

How HR Can Support Working Parents Amid Summertime Care Challenges

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Morning Brew Inc., Photos: Getty Images

Experts say employers can lean into flexibility, subsidize summer camp, or even grant PTO so workers can register their kids for programs.

Caregiving needs among the workforce multiply during the summer.

It's a phenomenon Sadie Funk, who runs the advocacy organization Best Place for Working Parents (BP4WP), likes to call the "great hustle."

"You go from a fairly structured system of support, where you have full-time childcare and/or school in session, and maybe some after-school programming that's fairly regimented to...the great wild west of pulling together summer camps, often week by week with different schedules," she said.

Funk noted that many summer camps only last through part of the day, from 9am–12pm or 9am–2pm, for example, creating a "tricky situation" for working parents.

The numbers bear this out. A majority (87%) of working parents said they experienced challenges when their children were home during the summer months, according to a survey fielded in April 2025 by childcare provider Bright Horizons. These challenges included work interruptions to distractions tied to their children's schedules.

In light of these challenges, some employers are leaning into flexibility and getting creative with their offerings, Funk said. Others are subsidizing the cost of summer camp or running programs from their offices, providers and employers told us.

Supporting workers during "the great hustle." The most common strategies Funk's organization sees employers implement during the summer are increased flexibility or scheduling predictability, as well as additional remote or hybrid work opportunities, she said. Allowing greater flexibility during the summer, she explained, helps "account for those interesting pickup and drop off times that families are dealing with."

A number of businesses offer "work from anywhere" weeks or company-wide breaks during the summer in light of the challenges Funk described. Dayforce, EY, and Liberty Mutual were among the companies that offered such benefits when HR Brew reported on the trend in 2024. More recently, Staffbase's global director of rewards and PX operations, Tina Böhringer, told us that considerations around employee's kids and the summer break schedule factored into the company's decision to adopt a four-day workweek in August.

Funk cited a number of other creative solutions from the employers in BP4WP's network, including offering a day of PTO in the spring so that employees can register their kids for summer camp—a notoriously all-consuming process.

"This is a time-limited, time-bound occurrence that happens every year, but really drastically changes what supports parents need," she said.

Summer camp's in session. Just as some employers invest in childcare benefits for employees with kids aged 0–5, they can offer summer camp benefits in a similar vein.

Dependent care flexible spending accounts, a tax-free savings account for workers with caregiving responsibilities, can be used for summer camp expenses. Additionally, childcare providers like Bright Horizons and KinderCare also run summer camps, in addition to year-round operations.

"I was recently at an HR conference, and so many folks that were coming up to the booth were saying, 'We're hearing from our employees that this is a need, and so we don't offer it currently, but we're exploring what does that look like,'" Amy Harmon, VP of client success for KinderCare, said, noting she's observed an uptick in employer interest specifically around summer camp offerings.

KinderCare sees employers offer summer camp programs in a variety of ways, Harmon said. They might help subsidize the cost of tuition for an off-site program, or offer a summer camp program out of an onsite childcare center located on the company's campus. KinderCare has

also seen employers run “pop-up” summer camps on campus, particularly if their employees’ caregiving needs are primarily for school-aged children, she said.

Harmon said KinderCare’s programs seek to align with working parents’ schedules. “Parents’ work days don’t change in August or July from February,” she said. “For a lot of families, they need a full day or extended day.”

J.M. Smucker, a food manufacturer based in Orrville, Ohio, has run a summer camp out of its onsite child development center since it opened in 2014, according to Hind Simonetti, VP of talent. The summer camp is more flexible than the infant through preschool daycare program, allowing employees to select specific weeks and days for their children to attend.

When surveyed about the summer and year-round childcare offerings, 100% of employees cited positive impacts on “their ability to concentrate on their job and be productive,” as well as said stress from managing personal and professional demands had gone down, Simonetti said.

While many employers often look to metrics like absenteeism and retention to judge the success of these programs, there are more “squishy” outcomes at play too, Harmon said. Enabling employees’ families to have new experiences through this programming can contribute to happiness and engagement, she suggested.

“As a mom, if I know my kids are being taken care of and safe and having these really fun experiences, I can focus on work and be more productive and just enjoy the whole experience in a greater way,” Harmon said.