



WORKING PARENT BUDDY PROGRAM



A Working Parent Buddy Program is a way of connecting working parents to each other within the organisation, providing them with opportunities to connect, share experiences and exchange valuable information.

What are the Benefits?

FOR EMPLOYERS

- Provides team members with opportunities to connect with others who have had similar experiences.
- Helps unearth 'shadow turnover' (team members who quietly leave because they assume the organisation won't support their needs upon return).
- Provides important channels of communication to express any work-life integration concerns and opens the conversation to work through possible solutions together.
- Additional sources of connection and support within the organisation can offer a protective factor against anxiety and depression.
- Reduces the impact of work-related risk factors such as poor support.

WORKING PARENTS

- Enables working parents to seek guidance from peers who have navigated the various challenges of working parenthood.
- For new parents, connecting with other parents who have been in their shoes may reduce social isolation at a vulnerable point in their life.
- Supports parents to extend their own network and offer support to others.
- Reiterates the important contribution that parents make to the organisation.
- Opens up opportunities to raise awareness on issues relating to perinatal mental health, and educate on referral pathways.



For more information about the PWWP please see W: www.pwwp.org.au or contact E: info@pwwp.org.au

© 2021 Centre of Perinatal Excellence (COPE) and Transitioning Well (TW)



Although I had a great leader when I returned from Parental Leave, there were some things I didn't necessarily feel comfortable discussing in a work capacity. I appreciated having someone neutral who I could talk to about parenting, ask advice and bounce ideas around with. As it turned out, my parent buddy was experiencing postnatal anxiety and we were able to support each other in different ways.

How to Set Up a Working Parent Buddy Program

1. BUILD THE NETWORK

Reach out and gather a list of those interested in participating as a Buddy in the program.

- **Who are they? Where are they in their current parenting journey?** There may be team members in your organisation who are not parents yet but who have been navigating the parenting journey (e.g. having experienced pregnancy loss, adoption, surrogacy). Knowing a little bit about individual experiences may be valuable in pairing buddies together.
- **What channels work best for communicating?** Different communication channels might reach parents from different parts of the business.

See Resource: Sample Email Invitation & Guide for Working Parent Buddies on page 3.

2. FACILITATE CONNECTIONS

To ensure a good fit, it can be useful to get a sense of what your parent buddies are hoping to get from the arrangement, and what each one feels they can bring to the program. To do this, you might ask a few questions of all the participants.

See Resource: Sample Questions for Pairing Buddies on page 3 to assist in the process.

Note that there's no need to make an 'exact' match. While there may be some obvious areas that buddies can help in (e.g. navigating the surrogacy process), it's often valuable to share experiences across multiple perspectives. It is, however, helpful to ensure that both parties are aligned on the value of the program and how they might nurture the parent buddy relationship.

3. CHECK BACK IN

It's a good idea to occasionally check in with buddy pairings to ensure the program is running smoothly. Be prepared to make changes – needs change, people don't always click, and sometimes it's valuable to get various perspectives from multiple people, even if the buddy relationship has been a great success! If either buddy feels that the pairing isn't working, openly discuss the swap with each of them to explain that needs have changed, and start the process of finding a new buddy for each of them. You may also find it valuable to suggest the possibility of one parent having more than one buddy. This minimises the impact if a particular pairing doesn't 'click', although it's important not to dilute the program by having too many buddies.

4. SYSTEMATISE THE PROGRAM

After setting up the Buddy program, it's worth incorporating the responsibility of overseeing it into an existing department's responsibilities, or to form a committee—don't let it rest on one person's shoulders. Systematise everything—when you incorporate a Working Parent Buddy Program into the processes of the organisation, you make it sustainable.

Look at existing HR/IT processes to determine the best way to keep your buddy list current. You'll need a process for inviting new members or removing people who have left/opted out (e.g. receive alerts from HR when people have left the company).

Resource: Sample Email From HR to Buddies

Dear [Insert Name],

We are delighted to welcome you to our Working Parent Buddy Program.

