

# Dos and don'ts for conversations with working parents



Embedding flexibility, drawing boundaries, setting clear goals, trying different schedules, asking for help. With the lines between work and life more blurred than ever, working parents are bringing challenging questions to HR and their managers. How are you approaching these conversations? Share this guide, created with Maven Career Coach Sara Taylor Tans, as an internal reference to ensure you're talking the talk and truly being supportive.



**Do:** Ask your parents questions that focus on their well-being.

Many of your working parents are operating on the bottom rungs of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. They are often managing basic needs, safety, and security right now. Questions to ask them might include:

- "What's going well for you this week?"
- "What's worrying you at the moment?"
- "What can I do to better support you this week?"



**Don't:** Make them feel like they need to apologize for their needs as a parent. Normalize conversations about flexible working hours or managing interruptions from kids. If you're hearing the word "sorry," question what you could do differently to level-set on your team.



**Do: Actively listen and assess when to empathize and when to problem solve.** When you're talking to working parents, don't always listen to respond or troubleshoot. Sometimes an empathetic "I hear you" or "I'm here for you" is what they're looking for in the moment.



**Don't: Assume your working parents are feeling the same from day to day.** Like everyone, parents are having some good days and some days that feel completely overwhelming. Acknowledge that the uncertainty around the future, the constant change, and the seemingly endless family decisions around the virus are going to take their toll. There will be moments of weariness, anxiety, and even grief.

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**Do: Communicate directly and often.** Connect with your employees regularly. Schedule 1:1 meetings. Listen to them. Keep them informed. Ask for candid feedback. Give them a regular space where they can ask questions and share how things are going. This is especially important for employees working from home.



**Don't: Assume your working parents all share the same needs or challenges.** Whether it's child care, virtual school, finances, or navigating parenting during work hours, each parent has their own unique set of circumstances and struggles during these times. Supporting your parents as individuals will be the most effective way to make them feel seen and heard.



**Do: Remind your working parents what resources they have available to them within the organization.** This might include things like flexible hours policies, parent employee resource groups, health and wellness benefits, support for working from home, or HR resource hubs.



**Don't: Try to offer tips for managing their home life or child care situation.** What has worked for you or another colleague likely won't work for others. Be mindful of when you're approaching a line of offering parenting advice, and steer clear. Only they know what's best for their family; just make them feel supported.



**Do: Be transparent about goals, performance, and job security.** Parents are dealing with so much uncertainty right now, which is adding to anxiety. Make sure they know where they stand at work, and have clear goals and performance metrics to keep them motivated and focused.



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