

Fathers and Paid Work Toolkit

The EEO Trust's on-line survey in 2003 asked fathers how workplaces could support them to be the fathers they want to be. Nearly 1200 fathers completed the survey.

This toolkit aims to help workplaces survey and assess their current work-life balance strategies and whether these cater to the needs of fathers within their organisations.

Enabling fathers to better balance their family and work commitments can improve an organisation's ability to recruit and retain skilled people, and help build a loyal and productive workforce.

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What Kiwi fathers want from workplaces

Eighty percent of fathers who responded to the EEO Trust survey said they would like to spend more time with their families, especially their children.

Working fathers' patterns of parenting are often different from those of working mothers and many workplace work-life policies do not meet their needs. Fathers are more likely to be involved in particular events such as sports at schools rather than the more continuous care such as taking time off work to care for sick children.

Diverse caring responsibilities

The EEO Trust survey found that fathers and their fathering responsibilities are diverse. These differences impact on fathers' experience of work and the use of workplace work-life policies.

Fathers may:

- be from a variety of ethnic groups

- be parenting babies, young children, teenagers or young adults
- have a disabled child or be disabled themselves
- have dependent elderly parents or relatives
- be gay, transexual or heterosexual
- be a lone parent or sharing care with a former partner
- live in an extended or multiple generational family
- have a blended family
- be in a two income or sole income family
- work part or full time
- be working in more than one job.

Finding work-life balance

Many workplace situations or conditions can negatively impact on some fathers' ability to balance their work and family lives.

Working hours

Long hours, shift work, lack of flexibility of hours, compulsory overtime, fixed start and finish times, unpredictable hours.

Travel requirements

Frequent travel away from home, distance and travel time to and from work.

Location of work

Lack of flexibility to work from home occasionally

Technology

The intrusion of technology into home time (cellphones, laptops etc)

Unsupportive work cultures

Workplaces that have a positive work culture allow fathers to be involved in their family's responsibilities and celebrations. Those workplaces that do not model effective work-life balance within their organisations and do not encourage employees to use work-life initiatives, impact on fathers' abilities to support their work and family commitments. Many fathers have a perception that using work-life initiatives would damage their career prospects and that balancing work and family is seen as a mother's issue. They also believe that part-time work is not an option as it takes time off career tracks.

Low uptake of work-life provisions by fathers

Fathers seem less aware of the work-life options available to them at work. They fear losing their job or being seen as not "committed" if they take up work-life provisions. Many believe that it is easier for mothers to take advantage of work-life initiatives.

The effects of poor work-life balance

Poor work-life balance affects workplaces, employees and their families. It contributes to lower productivity and increased staff turnover.

Impacts on the workplace

- increased tendency to make mistakes
- stress impacts at work
- staff turnover
- low staff morale
- increased use of sick leave

Impacts on fathers

- stress
- tiredness
- ill health
- not being available for family emergencies/events
- feeling guilty
- conflict at home

Impacts on families

- conflict in marital relationship
- one partner shouldering all the responsibility
- lack of family time

Suggested work-life balance initiatives

The research found that changes could be made in four workplace domains to assist men to be the sort of fathers they want to be.

Working hours

- flexibility to use small amounts of time to meet the demands of events/emergencies
- flexible start finish times
- reduced hours
- modelling of reasonable hours by senior staff
- compressed working weeks
- review shift work schedules with staff.

Work location

- support working from home on occasions or for part of the week
- review start times to avoid long travelling time in rush hour.

Technology

- create protocols around interruptions/assumed availability during home time
- use technology to support working from home.

Work culture

- ensure information about work-life policies reaches fathers as well as mothers. Consider how and what is communicated; men respond well to information in electronic form.
- check that work-life policies will meet the needs of working fathers
- male senior staff model work-life balance
- monitor uptake of work-life policies and provisions by gender
- ensure that part-time work is not being marginalised in terms of career prospects
- managers, colleagues and work teams support father's work-life balance
- ensure management accountability for successful implementation of work-life policies.

What do fathers in your workplace want?

To ensure employees who are fathers feel supported at work, the first step is to find out what they need and if your current work-life initiatives are helping them at work and at home. This section includes ideas on finding out what the situation is for fathers in your workplace.

Before you start researching your staff

It is important to communicate clearly with your employees from the start of the research procedure to ensure they (men and women) know what you are doing and why.

