

9 Things to Include in Your Children in the Workplace Policy



Is your organization ready for the next wave of COVID-19 school and daycare closures?

With public health officials warning of a second surge of COVID-19, HR directors must brace for a new round of staffing shortages in case the schools and daycare facilities must shut down again. One possibility worth considering is letting working parents bring their young children to work. While this proved an effective approach for some organizations during the first COVID-19 surge, it also creates a host of health, safety and productivity risks. The good news is that you can manage these risks by implementing a policy that includes 9 protections.

1. Statement of Limitations

Employees need to understand right up front that bringing their kids to work is a privilege and not a right, and that they may only benefit from it if they follow all of the policy ground rules you've put in place to ensure everybody's health, safety and productivity (Policy, Secs. 1 and 2).

2. Effective Date

List the date your policy begins (Policy, Sec. 2).

3. Exclusion of Sick and Symptomatic Kids

The last thing you want employees to do is bring kids with COVID-19 or symptoms to work with them where they can infect others. In accordance with current public health guidelines, the exclusion should also apply to any children who've been out of the province (unless it's a jurisdiction that's part of a bubble you're in, e.g., the Atlantic provinces) or in close contact (within 2 meters) for 15 or more minutes with a person who's confirmed to have the virus (Policy, Sec. 4).

4. Need for Notification and Permission

Requiring advance notification and permission from a supervisor or HR is an absolute must to maintain control so you can exercise veto power—for example, denying permission to key personnel requiring 100% focus at all times—and track which employees are bringing how many kids at any given time (Policy, Sec. 5).

5. Employee Responsibilities

List the things employees are responsible for doing to ensure their kids don't create hazards or distractions while they're at the workplace:

- Keeping the kids in the office with them at all times (assuming you're not offering onsite childcare or daycare) (Policy, Sec. 6.1);
- Accompanying their kids to the bathroom (Policy, Sec. 6.1);
- Not leaving the premises during work without taking the kids with them (Policy, Sec. 6.1);
- Ensuring the kids' safety (Policy, Sec. 6.2);
- Making sure their kids follow social distancing, hygiene and other health and safety rules while at the site (Policy, Sec. 6.2);
- Not taking the kids into company vehicles while performing job duties (Policy, Sec. 6.3); and
- Making sure the kids are well-behaved, quiet and non-disruptive (Policy, Sec. 6.4).

6. Complaints Procedure

Experienced HR directors caution that when you let employees bring their kids to work, you need to be prepared for other employees to complain. The one thing you don't want is for employees to directly confront their co-workers about their kids. So, make it clear that employees have the right to complain but only if they take their gripes to a designated supervisor or HR. Also promise to keep complaints anonymous to the extent possible to avoid feuds and repercussions (Policy, Sec. 7).

7. Revocation of Privileges

Clearly state that failure to comply with the policy may be grounds for revocation of the privilege to bring children to work and may result in discipline in accordance with organizational policies and procedures (Policy, Sec. 8).

8. Revocation of Policy

For most organizations, allowing employees' children at the workplace will be a temporary expedient made necessary by the closure of schools and daycare facilities. It's important that employees recognize this and understand that you can revoke or revise the policy at any time. Revocation could get tricky if it's sudden and doesn't give employees time to make alternative childcare arrangements. So, promise to do your best to give employees reasonable advance notice of revocation so that they can get the necessary coverage (Policy, Sec. 9).

9. Waiver and Acknowledgement

To defuse the risk of liability to employees if something bad happens to their children at the workplace, include legal language indicating employees agreement to waive their right to sue "in consideration" for your allowing them to bring their kids to work and ensure each employee signs it (Policy, Appendix).