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UNITED WAY
West Tennessee

FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORKPLACE GUIDE

Building Thriving Workplaces
for West Tennessee Families

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why This Matters

The Business Case

Family-friendly workplaces drive measurable business results, including lower turnover, 31% fewer unplanned absences, and significantly higher employee engagement.¹ This guide provides practical policies you can implement immediately – regardless of your organization’s size or budget. Whether you’re starting small or building comprehensively, you’ll find clear pathways forward.

75% of the overall workforce are caregivers.²

Pathways to a Family-Friendly Workplace

Flexibility

Control over schedules and location



Social Connection

Belongingness and relationships



Childcare & Family Assistance

Caregiving Support



Wellness

Physical and mental health



Economic Stability

Financial Security



Quick Start

Read: pages 4-6, 12-13 → take assessment, choose 2-3 immediate policies

Best for: busy executives, small businesses

Strategic Approach

Read: full guide → understand ALICE, explore all 5 pathways, follow 90-day roadmap

Best for: HR professionals planning major changes

Become a Leader

Read: everything, then implement across all 5 pathways → measure ROI, apply for Best Place designation, inspire other employers

Best for: companies committed to excellence

Ready to assess where you are?



1. The Best Place for Working Parents, “Family Friendly Is Business Friendly,” July 2022.
2. The Best Place for Working Parents, “EBN: New tool proves family-friendly benefits drive ROI,” September 5, 2025.

LEADERSHIP LETTER

A Message from our Leadership

DEAR COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND PARTNERS

Welcome to the ALICE: Employee Engagement Guide.

In every corner of West Tennessee, hardworking families form the backbone of our communities. Yet, too many of them, those we call ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), continue to face difficult choices between essentials like housing, childcare, and healthcare. These families are not distant statistics; they are our teachers, caregivers, and essential workers – the people who keep our economy going and our region strong.

At United Way of West Tennessee, we believe that when ALICE families thrive, our entire community thrives. This guide is designed to illuminate both the challenges and the possibilities before us. It equips businesses, nonprofits, and civic leaders with the tools and data needed to better understand ALICE households and to implement meaningful, family-friendly policies that make a tangible difference.

The insights and recommendations within these pages serve as a call to action: to unite strategies across sectors, innovate in how we support working families, and strengthen the systems that sustain them. Together, we can ensure that every individual in West Tennessee – regardless of income – has the opportunity to build a stable, secure, and successful life.

We're grateful for your partnership, your advocacy, and your shared commitment to building a thriving West Tennessee. Thank you for joining us in standing with ALICE families – because when working families succeed, businesses and communities grow stronger together.

Warm Regards,



Matt Marshall

President/CEO
United Way of
West Tennessee



John Tucker

Regional President
& Board Chair
First Citizens
National Bank

THE BUSINESS CASE

Thriving Families. Thriving Businesses.

34% of employees planning to leave cite better benefits – like leave, flexibility, and wellness – as the main reason. ³

75% of U.S. mothers and half of U.S. fathers say they've passed up work opportunities, switched jobs, or quit to care for their children. ⁴

75% of employees agree they are more likely to remain with their employer because of family leave policies. ⁵

What Family-Friendly Policies Deliver

Business Impact:

- ↓ Reduction in turnover compared to industry averages ⁶
- ↓ 31% fewer unplanned absences due to family emergencies ⁷
- ↑ 40% improvement in recruitment success + offer acceptance rates ⁸
- ↑ Higher employee productivity and engagement across all metrics ⁹

Community Impact:

- Stronger, more stable families
- Better outcomes for children's healthy development
- More reliable and committed workforce
- Growing regional economy

The Cost of Inaction

The alternative is expensive: **\$2.6 BILLION** state loss in 2023 due to insufficient child care. ¹⁰

Businesses lost: \$497 million

Taxpayers lost: \$413 million

Working parents lost: \$1.65 billion

The Bottom Line

The question isn't whether you can afford to implement family-friendly policies.
The question is if you can afford not to.



