



HOW TO SET UP A WORKING PARENT NETWORK (WPN)

A working parent network is a way of connecting working parents to each other within the organisation, providing opportunities to connect, share experiences and learn some useful information.

Build interest, seek champions

Start talking to working parents, managers, senior leaders and HR to get a feel for how this might benefit your organisation.

- Get to know who your working parents are. Be sure to consider all family types (e.g. single parents, same sex couples, adoption, foster carers, multiple births, stepchildren etc).
- Explore what they find challenging, and therefore what solutions your group could deliver.
- Speak to management about any resourcing options (administrative resources to manage logistics, budget).
- Brainstorm potential roadblocks to setting this up in your organisation.

Identify the influencers in your organisation and talk to them about the program—if they are supportive they will be your program's greatest champions.

Agree purpose

Create a purpose statement to explain the difference you're trying to make.

- What do you want working parents to learn, be aware of or do differently?
- How does this link in with your organisation's purpose? Align it to sustain it.
- Clarity now will aid future decisions around what to include (and importantly, what not to include) in the program.

Agreeing a purpose will help tie all the topics together—it's important to make sure that the program is about finding solutions to common parenting challenges, otherwise the program risks becoming a forum to complain about parenting challenges. While that can build relationships in the short-term, people are likely to lose interest over time.



Build on what you have

First, check whether a network currently exists—informal social gatherings, email distribution lists, social media groups, etc. Identify what’s in place already and build on that.

Is your organisation part of a conglomerate, or franchise? See if you can pool resources with other associated companies (e.g. combine budget for a special event).

Familiarise yourself with current policies, options for flexibility and how to apply for entitlements.

Identify the communication channels already in use—online chat, social media forums, newsletters, intranet. See if you can set up a working parent channel on an existing forum (if you set one up, be sure to check the policies of your organisation around accessing such forums at work).

What other hidden resources do you have?

- The mum of four who always appears calm and organised.
- The person who always arranges gifts for new parents.
- The dad who could be a great mentor for new dads.
- Parents who have successfully navigated the adoption process.

Any external suppliers who could provide useful content or guest speakers?

Communicate thoughtfully

Know your audience:

- Who are they? Where are they? What channels work best for communicating (different channels might suit different parts of the business).
- Be inclusive—some events might be interesting for non-parents too.

Make it clear how to opt in or out of the network. Keep in mind that some people may opt out and then forget to opt in when their situation changes. Advertise the existence of the network periodically in a non-intrusive way.

Advertise upcoming events on lift screens atrium TVs, staff noticeboards, company newsletters, etc. Not only does this boost awareness of the network, but it encourages inclusiveness.

Be sensitive—for people who have experienced loss or distress relating to family planning, it may be difficult to receive constant reminders of parent-related events.

Plan the calendar in advance

Hold a session upfront with interested parents to get ideas from the group. Rather than just ask them what topics they want, ask them what challenges they face as working parents, and what worries them—this will help you to keep the program solution-oriented and relevant. See sample survey in the resource pages.

Prepare the calendar 12 months ahead and update quarterly. See calendar example in the resource pages.

- Lock in speakers early and remember to check back in to confirm.
- Less is more—it’s easy to ramp up if needed, but ramping down will cause the network to lose momentum.

Consider how to cater to all your parents, recognising the limitations they may face (especially if working remotely).

- Livestream guest speakers online.
- Create short video stories to load onto the intranet.
- Ask for a volunteer at every gathering to take notes and distribute to those who couldn’t make it.

Hold events at parent-friendly times—avoid parenting crunch times (early mornings / late afternoons and school holidays!)

Future-proof it

Incorporate the responsibility of overseeing the network into an existing department’s responsibilities, or form a committee—don’t let it rest on one person’s shoulders.

Systematise everything—when you incorporate a Working Parent Network into the daily processes of the organisation, you make it sustainable.

- Look at existing HR/IT processes to determine the best way to keep your member list current. You’ll need a fool-proof process for inviting new members or removing people who have left/opted out (e.g. update onboarding materials so that all new starters know how to opt in. Receive alerts from HR when people have left the company).
- Create checklists for HR/Managers to follow at significant transition points—baby announcement, going on parental leave, returning from leave. Use this process to create an auto-alert inviting these individuals to opt into the network.

Be visible but not intrusive—make it easy for interested parents to find the group / resources, but not intrusive for people who may have personal reasons for opting out.

So... where to start?!

Every organisation will approach this differently, but we think a good place to start is to identify the purpose of your group.

What do you want parents to learn / know / do differently?

Once you have a feel for this, run it by a few people and see if it hits the mark.

Then get started on your calendar so that you have something concrete to send out to your participants—take the example calendar in this document and adjust it to suit your business.



Remember

- Don't make it onerous—look for ways to simplify and automate.
- You don't need a big budget—online posts are free! Social events can be BYO.
- It's better to start light and ramp up than to start with a bang and then fizzle out!
- People come and go in organisations—don't let it all rest on one person's efforts.
- Try and get the connections to happen organically—the more you can encourage parents to initiate connections and conversations, the less you will need to organise.
- Align everything with the group's overall purpose to ensure it remains relevant and solution-focused.
- Be inclusive—this could be a template for a host of interest groups open to anyone in the business.

Resource: Some ideas to get you started!

