



Family-Friendly Workplaces

Good for Families – Good for Business – Good for the Community

It is no secret among locals that San Luis Obispo is a great place to live. It also happens to be one of the country's most expensive places to live, especially for families when they first start raising kids. The parental and budgetary balancing act starts early on the Central Coast, as we seek ways to maximize our time with our young children while also sustaining an income that keeps us in our homes, pays for quality childcare, and buys other basics to grow thriving families.

Families with young children can't do it all on their own.

Fortunately, across the country and in San Luis Obispo, employers and governments are stepping up to develop "family-friendly workplace" policies and practices that recognize the needs of young families. We hear almost daily news of tech companies racing to create innovative family friendly benefits to recruit and retain the best and brightest.

Companies like Facebook, Google, Microsoft, and Patagonia have figured out investing in family-friendly workplace policies is a win-win. California is one of only three states in the country with a paid family leave policy. In our own city, we can boast a growing list of employers who are adopting innovative practices to support families in the workforce.

What IS a family-friendly workplace?

A family-friendly workplace is one whose policies make it possible for employees to more easily balance family and work.

Employers small and large can put in place a variety of family-friendly workplace policies and practices to benefit their businesses, their parenting workforce, and their community. Take a look at a few of the most common examples:

- **Flex-time** allows people to choose when they work, as long as they put in their hours every week. For employees with family obligations, providing these individuals with control over their time is one of the most valuable benefits an employer can offer.
- With **telecommuting**, an employee may work from home or some other remote site some or all of the time.
- **Job sharing** involves two (or more) employees sharing a single position, each working a portion of the necessary time.
- **Breastfeeding Accommodation.** Employers now have a *legal* obligation to provide time and private space (*not* a bathroom) for a mother to pump milk.
- **Childcare.** On-site child care is an ideal option, and there are also many other alternatives for employers, such as subsidizing employees' child care, providing referrals to reliable child care, or reserving slots at nearby facilities.
- **Family Leave.** The time immediately following the birth of a child is intense and important for families. California has one of the nation's most generous family leave policies, offering up to 3 months of partially paid leave (60% wage replacement and 70% for low-income workers). 2017 state legislation extended unpaid family leave to individuals working for employers with between 20 and 49 employees. Some employers are finding ways to augment these policies by offering additional weeks of paid or unpaid leave and/or fuller compensation during leave.

Everyone stands to benefit from a family-friendly workplace culture: businesses, employees and their children, and our community overall. By supporting working parents, **businesses** can maximize employee productivity and corporate profits, grow loyalty and morale, increase employee retention, strengthen recruitment effectiveness, and allow employees to improve their economic status and quality of life. **Employees** who feel that their family responsibilities are valued by their employers are less stressed, more successful in balancing work and family life, more loyal and committed to their employers, more satisfied with their jobs, and more likely to want to remain with their employers. **Children** receive the early undivided and low-stress attention they need from their parents during their early years, and get to play and learn in high-quality childcare and preschool while their parents are at work.

And **communities**? Today's brain researchers *and* economists are both reminding us of the societal return on investment when we pay closer attention to families during early childhood. An estimated 80% of a child's brain is fully developed by the time she is three years old. Nobel Laureate Economist James Heckman points out that "the longer we wait to intervene in the life cycle of the child the more costly it is to remediate." To sum it up, we *all* reap rewards when we share a commitment to investing in a work-life balance environment that supports family life while cultivating a thriving economy.

WANT MORE INFORMATION OR INSPIRATION?

[Families and Work Institute](#) (FWI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization that studies the changing workforce, family and community.

[Working Mother 100 Best Companies for Working Moms](#) is an annual list of employers that meet the national magazine's criteria for family-friendly employers.

[Office of Women's Health, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services](#) provides employer solutions to supporting nursing moms at the workplace.

**-Wendy Wendt, Executive Director
First 5 San Luis Obispo County**

First 5 SLO County is a public agency that allocates funds and advocates quality programs and services supporting children prenatal to 5, to ensure that every child is healthy and ready to learn.

Familiar with local examples of family-friendly workplaces in action? Interested in being part of an ongoing conversation to build more? Contact us at First 5! 805-781-4058 or first5@first5slo.org.