- Ernst & Young Global Limited, "How the future is shaped by an untethered workforce," EY - Global Insights, accessed October 27, 2025.
- Danielle Paquette, "The surprising number of parents scaling back at work to care for kids," The Washington Post, August 6, 2015.
- Boston College Center for Work & Family, 2019, cited in CPL Leadership, "Don't Get Left Behind in the Changing Parental Leave Landscape," October 21, 2024.
- S&P Global & AARP, "Companies Expand Family-Friendly Policies, But Focus Favors Parents Over Caregivers," May 22, 2024.
- The Best Place for Working Parents, "Family Friendly Is Business Friendly," July 2022.
- Flexa Careers, "Future of Work Insights: the must-have family-friendly benefits for 2025," October 16, 2025.
- Best Place for Working Parents®, "Policies - Best Place for Working Parents®," January 15, 2025.
- Tennesseans for Quality Early Education, "Ongoing Child Care Crisis Costs Tennessee \$2.6 Billion Annually," August 11, 2024.

UNDERSTANDING ALICE

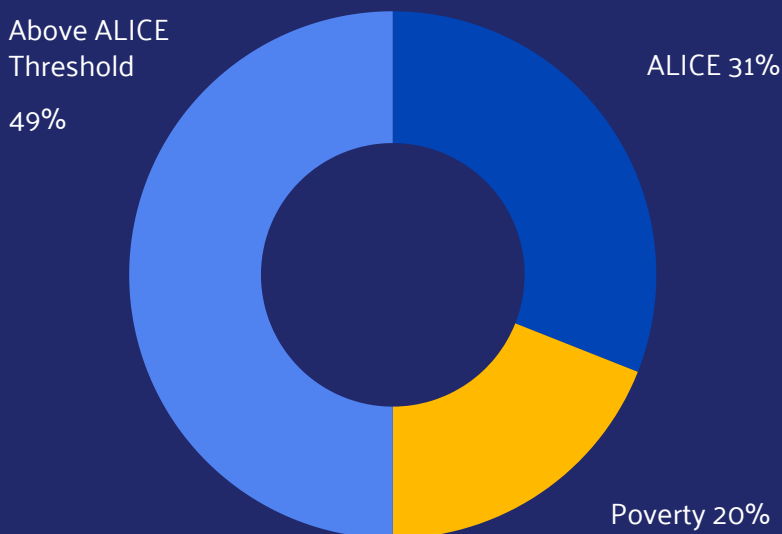
Asset, Limited, Income Constrained, Employed

These individuals and families work and earn above the poverty level, yet still live paycheck to paycheck, struggling to afford basic needs.

Family-friendly workplaces uplift everyone, but for those below the ALICE threshold, they offer a lifeline – breaking cycles of hardship.

Without supportive policies, these families – your employees, neighbors, and the backbone of your workforce – face impossible choices between earning a paycheck and caring for their loved ones.

2023 West Tennessee Snapshot



West Tennessee Households: 179,314
Households Below ALICE Threshold: 91,450
Median Household Income: \$50,695
Labor Force Participation Rate: 52%

Counties represented: Carroll, Chester, Crockett, Decatur, Dyer, Gibson, Hardeman, Hardin, Haywood, Henderson, Henry, Lake, Madison, McNairy, and Weakley

When Working Harder Isn't the Answer

32% of workers in Tennessee's 20 most common jobs lived in households that **couldn't afford basics**. Occupations with the largest share of workers in households below the ALICE threshold included:

- Personal care aides (62%)
- Fast food and counter workers (48%)
- Cooks (47%)
- Janitors and building cleaners (46%)
- Waiters and waitresses (45%)

Local Insights:
uwwt.org/meet-alice

National Dashboards:
unitedforalice.org

FIVE PATHWAYS

Supporting working families means looking beyond wages to address the real challenges they face every day. When employers invest in family-friendly practices, they create pathways that help employees build stability – strengthening their households, our businesses, and West Tennessee communities.

1. Flexibility

Employees have control over when and where work happens.

Key Stat: Two-thirds of U.S. workers rank workplace arrangements – including remote options and adjustable schedules – among their top five non-salary benefits.¹¹

Low Cost | Quick to Implement | High Impact



2. Social Connectedness

Employees feel belonging and build meaningful relationships.

Key Stat: Employees reporting loneliness miss work five times more often due to stress and twice as often due to illness.¹²

Low Cost | Quick to Implement | Medium-High Impact

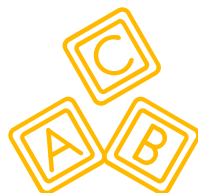


3. Childcare & Family Assistance

Employees receive practical help balancing work and caregiving.

Key Stat: Over half of working parents cite child care among their top three reasons to stay – just behind health care and PTO. For Gen Z parents, it's the #1 loyalty factor.¹³

Medium - High Investment | Medium-term | Medium-High Impact



4. Wellness

Employees' physical, mental, and emotional health are supported.