EVENT TOPICS & GUEST SPEAKERS

- Kids first aid
- Preparing easy meals
- Preparing a will
- Tax changes relating to childcare rebates
- Setting up savings accounts / investments for your kids
- Cybersafety for kids
- Teens and gaming
- Parenting programs
e.g. 123 Magic, Triple P, Circle of Security
- How to deal with bullying at school
- School readiness
- Anxiety in kids
- Nutrition
- Insurances you need as a working parent
- Best parenting apps
- Working flexibly
- Managing time
- Building your resilience (working parents)
- Calmbirth (for expectant parents)

ONLINE FORUM DISCUSSION STARTERS

Use these in the early days to encourage members to contribute their tips and tricks for other working parents.

- Best parenting advice you've ever been given
- Lunchbox ideas
- Fast and healthy dinners the kids will love
- Things to do with kids in the school holidays
- Local childcare options
- What I wish I knew when...
 - *I had my first baby*
 - *I went on parental leave*
 - *I became a dad for the first time*
 - *I became a mum for the first time*
 - *I was trying to figure out how to juggle full time work and childcare (best time-saving hacks)*
 - *I found out we were having twins / multiples*
 - *My child started kindy*
 - *My child started high school*
 - *I was hiring a babysitter / nanny / au pair*
 - *I had my second / third / fourth /... child*
 - *I became a single parent*

SOCIAL / KIDS

- Family picnic with kids & families – BYO picnic.
- Bring your kids to work day (during school holidays), organise face painter etc.
- Movie night – set up a big screen in a conference room, order pizzas or ask families to bring snacks.
- Kids Christmas party – find a few people to volunteer for face-painting, set up a Christmas craft table or prepare some party games (musical statues, musical bumps, pass the parcel) and serve snacks.

Resource: Sample survey

EXAMPLE SURVEY

As part of our commitment to supporting working parents, we are preparing to launch a Working Parent Network (WPN). This network is a way of connecting working parents to each other within the organisation, providing you with opportunities to connect, share experiences and learn some useful information. We hope this network supports you to thrive as a working parent! The purpose of this survey is to identify the challenges you face as a working parent. We will use your responses to formulate a calendar for the year ahead.

SECTION 1: GET TO KNOW YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

1/ Do you have children?

If yes, how many kids do you have? What are their ages?

2/ Are you expecting a child (birth or adoption)? Yes/no

3/ Do you intend to have (more) children in future?

4/ Do you work remotely? If so, how often?

SECTION 2: UNDERSTAND THEIR CHALLENGES / WORRIES

5/ What are the biggest challenge you face as a working parent?

6/ What parenting issues / challenges do you wish you knew how to handle better? (These don't have to be work-related)

7/ From the following list, please tick the topics that would be of interest to you: (Tick all that apply)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kids first aid | <input type="checkbox"/> School readiness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Preparing easy meals | <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety in kids |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Preparing a will | <input type="checkbox"/> Nutrition |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tax changes relating to childcare rebates | <input type="checkbox"/> Insurances you need as a working parent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Setting up savings accounts / investments for your kids | <input type="checkbox"/> Best parenting apps |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cybersafety for kids | <input type="checkbox"/> Working flexibly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teens and gaming | <input type="checkbox"/> Managing time |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parenting programs (e.g. 123 Magic, Triple P, Circle of Security) | <input type="checkbox"/> Building your resilience (working parents) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> How to deal with bullying at school | <input type="checkbox"/> Calmbirth (for expectant parents) |

8/ What other topics would you find useful?

9/ Can you think of any internal resources we could harness for this network?

This includes people who are informal 'experts' on topics related to working parents – e.g. that parent who manages time like a pro, the parent who always has great lunchbox ideas, etc

SECTION 3: INVITE CONTRIBUTORS

10/ Would you like to be part of a committee that helps to organise WPN events?

If so please enter your email address / contact details

11/ Would you be interested in helping to manage the online forums?

12/ Any other comments, suggestions or ideas?

Resource: Sample calendar

	Q1			Q2		
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APRIL	MAY	JUNE
School Holidays (Exact dates vary by state/territory)	School Holidays			School Holidays		
Brown Bag Lunches (BYO lunch)		Kids first aid	Financial planning for families	Cybersafety for kids	Mindfulness for parents	Tax for families & childcare
Social Events			BYO picnic for all employees and their families			
Online Topic (Initiated by organiser, then parent-led)	What are your best hacks for managing work & family life?	Easy lunchbox ideas	What's the best parenting advice you've ever received	What I wish I knew when ... I went on parental leave for the first time?	Quick weekday meals	What I wish I knew when ... I had my first child
Other	Lunchtime Jogging Club (30 minutes) Lunchtime Mindfulness Session (20 minutes)					

	Q3			Q4		
	JUL	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
School Holidays (Exact dates vary by state/territory)	School Holidays			School Holidays		School Holidays (~mid December)
Brown Bag Lunches (BYO lunch)	School readiness (kindergarten)	Writing a will	Building resilience for working parents	Sorting out insurance - life, income protection, home & contents	Decluttering / re-organising your house	
Social Events	Movie night (BYO popcorn & snacks)					Kids Xmas Party
Online Topic (Initiated by organiser, then parent-led)	Recommendations for family holidays - farmstays, beach, kids clubs	What do you wish you knew when your child started kindy?	Single parenting tips for managing work and family?	How to find (and keep) good baby sitters?	School holiday survival tips and ideas	Christmas series: stocking fillers, gift ideas for age groups, your family's traditions
Other	Lunchtime Jogging Club (30 minutes) Lunchtime Mindfulness Session (20 minutes)					