Sometimes setting up such programs can be as simple as asking the care agency to extend its operating hours to match the needs of your employees. In other cases, businesses can help the coalition to locate or lease a facility for its program.
- **Child Care Provider Grants:** Employers offer small grants to child care providers who care for children of employees. The grants can be used for safety equipment or child development materials. Often these programs are implemented by child care experts who can offer helpful advice to the participating providers.
- **Scholarships and Training:** Contributing partners sponsor one or more child care providers to help increase their formal training in early childhood education. Businesses also can sponsor local seminars for child care providers.
- **Child Care Provider Loan Fund:** Employers establish loans to child care providers (primarily family day-care homes) at low interest rates in order to improve the quality of existing services to children or to encourage new facilities to be established. Loans may be used to refurbish buildings, provide training, or acquire new toys and materials. Businesses also can offer financial or in-kind incentives to child care providers for meeting licensing requirements.

- **In-kind Donations:** In-kind contributions from businesses can help sustain or upgrade existing child care centers by improving the learning environments, increasing management efficiency, and adding financial flexibility to better support staff and training. The following items are needed in many child care facilities.

fax machines	shelving
computers software	art easels
copy machines	child-size furniture
printers	commercial sweepers
office chairs	baby cribs
file cabinets	high chairs
paper envelopes	cots
pencils	play kitchens
pens	baby bibs
file folders	wash cloths
art materials	baby paper products
landscaping products	business training
mulch	computer assistance
trash cans	marketing assistance
storage crates	recycled products
coat racks	fruit juices
partitions	non-perishable food

## Implementation

For confidential cost-free consulting in implementing any of the above-mentioned programs, contact Child Care Options-Resource Development Center 207-582-3110 or 1-800-525-2229 or email us at [rita@skcdc.org](mailto:rita@skcdc.org)