

2011 OSEP Leadership Mega Conference

Collaboration to Achieve Success from Cradle to Career 2.0



Workplace Supports for Families of Children and Youth with Disabilities:

Lessons from human resource professionals and employed parents

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NIDRR-funded Research

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Work-Family Challenges



Employed family members raising children/youth with disabilities report:

- Significant overlap in time and attention demands across exceptional care responsibilities & work obligations.
- Diminished access to community resources & services designed for children/youth with typical development.
- Benefit from workplace supports, e.g., flexible work arrangements, that enhance work-family integration.

Work-Life Integration Research



- Focus group method used to study workplace experiences related to flexibility requests, communication strategies, and supportive practices.
- Outcomes of disclosing vs. concealing family needs at the workplace.
- Focus Group Participants:
 - 28 family members raising children/youth with mental health difficulties
 - 17 human resource (HR) professionals in large organizations.

Employed Family Members



- Continual need for work adjustments.
- Experienced “courtesy stigmatization” in the workplace.
- Made decisions to disclose/conceal their family’s unique needs based on:
 - Past experiences with disclosure, stigmatization.
 - Perceived culture of the organization.
 - Confidence in ability to competently communicate needs and successfully negotiate for workplace supports.

Disclosure Decision Outcomes

DISCLOSURE

- Formal supports accessed
- Flexible work arrangements secured
- Informal support from supervisors, co-workers increased
- Others in the workplace educated about diverse family needs

CONCEALMENT

- Courtesy stigmatization avoided
- Equity concerns absent
- Performance scrutiny minimized
- Worries from home escaped
- “Normal appearing” work life maintained

Human Resource Professionals



- Concerned with equity issues when the employee seeks flexible work arrangements or workplace supports.
- Negotiated the boundaries of communication—respecting privacy, confidentiality.
- Had a dual focus: creating a positive work climate while protecting the company from negative legal consequences.

Improving Family Supports for Integration



- Service providers working with families raising children/youth with disabilities can help by:
 - Exploring the challenges & strategies of work-family integration, including disclosure concerns.
 - Gaining & sharing knowledge about legal work-family provisions and workplace supports.
- Workplace HR and supervisors can help by:
 - Gaining knowledge about challenges facing employees with exceptional care responsibilities.
 - Developing effective communication strategies to use in work-family negotiations.



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Work-Life Integration Resources



- HR Training Manual: *Children/Youth with Disabilities: Their Parents Are YOUR Employees.*
 - <http://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/pbWorkLifeTrainingManual.pdf>
- Work-Life Integration Project Website:
 - http://www.rtc.pdx.edu/pgProj_4work-life.shtml
- Work-Life Factsheet:
 - http://www.rtc.pdx.edu/PDF/pbWork-Life_WorkplaceSupportsFactSheet.pdf