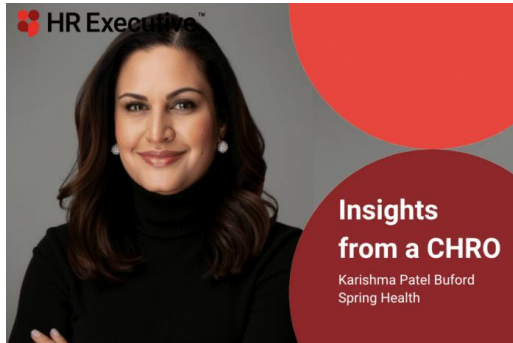


What This Mom Of 3 Says HR Can Do to Support Working Parents This Summer

HR Executive | Jen Colletta | June 12, 2025

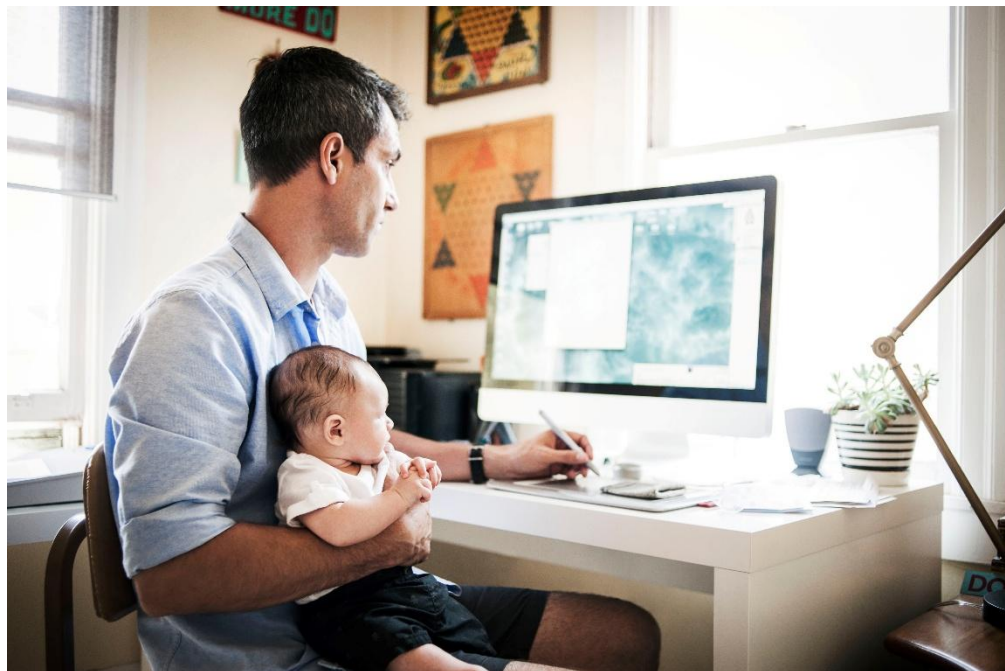


For kids, summer is typically a time of freedom and fun—yet for their working parents, it can be anything but.

New research from Bright Horizons, for instance, found that more than three-quarters of working parents said their ability to focus at work during the summertime is directly tied to their kids' schedules.

About one-third have to check out of work periodically to take care of their kids in the summer, and just as many are distracted and worried about their children while they're working in the summer.

It's a challenge Karishma Patel Buford knows well. As the mother of three young kids and the chief people officer at mental health solution provider Spring Health, she is accustomed to navigating the daily juggling act of giving her all to her organization and her family. For Buford, success—including in the hectic summer months—comes down to intentionally being present, both at home and at work, and prioritizing her mental health.



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Buford—who previously held HR leadership roles at organizations including OppFi and Groupon—recently spoke to HR Executive about how employers can operationalize these lessons to better support their working parents, in the summer and beyond.

HR Executive: How have your identities as a parent and an HR professional—and now executive—intersected?

Buford: Parenthood alongside a career gives a person perspective and the opportunity to assess everything happening in their life: their role, purpose, relationships, how fulfilled they feel at work and the environment they choose to be in. This is exactly what happened to me.

I have three children—ages 10, 8 and 4—and just last year I realized that every time I had a child, I changed jobs. When I had my first child, I was at a manager level. Then, when I had my second, I transitioned from senior director to returning in a VP role. With my third child, I was in my first chief people officer role. As you can see, the scope of the job, the challenges and the stressors were very different each time and required me to adapt. The intersection of being both a parent and an executive taught me how to be more productive and efficient and helped me understand what needs to be perfect versus what’s “good enough, move on.”

HR Executive: How did the pandemic impact your ability to parent and be a professional simultaneously?

Buford: The pandemic taught me the importance of presence, which is something I still find challenging. Being present was something that was really taken away from us during COVID. Work and life boundaries became blurred, and people fell into an “always-on” culture since we were ending our days at home instead of during our commutes. Being distracted has become much more normalized at work. It’s not a good thing, but it has become accepted. However, for a child who wants and needs 100% of your focus, that simply does not work. Being present is an intentional skill that takes a significant amount of effort and energy to get right.

HR Executive: From your experience, what have been the most effective techniques to balance work and life, particularly with kids?