Suggested steps:

- determine what research method is appropriate for your organisation
- set timelines; tell staff in advance how and when they will hear about the results and make sure you follow up
- ask for positive and negative feedback

- remind them what initiatives are available to them
- be realistic and do not over-promise; you are not committing to acting on every suggestion
- communicate; some suggestions may take longer to implement so it is good to have progress reports
- be consistent; if you promise confidentiality ensure it happens
- monitor whatever you put in place as a result of the research.

You may decide to use the questionnaire or the checklist tool below to research your organisation. Your decision on which resource tool to use may be influenced by the size of your organisation or work team, the gender breakdown of employees, the ways you normally communicate with staff and if you already use a staff survey tool.

Using questionnaires to research your workplace

This survey method may be appropriate where the organisation or work unit is large, confidentiality is important, employees are not comfortable with face to face discussions, or where written literacy is reasonably high.

The questionnaire is designed in modules and you may not need to use them all. You may want to adapt the questions or add others. You are likely to want to change the language to suit your workplace and to choose electronic or hard copy distribution to best suit your organisation.

If you already use climate survey or exit questionnaires, you may want to consider adding some of these questions to your existing process.

Using discussion checklists

This research method may be appropriate where the organisation or work unit is small, communication is generally less formal, people prefer to talk rather than write, and there are clear opinion leaders in the organisation.

You can adapt these checklists to use in:

- focus groups
- discussions at a staff meeting or tea break
- interviews for key people or opinion leaders.

The prompts under the topics are designed to assist the discussion. They are suggestions only. You may need to change the language to suit your organisation.

Sample questionnaire

Introduction

(You may want some sort of endorsement from a CEO or manager to increase confidence that this issue matters.)

We are keen to explore whether there are any particular issues for men with fathering responsibilities within this organisation. We want to find out what we are doing well to assist fathers balance their work and family life, and how we could improve. Your answers are confidential. Please return this questionnaire to:.....by

Thank you for your help.

(Signed)

Section 1: Demographic information

1. How old are you?

- Under 30 years
- 31-40 years
- Over 40 years

2. How many children do you have?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- more than 5

3. How old are your children?

- Under 2 years
- 2-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-14
- 15-18
- over 18 years

4. Do any of your children have a disability or special needs?

- Yes
- No

Having a balance

5. Do you generally feel you are able to balance your work and family life?

Yes No

6. Do you currently use any of the work-life policies or programmes provided by the organisation?

Yes No

Working hours

7. Do any of the following help you balance your work and family commitments?

	Yes	No	Not available to me	Not applicable to me
Flexible starting times				
Flexible finish times				
Flexible hours generally				
Time off for family emergencies & events				
Part-time or reduced work hours				
Time off in school holidays				
Compressed working week/fortnight				

8. Do any of the following hinder you in balancing your work and family commitments?

	Yes	No	Not applicable to me
Long work hours			
Compulsory over time			
Weekend work			
Shift work			
Timing of work meetings/training			

Support from others

9. Do any of the following help you balance your work and family commitments?

	Yes	No	Not available to me	Not applicable to me
Support from manager/supervisor				
Support from colleagues				
Support from team members				
Encouragement to use paid and unpaid parental leave				
Seeing other men use work/family policies				

10. Do any of the following hinder you balance your work and family commitments?

	Yes	No	Not applicable to me
Negative attitude of managers			
Negative attitude of colleagues			
Negative attitude of team members			

Working arrangements

11. Do any of the following help you balance your work and family commitments?

	Yes	No	Not available to me	Not applicable to me
Working from home				
Technology such as laptops or cell phones				
Being able to bring children into work on occasions				

12. Do any of the following hinder you balancing your work and family commitments?

	Yes	No	Not applicable to me
Technology such as laptops or cell phones			
Frequent travelling away from home			

Getting a balance

13. What could this organisation do to help you balance your work and family life?

Comments:

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14. Do you think that if employees have good work-life balance the organization will be more effective and successful?

Yes/No

If so how?

Thank you for your time.

Sample checklist

1. Is this organisation currently assisting fathers balance their work and family lives?

How?

- Support
- Policies – which?
- Being flexible

2. What are the most useful things we do?

- formally
- informally

3. Are there ways in which we create barriers or obstacles for fathers to get this balance?

- hours
- shifts
- flexibility for family emergencies/events
- attitudes
- behaviours
- subtle messages
- no formal policies – all discretionary
- not taking issues for fathers as seriously as those for mothers

4. What are the three most useful things the organisation could do to help fathers?

Thank you