

Practices That Consider Different Family Forms and Situations

Objective

To identify different family forms and the needs arising from various family situations, promote gender equality and non-discrimination, and establish practices that take different family forms and situations into account in a family-friendly workplace.

Why?

Families come in many forms. Consequently, needs for support vary across family situations, and different types of flexibility may be necessary. A family-friendly workplace acknowledges diverse family forms and values family diversity. An open workplace atmosphere encourages discussion about the variety of family structures.

In Finland, more than one in three families with children is in some way diverse and differs from the traditionally assumed family model. It is worthwhile to prepare for different family situations and needs for flexibility in advance, even if such matters are not currently relevant at the workplace.

Recognize Different Family Forms and Situations

Examples of different family forms include:

- single-parent families, where the parent (sole custodian or joint custodian) lives with the child or children without a spouse/partner
- blended families, where at least one child under 18 comes from a previous relationship and the family may also have mutual children
- adoptive families, where the child has been adopted domestically or internationally
- families with children who require special support or care
- families in which a spouse or partner needs special care due to illness or another reason
- rainbow families, where one or more parents belong to a sexual and/or gender minority
- intercultural families, where the parents were born in different countries and have different cultural backgrounds as well as usually different native languages
- families with immigrant backgrounds
- multiple birth families (twins, triplets, quadruplets)
- childless families
- families hoping to have a child
- bonus parents—i.e., stepparents in blended families who are not biologically or legally related to the child
- foster and support families
- those who have lost a child, spouse/partner, or other close loved one

In addition, employees may have caregiving responsibilities for their own aging parents or other close relatives. For some, family may also include other relatives or pets.

Family-friendly practices—such as flexible working hours and schedules, opportunities for remote work, and reduced working time—apply to all family situations (see the “Practices for Reconciling Work and Family” method card).

Examples of Practices

Below are examples of practices that take different family forms and situations into account. You can choose the ones that best fit your workplace. The examples draw on the guide *Diverse Families in Working Life* produced by the Diverse Families network (Monimuotoiset perheet).

Strengthening the Competence

- Strengthen the ability of HR staff and supervisors to recognize various family forms and the related support needs. Offer training to build this competence.
- Respect the employee's own definition of their family and provide flexibility accordingly. If a family situation is unfamiliar, communicate this openly and show a genuine interest in learning more. Respect the employee's wish if they prefer to keep their family situation private.
- Create a safe and encouraging atmosphere in the workplace where employees feel comfortable sharing their family situations openly.
- Increase the entire work community's ability to discuss different family forms using appropriate terminology. Provide for example information sessions on the topic through internal channels and staff events. Allow mistakes during the learning process.
- Ensure that workplace guidelines and practices are inclusive of all genders, family forms, and employees who speak different languages.

Flexibility in Different Family Situations

Family-friendly practices include flexible working hours as well as jointly agreed arrangements for shifts and holidays – taking into account the needs of both employees with children and those without. In some family situations, greater flexibility may occasionally be needed.

Examples of family-friendly practices and flexibilities in different family situations:

- Allow all parents to attend prenatal and parental clinic appointments during working hours.
- Provide flexibility according to individual needs. For example, in single-parent families, flexibility may be needed when the employee has custody time or needs to pick up a child from another locality.
- Grant time off for adoption counselling or foster care preparation.

- Support adoptive parents in travelling to pick up their child.
- Support families receiving a child through placement. Notification may come quickly and require flexibility.
- Prepare for the fact that parents of multiples (twins, triplets, quadruplets) may need to care for their children at home longer compared to families with a single newborn.
- Support parents in rainbow families with family-friendly flexibility even if they do not have legal parenthood or custody, and even if the child lives mainly elsewhere.
- Offer family-friendly flexibility to bonus parents (stepparents), grandparents, and other adults actively involved in the child's life. Note that someone may become a grandparent through a blended or adoptive family.
- Provide flexibility to childless employees in matters related to family formation. For example, allow fertility treatment appointments during working hours and pay sick leave caused by fertility treatments.
- Provide flexibility in various caregiving situations, such as when caring for aging parents or other elderly relatives – for example, by allowing medical appointments or handling relatives' affairs by phone during working hours.
- Support an employee who has lost a child, spouse/partner, or other close loved one with paid leave. Offer remote work options, lighter duties, or other adjustments where possible.
- Recognize that families with children or young people who require special support may need extended support and more long-term flexibility.

Other Practices

- Grant paid leave for the sudden care of a sick child to all bonus parents, even if this is not specified in the collective agreement. Also take into account, for example, rainbow families and partnership families, where a child may have more than two parents
- Grant paid parenting leave days to the child's parents to whom the legal parent transfers parenting leave days from their own quota. For example, collective agreements do not always recognize all partnership and rainbow parents who are involved in a child's life .
- Provide adoptive parents taking parenting leave with the same number of paid parenting leave days as birth parents.

- Offer unpaid leave for family reasons or allow temporary remote work from abroad. For instance, a family that has moved to Finland from another country may have aging parents living far away.
- Provide funded childcare assistance for families of employees who travel for work during business trips.
- Grant paid leave to employees during the palliative care of a close relative.
- Pay the remaining paid portion of parenting leave if a child is stillborn or dies during the parenting leave period.
- Acknowledge and respect the ways in which people from other cultures and countries living in Finland express grief.

Work Community Practices

- Create an open and safe culture within the work community for discussing different family forms, childlessness, family formation, and crises.
- Allow employees or colleagues to define their own families. For example, ask who is included in their family.
- Avoid reinforcing traditional stereotypes – for example, by asking whether the mother will stay home to care for the child. Encourage fathers and other non-birthing parents to take parenting leave and to share leave equally.
- Avoid comments related to the body, gender, womanhood, or motherhood during pregnancy.
- Recognize that family-centered conversation may unintentionally make childless employees feel excluded.
- Ask how an employee who has lost a child, partner/spouse, or close loved one wishes the matter to be handled within the work community. Do not discuss the situation without the grieving person's permission.
- In crisis situations, invite employees to talk and offer support – but do not force them to talk.
- A colleague's grief can also evoke emotions within the work community. These can be addressed, for example, through professional supervision. However, do not discuss personal details.

Cooperation with Occupational Health Services

- Offer employees support and counselling through occupational health services, in addition to supervisors, during demanding or stressful family situations.
- Plan the return to work together with occupational health services for employees who have been absent due to a crisis. Examples include employees grieving a miscarriage, or the death of a child or spouse/partner.

Integrating Practices into the Workplace Gender Equality Plan

- Ensure that the workplace gender equality plan considers different forms of parenthood, family structures and situations, as well as the needs of employees without children.
- Inform staff about the family-friendly flexibilities and practices that recognize diverse family forms and situations.

See the other method cards

- [Practices for Reconciling Work and Family](#)
- [Parenting Leave Practices](#)
- [Practices for Preventing Pregnancy Discrimination and Parenting Leave Discrimination](#)
- [Family-Friendliness as Part of the Workplace Gender Equality Plan](#)

Sources and further information

- [Balancing work and family | Finnish Institute of Occupational Health](#)
- [The many faces of Finnish families | Diverse Families Network](#)
- [A bereaved person in the work community | Surevan kohtaaminen](#)

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