Key Stat: Nearly 70% of parents and caregivers experience mental health challenges, with over half reporting depression and anxiety symptoms.¹⁴

Medium Investment | Quick to Medium | High Impact



5. Economic Stability

Employees achieve financial security and have resources for growth.

Key Stat: Only 39% of Tennessee households living at or below the ALICE Threshold had enough savings to cover three months of basic expenses.¹⁵

Varies by Policy | Immediate to Medium | High Impact



11. FlexJobs. "Survey: US Employees Prioritize Workplace Flexibility." FlexJobs Employer Blog. Accessed October 28, 2025.

13. KinderCare. "2025 Parent Confidence Report." KinderCare for Employers. Accessed October 28, 2025.

15. United For ALICE. "Tennessee | UnitedForALICE." Accessed October 28, 2025.

12. Business Group on Health. "Social Connectedness: Building Bonds in the Workplace." Business Group on Health. Accessed October 28, 2025.

14. Verlenden, J.V., et al. "Mental Health Among Parents of Children Aged <18 Years and Unpaid Caregivers of Adults During the COVID-19 Pandemic – United States, December 2020 and February–March 2021." Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 71, no. 24 (June 17, 2022): 759-765.

FLEXIBILITY

When employees have control over when and where they work, they can manage both job responsibilities and family needs more effectively. Flexible work arrangements reduce the daily stress of juggling competing demands, improve employee retention, and signal that your organization values the whole person – not just their output.

71% of mothers have left or considered leaving a job due to lack of workplace flexibility.¹⁶

| Policy | Description | Cost | Time | Impact |
|----------------------|--|------|--------|--------|
| Flexible Work Hours | Adjustable start/end times within a range (7-9am arrival) | \$ | Quick | High |
| Remote/Hybrid Work | Employees work from home part or full-time using technology | \$ | Quick | High |
| Compressed Work Week | Employees work full-time hours in fewer days (4/10 schedule) | \$ | Quick | Medium |
| Shift Flexibility | Rotating or alternating shifts to accommodate preferences | \$ | Medium | Medium |
| Flexible Leave | Options for unpaid leave, sabbaticals, or extended time off | \$ | Quick | Medium |
| Parental Leave | Paid or unpaid time off for newborns, adopted children, or family care | \$\$ | Medium | High |
| Phased Retirement | Employees gradually reduce hours as they approach retirement | \$ | Medium | Low |

Policy in Action



Jackson Energy Authority
One thing you can count on.

Childbirth Leave: 6 weeks for birth mother

Bonding Leave: 2 additional weeks for birth mothers; 2 weeks for fathers and adoptive parents

Total Paid Leave for Birth Mothers: Up to 8 weeks

Family Care Leave: Up to 80 hours of sick leave per year to care for loved ones with medical needs

16. FlexJobs. "Lack of Flexible Work Keeps Moms from Staying in the Workforce."
Published January 11, 2022.

SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

When employees feel genuinely connected to their coworkers, they're more engaged, resilient, and committed to their work. Building authentic relationships at work creates the trust and support systems that help people navigate challenges – both professional and personal – and strengthens your entire organization.

Employees who form workplace friendships experience a 19% lower turnover rate compared to those who do not.¹⁷

| Policy | Description | Cost | Time | Impact |
|--------------------------|--|------|-----------|--------|
| Recognition Programs | Systems to acknowledge employees' contributions and milestones | \$ | Immediate | High |
| Team-Building Activities | Events, volunteer projects, workshops, or retreats | \$ | Quick | Medium |
| Workplace Social Events | Casual gatherings, celebrations, or team lunches | \$ | Quick | Medium |
| Employee Resource Groups | Employee-led groups based on shared identities or interests | \$ | Quick | Medium |
| Open Communication | Platforms for employees to share ideas, concerns, and feedback | \$ | Immediate | Medium |
| Volunteer Days | Paid time off for community service and team volunteering | \$\$ | Quick | Medium |
| Mentorship Programs | Pairing employees for career development and connection | \$ | Medium | Medium |

Implementation Tips

Design **inclusive** community activities.

Recognize that **night shift workers, remote staff, and introverts** have different needs.

Avoid one-size-fits-all approaches that exclude people.

Offer variety:

- In-person and virtual options
- High-energy + low-key activities
- During work hours + optional after-hours events

17. "Fostering Friendships: The Game Changer in Employee Retention." HR Exchange Network, September 26, 2024.

