



Workplace family rooms

Work life balance fact sheet 11

What is a workplace family room?

A family room is a designated private area that allows employees to continue working while managing short-term dependent care responsibilities. The family room can be used when:

- caring for a child or dependent suffering and/or recovering from a non-contagious illness;
- regular care arrangements have broken down; or
- breast feeding and expressing milk.

Family rooms may provide a range of facilities including a fully functioning workstation, kitchen facilities, baby changing facilities, a sofa bed or cot, television, DVDs, books and toys.

Establishing a family room is not a legislative requirement in Western Australia. The decision to provide such a facility generally rests with the employer.

Benefits of a workplace family room

Providing a family room is a relatively low cost initiative that can:

- minimise the disruption to other employees by children being brought to work;
- reduce absenteeism and turnover, as employees with family responsibilities can continue their regular work duties;
- enhance employee morale, productivity and commitment;
- be an attraction incentive for potential employees; and
- actively promote businesses as family friendly and supportive of work life balance.

How to implement a family room

Identify the need

Surveying staff will help identify the kind of assistance required by employees with family responsibilities. If employees need assistance with emergency dependent care, then establishing a family room is an appropriate option.

Allocate an area

Allocating an area to serve as a family room is dependent on the nature of work being performed, along with business and operational requirements. In smaller offices with limited space, employers

may choose to set aside an area (rather than a designated room) adjacent to the employee's normal workstation.

The family room or area should be:

- close to kitchen and toilet facilities;
- easy to access; and
- not likely to disrupt the work of other employees.

Set up the family room

Involve employees in the process to ensure that the family room will be suitable. If possible, visit family rooms in other workplaces to gather ideas. Allocate a budget for renovation and purchase of furniture and equipment.

Develop a family room policy

For some smaller employers an informal, ad hoc arrangement may be suitable. Other employers may opt to have a formal family room policy covering matters such as safety, security and responsibilities. Any policy should provide clear guidelines on the family room's purpose, rules and booking requirements.

Use of disclaimer forms

Employers should consider requiring employees to sign a disclaimer form before using the family room, confirming they agree to comply with the policy. Employers should seek legal advice if using disclaimer forms to avoid responsibility for any injury, loss or damage associated with use of the family room.

Occupational safety and health

The *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984* places certain duties on employers and employees in preventing accidents and injury in the workplace. A family room may raise concerns about the safety of the work environment for non-employees such as children. It may also be an occupational health risk to allow family members with infectious diseases into the workplace. Employers should contact WorkSafe on 1300 307 877 to discuss their duty of care responsibilities.

Insurance

Employers should determine whether their public liability insurance extends to covering accidents that occur in the family room – particularly where non-employees are involved.

Alternatives to a family room

Establishing a family room in the workplace might not suit all workplaces. In some cases, the nature of work may not allow employees to work away from their normal area to supervise family members. Likewise, small businesses may not have the available space.

Employers can consider a range of alternative options for employees needing to provide emergency care for their dependants, including:

- supporting employees in using their carer's leave entitlement;
- allowing employees to work from home or at a different work location; and
- providing flexible working hours.

Checklist for establishing a family room

- Ask employees about the need for a family room.
- Identify a suitable room or area in the workplace.
- Seek ideas from other organisations.
- Allocate a budget for renovation and/or necessary items.
- Develop a clear policy for using the family room.
- Develop a disclaimer form for using the family room.
- Consider any occupational safety and health issues that may arise.
- Ensure insurance policy extends to non-employees using the room.
- Consider other work life balance initiatives where appropriate.

Where to go for more information

Further information about work life balance strategies is available from the Department of Commerce work life balance website www.worklife.wa.gov.au