

BACKGROUND

Child care is one of the biggest challenges for working families since it needs to be affordable, dependable, and of high quality. Though women now comprise half of the U.S. workforce, our workplaces still function on the assumption of the male breadwinner and the female caregiver. In the absence of workplace policies like maternity/parental leave, many working parents are faced with the daunting task of finding reliable, affordable and quality child care within weeks of a new child's arrival. Even past the infant/toddler care stage, child care continues to remain a challenge as working parents struggle to negotiate preschool care, before- and/or after-school care, holiday care and emergency care.

A good and reliable child care arrangement means fewer missed workdays for parents, greater stability and productivity for employers and a good foundation for children. Bargaining issues around child care can take several directions, each of which can be discussed in terms of quality: (1) the quality of benefits for parents who need care for their children; (2) the quality of the child care itself, and (3) the quality of workplace rights, wages, and benefits for child care workers.

FEDERAL AND STATE SUPPORT

Federal and state tax credits and financial assistance programs can help working parents defray the high cost of child care:

- At the federal level, the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit offers up to \$6,000 for child care and adult day care expenses. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is available to certain workers with low to moderate wages. The Dependent Care Assistance Program (DCAP) allows workers to take a pre-tax deduction for eligible dependent care expenses from their pay. DCAPs must be set up through the employer.
- Low-income parents may also be eligible for cash aid or child care subsidies through state-run programs.

In addition, child care scholarships may also be available from local non-profit agencies, community or faith-based organizations.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

In general, contract language should include the intention to provide an environment where workers have the ability to meet regular child care needs and the flexibility to find child care in case of an emergency. Contract terms can offer concrete resources on where parents can send their children while they work and where they can leave their children should an emergency arise. Options for child care assistance are varied, so unions may want to conduct a survey to determine the specific needs of its members. Here are several options that unions can bargain for:

Labor-management committee

Form a committee to discern employee child care needs, discuss the best ways to fund them, and determine which options to pursue. This is often a good first step.

Resource & referral services

Find services can help match employees with appropriate and available child care

providers by taking each family's circumstances into consideration. This can be provided either in-house or through a contracted external referral agency.

Pre-tax programs

Bargain for a dependent care assistance plan or flexible spending account that allows workers to set aside a portion of their earnings (up to \$5,000) in a tax-free account to help pay child care costs. This is an IRS program and there is no cost to employer except administration of the plan. Contact a benefits specialist for more information.

Child care funds

Bargain for the employer to contribute to a fund that provides direct cash payments or a reimbursement for child care expenses. Child care funds can also pay for last-minute care for a sick child, backup in case of one's own emergency, holiday care, or after-hours care. If the company has other funds that are underutilized, see if the money can be transferred to address child care.

Subsidized child care

Negotiate for the employer to arrange subsidized slots at local child care centers or family child care, including before/after school care. Employers can also provide

vouchers to use at one's own childcare facility. Be sure that these centers provide [quality child care](#).

On-site/near-site child care centers

Bargain for a child care facility either at the worksite or at another location in coordination with other companies. It is important to research this thoroughly, including assessing workers' needs before choosing it as an option.

Flexible sick time

Allow an employee to use his or her own sick time to care for a sick child. Another option is to create a leave bank, where employees can donate sick time to a parent who needs additional time off.

See our other fact sheets on Family Leave, Flexibility, Low Wage Worker Benefits and Paid Sick Time for more options to support working families.

A wide range of actual contract language is available for free in the Labor Project's LEARN WorkFamily database.
www.learnworkfamily.org

Get more information and download free resources: www.working-families.org

GET INVOLVED

In addition to bargaining for stronger contract language, it is equally important for unions to participate in efforts to advance family-friendly workplace policies at the local, state and national level.

Child Care Aware: Get information on how to get involved and take action on child care policy efforts in your state. usa.childcareaware.org

First Five Years Fund: Learn more about national child care policy efforts. www.ffyf.org

California Work & Family Coalition: Learn about and join the Labor Project's California-specific campaigns on issues such as family leave, caregiver discrimination, and paid sick days.
www.workfamilyCA.org

Family Values @ Work: Learn about and join efforts in states with labor-community coalitions working for paid sick days, family leave insurance and other policies that value families at work.
www.familyvaluesatwork.org