

COMPANIES WITH CHILDCARE BENEFITS FOR WORKING MOTHERS



Would you like to drop your kids off at a licensed day care center next door to your workplace and share lunch with them? Are you looking for a place to take a sick child? What if there was a prenatal education program at work to help your pregnancy go smoothly? Wouldn't it be nice to return to work after delivery with access to a lactation room?

These are just some of the new childcare benefits employers are offering to soothe the troubled souls of working parents. A working parent's biggest concern is often not the availability and expense of company life insurance, but the prospect of finding a safe and happy environment for one's children during the workday. With innovative and long overdue childcare benefits, some firms are finally providing their employees with the peace of mind they need to concentrate fully on their jobs. And the payoff for employers is just as profound. Their bottom line improves by reducing absenteeism, increasing productivity, and boosting recruitment and retention efforts.

The workplace of the new millennium will be composed of many single parents.

Finding Joy in All Parts of Life

In Austin, TX, **Motorola** built a child development center just across the street from each of its three new employee activity centers. The independently run centers, which are also open to non-Motorola families, take care of children from six weeks to six years old. Motorola gives its own employees preferred placement and subsidizes the cost.

These centers help employees find more joy in their lives, at home and at work. We know that employees want three things besides a paycheck: a meaningful life, peace of mind, and more time. Our programs aim to fill those basic human needs.

Benefits for Moms, Babies, and Bosses

CIGNA Corporation provides a unique benefit to new Moms who want to balance their new babies and existing careers. The company, which has a high percentage of female workers, has instituted an on-site "Working Well Moms" lactation program, which supports quick return to work for new mothers who wish to breastfeed. The rate of mothers who continue to breastfeed beyond six months is three times the national average at CIGNA. The program provides mothers with a professional lactation consultant before and after they give birth, access to a private room, a hospital-grade breast pump, refrigeration, a carry case, and supplies. Such progressive measures have helped to make CIGNA one of Working Mother magazine's best companies.

The payoff for the company? CIGNA's program has reduced medical costs for breastfeeding mothers and their children by over \$200,000 annually. The company also saves an annual \$60,000 through reduced absenteeism among breastfeeding mothers at more than 250 CIGNA offices. With the cost savings, this program has a clear business benefit, while also benefiting employees.

In fact, many companies now offer special wellness programs, such as well-baby/child care and prenatal advice. Occupational health nurses at BankOne--one of the nation's largest banks--host an ongoing series of lunchtime seminars. "Healthy Moms-Healthy Babies" covers everything that expectant mothers need to know to ensure safe, healthy deliveries. And BankOne actually pays its employees for completing the course.

A full 70 percent of its 95,000 employees are women, making pregnancy-related expenses a huge part of the company's annual healthcare bill. Expectant women who participate in the prenatal education program have fewer C-sections, fewer low-birthweight babies, and lower pregnancy-related costs.

The Federal Bureau of Infants?

On-site childcare now extends beyond the private sector, where companies are using benefits of every kind to attract scarce talent, to more conservative areas like government employment. At the remote Federal Bureau of Investigations complex in Clarksburg, WV, where federal investigators examine fingerprints and conduct background checks for handguns, a state-of-the-art child development center sits beside the sprawling FBI complex in a private wooded setting. A non-profit corporation runs the center, serving 150 children of various ages. Tuition is fully paid by employees, not taxpayers.

Landing a spot in a quality childcare center near work is a working parent's version of Nirvana. A few forward-thinking companies contract directly with benefits providers who operate 24-hour referral hotlines. Through these services--underwritten by the employer--an employee can get pre-qualified leads to childcare providers or even guaranteed placement. A host of other referral services are also provided, including legal, marital, and mental health consultation.

A Common Problem Solved

"I don't feel well." These four words strike panic in the heart of every working parent. It's a nightmare, and 500,000 working parents are forced to cope with the dilemma every workday. Parents and caregivers lose an estimated 5 to 29 workdays per year because of sick children.

Get Well Centers, a Nashville-based enterprise staffed with healthcare and childcare professionals, is one company that works with employers to provide care for their employees' sick children. Employers buy a certain number of sick-child-care days per month to help parents with ill children concentrate on something other than fevers and flu. Employees also want backup care when normal childcare fails. Operating much like sick-child-care, the backup care concept covers working parents on non-school days or when the regular care provider is unavailable.

The Balancing Act

The workplace of the new millennium, with its anticipated shortage of 2 million skilled workers, will be composed of an increasing number of women and single parents. These employees are already asking for childcare benefits that allow them to balance work and family life. Many employers are aware of this trend--and are making fundamental changes to meet demand.