CHILDCARE & FAMILY ASSISTANCE

When employers help solve the childcare challenge, they remove one of the biggest barriers to workforce stability. Whether through on-site care, childcare subsidies, or backup care options, these supports allow parents to show up for work without constantly worrying about their children's care and safety.

Infant care costs more than in-state college tuition at nearly every Tennessee university.¹⁸

| Policy | Description | Cost | Time | Impact |
|-----------------------|--|--------|--------|-----------|
| Childcare Partnership | Negotiate discounts with local providers or offer referral support | \$ | Medium | High |
| Paid Parental Leave | Paid time off for new parents (birth, adoption, foster) | \$\$\$ | Medium | Very High |
| Emergency Backup Care | Temporary care services for unexpected situations | \$\$ | Medium | High |
| Lactation Support | Private rooms and flexible breaks for nursing mothers | \$ | Quick | Medium |
| Parenting Resources | Workshops, webinars, and counseling for parenting challenges | \$ | Quick | Medium |
| Elder Care Assistance | Resources and support for employees caring for aging parents | \$ | Quick | Medium |
| Adoption Assistance | Financial support for adoption-related expenses | \$\$ | Medium | Medium |

Policy in Action



\$5M investment in the Tyson Learning Center beside the Humboldt plant

Affordable, KinderCare-managed childcare for 100+ employee children

Rates: about \$1.60/hour, with hours matching plant shifts

Impact: 40% drop in childcare-related absenteeism and improved retention¹⁹

18. Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth, "State of the Child Report 2024" as referenced in The Tennessean, January 9, 2025.

19. "Tyson Foods' Child Care Solutions for Employees." Tennesseans for Quality Early Education (TQEE), July 22, 2025.

WELLNESS

Supporting employee wellness means recognizing that stress, exhaustion, and health concerns directly impact job performance – especially for working parents balancing family and work. Effective wellness initiatives provide accessible resources for physical and mental health, from flexible time for appointments to Employee Assistance Programs.

On average, workplace wellness programs reduce sick leave and related health cost by about 25%.²⁰

| Policy | Description | Cost | Time | Impact |
|---------------------|--|--------|-----------|------------|
| Healthcare Coverage | Medical, dental, and vision insurance | \$\$\$ | Medium | Very High |
| Mental Health/EAP | Employee Assistance Programs with counseling access | \$\$ | Quick | High |
| Paid Sick Leave | Dedicated days for illness and medical appointments | \$\$ | Quick | High |
| Mental Health Days | Specific PTO designated for mental health (separate from sick leave) | \$ | Immediate | Medium |
| Wellness Programs | Gym memberships, fitness challenges, yoga, meditation | \$ | Quick | Medium |
| Preventive Care | Health screenings, vaccinations, wellness check-ups | \$ | Quick | Low-Medium |

Policy in Action



On-site Family Health Center at DOT Foods' Dyersburg facility

Provides: primary care and wellness services for employees and families

Benefits: eliminates travel time and lowers out-of-pocket costs

Impact: helps workers address issues early, stay healthy, and reduce absenteeism

20. Baicker, K., Cutler, D., & Song, Z. (2010). Workplace Wellness Programs Can Generate Savings. NIH / Health Affairs, cited in: "Promoting Health and Wellness in the Workplace: A Unique Opportunity to Transform the Healthcare System." National Institutes of Health, Sep. 2006

ECONOMIC STABILITY

Economic stability requires more than just wages – it includes affordable healthcare, retirement benefits, paid time off for emergencies, and pathways to higher earnings. When employers address these financial resources together, they help employees build real security instead of just getting by paycheck to paycheck.

Only 39% of Tennessee households below the ALICE Threshold can cover three months of expenses in an emergency.²¹

| Policy | Description | Cost | Time | Impact |
|--------------------------|---|--------|-----------|-------------|
| Competitive Compensation | Wages aligned with cost of living and industry standards | \$\$\$ | Medium | Very High |
| 401(k) Matching | Employer contributions to retirement savings | \$\$ | Medium | Medium |
| Financial Counseling | Free access to professional financial guidance (via partners) | \$ | Immediate | Medium-High |
| Emergency Assistance | Grants or short-term loans for unexpected financial crises | \$\$ | Quick | High |
| Student Loan Assistance | Support for managing and repaying student debt | \$\$ | Medium | Medium |
| Tuition Reimbursement | Financial support for continuing education | \$\$ | Medium | Medium |
| Earned Wage Access | Access to earned wages before traditional payday | \$ | Quick | Medium |

Implementation Tips

Consider referring employees to the [Financial Empowerment Center](#).