As part of our commitment to supporting working parents, we aim to connect working parents in the organisation with each other to provide parents with opportunities to connect, share experiences and learn valuable information.

We hope this program supports you to thrive as a working parent! Although your relationship will be shaped by what works best for the two of you, the attached Guide for Parent Buddies sets expectations around what this program is about, the roles you might play and the benefits of the program.

Over time, you may find that your needs as a parent change and occasionally it may be beneficial to rotate buddies. Feel free to discuss your changing needs with your buddy regularly. You are always welcome to discuss any required changes with us too.

If you have any questions or feedback about the Working Parent Buddy Program, please let us know.

Kind Regards, [HR Team]

Resource: Sample Questions For Pairing Buddies

Thanks for expressing your interest in the Working Parent Buddy Program. To get started, the following questions will provide us with a greater understanding of your current situation and your requirements for the program. We will use your responses to pair you with a Buddy.

To help us in pairing parents, please answer the following questions:

1. Do you currently have children? Yes No

If yes, what are the ages of your children?

2. To the extent that you are comfortable sharing, do you have personal experience with any of the following? This can help us in pairing you with another parent buddy.
- Adoption
 - Surrogacy
 - Stepchildren
 - Blended families
 - Foster carer
 - Single parenting
 - Shared custody
 - Other (please specify)

3. What do you hope to bring to this program?

4. What do you hope to get out of the program?

Resource: Guide For Parent Buddies

The purpose of this program is to connect you with other working parents within the organisation.

It will provide you with opportunities to connect, share experiences and learn some invaluable information.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS FOR BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL BUDDY RELATIONSHIP

Set up your first meeting well.

You may find it helpful to ask each other the following:

- What do you hope to get from your Buddy connection? How do you see the relationship working? Aligning goals, setting basic ground rules and agreeing to a communication approach that works for both of you can improve the likelihood of this relationship thriving.
- Discuss how often you would like to meet (generate recurring meetings—don't cancel!)
- What things are going to be too personal and where are the boundaries going to be set? It may be worth keeping these in mind, and having a discussion around boundaries in order to develop and maintain a supportive and respectful relationship.
- What is our commitment to confidentiality?
- Do you each prefer to set activities or discussion topics ahead of time, or take things as they come? There is no 'one' way to navigate the program, it is simply about finding the style that works well for both of you.

Be clear on your role.

Your role is to share perspectives, actively listen, empathise and ask insightful questions to learn from your buddy, provide advice and help your buddy to problem solve. However, you are not responsible for solving your buddy's challenges. You should provide support by encouraging them to take action, build plans together and follow up on agreed actions.

You are not a counsellor; however, it is important to be able to identify and refer your buddy to professional supports when needed. Be aware and look out for signs of mental distress ([click here](#)). Take a look at the resources available to support you in your organisation, and make sure you know contact details for your organisation's EAP (free, confidential counselling service).

Nurture trust.

All information exchanged between you and your buddy should be kept confidential, however there may be times when you become concerned about your buddy, and you feel it is necessary to break confidentiality. It's important that you and your buddy have had a conversation about confidentiality upfront, so that you can agree the limits of it.

One way to say this is: *"Shall we agree that everything we talk about here is confidential, unless one of us ever believes the other is at risk of harm? In that case I feel we may need to break that confidentiality, but only after discussing with each other. What are your thoughts?"*

Respect each others' time.

As buddies, it's important that you honour the commitment you have made to each other. It can be disheartening for parents to have their meeting cancelled or regularly pushed back as it sends a signal that the relationship is not valued.

Invest in the relationship.

Be accessible and avoid cancelling meetings whenever possible.

Share resources.

Become familiar with resources that are available within your organisation, and externally, and share this with your Buddy.

Recognise that needs may change over time.

It's healthy to gain differing perspectives by switching buddies occasionally (you can still retain the connection informally).



It's always a good idea to check in on the lows of parenthood and the highs of parenthood since the last meeting—it provides a good ice breaker too, as you get to know each other.