

 FIRST THINGS FIRST

A TOOLKIT FOR CHILD CARE: EVERYONE'S BUSINESS





Child care plays an important role in Arizona's economy. Our state's economic development starts with early childhood development.

Since 60% of young children in Arizona live in households where all adults work, child care is essential in helping prepare babies, toddlers and preschoolers for future success in school. The early years matter because from birth to age 5, a child's brain grows faster than at any other time in life. Daily interactions with the adults in their lives — including with child care providers — shape how children's brains develop and impact how well they learn and grow. Research shows that essential skills like problem-solving, communication, teamwork and self-discipline start developing in the first five years. These are the skills that employers need, making child care a key to preparing our future workforce.

Child care is also an essential workforce support for parents and their employers. Access to dependable and affordable child care is important for working families. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation found that child care challenges cost the Arizona economy about \$1.7 billion annually. These include costs due to employee absences and turnover and loss of tax revenue.

Bottom lines suffer as productivity declines and employee turnover costs grow because of the lack of accessible, affordable child care for working families.

This toolkit provides Arizona businesses with resources and information to help support working families with young children and our state's early childhood sector.

1. Become more informed about early care and education:

- Connect with [First Things First](#) in your community to learn more about why early education matters to the bottom line and to join our state's early childhood movement.
- Learn how child care impacts your employees through an employee survey (example questions in [Appendix 1](#)).



2. Help families access quality, reliable child care:

HR departments can provide information and resources to help families find accessible and affordable child care. These include:

- **Arizona's Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) helpline:** 1-800-308-9000. The [CCR&R website](#) has information about tax credits and other types of assistance that may be available to families.
- Working families with incomes at or below 165% of the federal poverty level may be eligible for **child care assistance**. Information can be found on the [Arizona Department of Economic Security, Division of Child Care website](#).
- Employees can check if they qualify for **First Things First Quality First child care scholarships** - which are limited to families at or below 300% of the federal poverty level and available on a limited basis - by emailing regionalscholarships@vsuw.org.
- Some families who are at or below the federal poverty level may qualify for **Head Start and Early Head Start**. Eligible families can use the [Head Start Locator](#) to find a program.

3. Employers can directly help families with child care challenges:

- Create **flexible benefit plans**, such as a Flexible Spending Account, to help support child care costs. Flexible Spending Accounts provide a tax break for families and are available through the benefits package offered by a company. They allow employees to set aside money from each paycheck pre-tax to be used for certain dependent care. [The Family Forward NC website](#) offers general information on how employers can set up FSAs for employees and shows a sample policy.
- Support **back-up child care** options, which offers a reliable alternative for unexpected child care disruptions. Businesses can partner with local child care providers who offer back-up care options. For more information, see a [guide provided by Pulse at the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research](#).
- Some employers have set up **on-site or near-site child care programs**. Employers can sponsor a child care program on or near company premises and provide some level of financial support for rent, build-out and/or the operating costs of the program. Read examples and background information in the [Pulse guide](#).



Due to the complexities of operating a child care program, employers often outsource the program to professional child care organizations. To learn more about **employer sponsored/independently operated child care programs** contact:

[Bright Horizons Family Solutions](#)

[Kindercare Education at Work](#)

Consider partnering with other nearby employers to share the expenses of operating a child care program for employees. This option is particularly suitable for small companies, city-center businesses, industrial parks, shopping malls and medical complexes.

4. Help employees and their young children with family-friendly policies:

- Provide reliable work schedules to help families better plan for their child care needs.
 - Predictive scheduling - advance notice of weekly and on-call shift scheduling - can help retain employees and attract new hires.
 - Predictive scheduling can save money because it reduces the frequency of absenteeism, which can decrease revenue and drive up operational costs.
 - Consider how work schedules impact working parents. This [Harvard Business Journal article](#) suggests that businesses consider four questions when rethinking work schedules.
- Consider wage levels. The cost of child care is one of the biggest expenses families face. The average annual cost of infant care in Arizona is \$912 per month — which is \$10,948 annually, more than in-state tuition for a four-year public college.
- Examine the current parental leave policy, if there is one, and consider how it can offer positive benefits to new parents and their infants as well as to the employer, such as increasing retention. Parental leave is paid leave for the birth, adoption, or acceptance of foster placement of a child that is separate from vacation or sick leave. Many health organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, recommend a minimum of 12 weeks of paid parental leave. For the benefits of parental leave, and a sample policy, visit the [Family Forward NC website](#).



- Consider innovative family-friendly policies such as lactation rooms and appropriate break times and parent-to-parent support groups. Some of these innovative policies are described in [this article](#). In addition, [SHRM, the Society for Human Resource Management](#), offers numerous resources on innovative workplace policies.

5. Businesses can use their voice:

- As trusted community members who see firsthand the impact of child care challenges on employees, the business community voice is critical to encourage early childhood investments. When speaking about the importance of education, always include early childhood and consider using the term “cradle to career” which clearly shows the focus on the first five years.
- Act locally. Get involved by [applying to volunteer on an FTF regional partnership council](#) or with other early childhood organizations.
- Be aware of policies impacting young children and their families. Keep informed by [signing up for periodic policy updates from FTF](#).

6. Help during the current child care crisis:

- Know who the child care providers are in your community, and your employees’ child care providers. Adopt a local early childhood program for focused volunteer efforts, such as painting, clean-ups and donations of children’s books.
- Share talents and expertise such as accounting skills, management training, construction, tech, etc with a local early childhood program. Contact [Southwest Human Development Early Childhood Business Solutions](#) for support.
- The [Early Childhood Scholarship Fund](#) at the Arizona Community Foundation directly supports FTF Quality First Scholarships which give access to high-quality early education for young children from low-income families in Arizona. Donations can be made on the [Arizona Community Foundation website](#).



Appendix 1

[Sample employee survey](#) from Cleo, a parenting benefits company, some questions include:

What best describes your work schedule with the company?

How would you best describe how you are currently working - remotely, in-person, hybrid?

If you are a parent, which age groups do your children fall into?

Prior to COVID-19, what was your childcare arrangement?

What are your greatest challenges in life and work currently?

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation Center for Education and Workforce has developed an [employee child care needs survey](#), questions include:

1. How many children under six, who are NOT enrolled in kindergarten, live with you and for whom you are responsible?
2. Age group of each of your children.
3. What kinds of childcare arrangements do you typically use for these children? Chose as many as you like:
 - A. Child stays at home with a parent, stepparent, or guardian
 - B. Child stays with another family member or friend
 - C. Child stays with a person who cares for several children
 - D. Child attends a child care center
 - E. Child attends preschool
 - F. Other
4. What are the primary reasons that you selected this childcare arrangement? Select all that apply.
 - A. Financial reasons/affordability
 - B. Proximity to your home or work
 - C. Perceived quality/reputation
 - D. Recommendation/referral (from a friend, family, etc.)
 - E. Personal preference
 - F. Hours of operation
 - G. Waitlist/No open slots
 - H. Something else