Buford: It’s all about how you integrate mental health and balance throughout your day. For me, that means going for a walk with my husband, which gives me a brain break to disconnect and step away from work for 30 minutes. I also believe energy management and intentional recovery are very important.

For instance, every Saturday my husband takes the kids out, and I have four hours to do my own thing and not hear “Mommy” 733 times in three hours—which truly happens. I hold this time sacred because it’s my alone time to recover from the work week—whether it’s flow therapy, cryotherapy, sauna, a massage or something else. If you don’t set that time aside intentionally, it’s not going to happen. I always emphasize that people should put their own oxygen mask on first, and I don’t think there is anything more important as a parent and executive than doing that before your cup is empty and you’re running on fumes.

HR Executive: How can HR use those lessons to better support working parents in their organizations?

Buford: Companies can help operationalize the realities of working parents through negotiation and mutually beneficial flexibility. With the pandemic, employee expectations have certainly evolved, and the pendulum has shifted toward the idea that employees should have the flexibility to work in a way that suits them. But at the end of the day, this needs to be mutually beneficial for both the employee and the employer, and that requires negotiation and transparent conversations.

Last year, I moved from Chicago to Atlanta with my family, and I made a goal: "This is going to be the year where I get back to myself." I knew I could only work out in the morning because after a 10-hour workday, once the kids are home, it wouldn't happen. So, I carved out two, sometimes three, mornings a week where that time is sacred for me to work out. It also means my first meeting of the day on those few days doesn't start until 9:30 a.m., but those boundaries are respected by my boss and my colleagues. It's simply part of my way of working.

Overall, balancing parenting and a career is about explicit negotiation around what allows you to bring your whole self to work while also meeting your personal needs. In today's world, the expectations between employers and employees need to be much more transparent, negotiated and mutually beneficial.

HR Executive: When it comes to summer, what are the unique stressors facing working parents?

Buford: One of the biggest stressors facing parents in the summer is childcare challenges. My No. 1 advice is that as soon as summer camps open, sign up immediately. If you don't register for summer camps by April, you're going to have a hard time. Summer schedules look different for many parents. If your child is in a full-time camp, it can feel very similar to a school schedule, but that's not the case for most people.

Therefore, I encourage employers to emphasize and reiterate the benefits they offer, especially childcare benefits, as these can provide employees with support and guidance when their schedules change. I also advise employers to implement psychological safety practices and maintain an open-door policy, so employees feel comfortable having transparent conversations about what they may need in terms of flexibility and scheduling. This creates an opportunity for employees and employers to negotiate and find a win-win solution that works for both sides.

HR Executive: In what ways has Spring Health been the most innovative when it comes to supporting working parents?

Buford: The key point here is that everyone is in a different situation with differing needs. At Spring Health, we have introduced Journeys, a personalized approach to guiding members through life's most pivotal and often most complex moments. Rather than offering isolated programs or generic content, Journeys combines personalization, intelligence and human care to connect members to the right support across three key elements:

- Curated content hubs aligned to meaningful moments—whether that’s a health diagnosis, a parenting challenge, a new role at work or something else.
- Matched provider recommendations across the full spectrum of need, including coaches, therapists and physicians.
- Specialty services for specific needs, delivered through expert partners and Spring Health’s own innovative in-house models.

In addition to Journeys focused on neurodiversity and the manager experience, we also offer one centered on family care, including teen support. This provides resources and care pathways for parents and caregivers navigating the emotional and logistical demands of family life, including adolescent mental health. We also have providers with deep expertise in postpartum support, including postpartum depression and anxiety. Even more, we offer guidance for those adjusting to life with a new baby or managing transitions with each child, especially during the return to work.

Journeys focused on caregiving, perinatal health, divorce and weight management are also in development.

HR Executive: What is your advice for HR leaders about offering the resources working parents need without alienating non-parents?

Buford: A sense of alienation arises because, as a society, we have assumed the binary philosophy: “I can only be right if you’re wrong.” The bigger idea here is that it’s not either/or; it’s an “and.” The needs of all employees, no matter what stage of life they are in, can be met and recognized. I recommend that employers implement a few employee resource groups that resonate with the needs of their workforce.

At Spring Health, we have an ERG called Offspring. This is our group for parents, and it serves as a community where we can share stories and challenges, and receive feedback and advice on parenting. Instead of sending a parenting question to your entire team, you can share it with a specific group and community that allows for safe, focused conversations.

HR Executive: What more can HR do to reduce the stigma around talking about the pressures of being a working parent?

Buford: One of the closest things to stigma in this context is the idea of alienating another group or causing a group of people to feel like, “Does that mean my stressors are less important or less extreme?” As I mentioned earlier, building a community that understands you and is going through a similar experience is really important and allows everyone to feel understood.

Parent coaching is a growing field that has expanded over the last few years. It is specifically dedicated to providing expertise on what it means to be a parent and how to raise children within different family structures and designs. Setting up time with a parent coach or someone with focused expertise in family therapy or family systems work can make a significant difference.

Overall, connection is what will help break down this stigma. It's important to reach out, whether it's to a community at work, a provider or a therapist—someone who can remind you, "You're not alone. You're not the only person who experiences this."