[Completely free](#) for both employers and employees.

[High ROI](#): no budget needed, immediate impact

[Easy to implement](#): promote the resource and encourage employees to schedule appointments.

21. "An Update on Financial Hardship in Tennessee." United For ALICE, May 2024, p. 6. Accessed October 29, 2025.

YOUR PATH FORWARD

Quick Start (15 minutes)

Best for: Small businesses, busy leaders, anyone ready to act now

1. Assess (15 minutes)

Take the free Best Place for Working Parents assessment → bestplace4workingparents.com

2. Listen (this week)

Ask employees 3 simple questions:

- What challenges do you face balancing work and family?
- What one change would make the biggest difference?
- What would make you stay at this job longer?

3. Act (within 2 weeks)

Choose 2-3 quick-win policies:

- ✓ Flexible arrival times - \$0
- ✓ Financial counseling partnership - \$0
- ✓ Peer recognition program - \$0

Strategic Build (90 Days)

Best for: HR professionals, medium-sized organizations, comprehensive planners

Day 1-30 (foundation)

- ✓ Complete assessment and survey employees
- ✓ Form implementation team (HR, manager, employee rep.)
- ✓ Implement 2-3 quick wins immediately

Day 31-60 (planning)

- ✓ Review pages 7-11 and identify 5-8 policies for your workforce
- ✓ Research vendors (EAP providers, childcare partners)
- ✓ Calculate projected ROI
- ✓ Present business case to leadership and secure budget

Day 61-90 (launch)

- ✓ Train all managers on new policies before staff announcement
- ✓ Launch 3-5 major policies:
 - Paid parental leave (4-6 weeks)
 - Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
 - Childcare partnership or discount
- ✓ Begin tracking metrics (turnover, engagement, utilization)



Regional Leadership (12+ months)

Best for: Organizations committed to becoming model employers

- ✓ Implement comprehensive policies across all five pillars (pages 8-12)
- ✓ Measure and demonstrate ROI over time
- ✓ Apply for Best Place for Working Parents designation
- ✓ Share your story publicly to inspire other employers
- ✓ Mentor organizations starting their journey

Right-sizing Your Approach

Small (10-50 employees)

Your advantage: Personal touch and genuine flexibility

Start with: Flexible hours • Financial counseling • Recognition program

Medium (50-500 employees)

Your advantage: Scale for meaningful benefits, agility to respond

Add: Paid parental leave • EAP • Childcare partnerships • 401(k) match

Large (500+ employees)

Your responsibility: Set the regional standard and lead the community

Go comprehensive: Implement policies across all five pathways

Regardless of Size, the Goal is the Same.

Every organization – whether 10 employees or 10,000 – can take meaningful steps toward this goal. The path looks different, but the destination is the same: a workplace culture that recognizes employees as whole people with lives, families, and responsibilities beyond work.

Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.

Small changes create momentum. Momentum creates transformation. Transformation changes lives.



UNITED IS THE WAY

We're here to help you create a family-friendly workplace

We believe that when businesses thrive and families thrive, our entire community prospers. We provide free resources to support employers and their employees across our 15-county region.

ALICE Data & Insights

We provide regional reports, household budget calculators, and local economic trends to help you understand and support your workforce.

Local insights: unitedwaywesttn.org/alice

National dashboards: unitedforalice.org

Financial Empowerment Center

Your employees get free, confidential one-on-one financial counseling:

- Credit building and repair
- Debt management
- Budget and savings support
- Banking access assistance
- Student Loan Guidance

211 Helpline

Your employees can access critical resources:

- Emergency financial assistance (rent, utilities, food)
- Childcare resource referrals
- Healthcare connections
- Mental health resources

Tennessee Benefit Kitchen

Employees text "Benefits" to 211-211 for free screening of unclaimed public benefits and tax credits – potentially adding thousands to household budgets.

West Tennessee Volunteer Hub

The Volunteer Hub provides the community with information regarding upcoming service opportunities for free. This online database is a one-stop-shop for all things volunteer-related.

These are just a few of the ways United Way supports employers and working families. We also offer free tax preparation, volunteer coordination, childcare development resources, and community partnerships that strengthen our entire region.



JOIN US

You're already leading the way by creating a family-friendly workplace. Join us in expanding this impact across our entire region. Together, we can ensure that every working family in West Tennessee has the support they need to thrive.

Give

When you invest in United Way, you're strengthening the very resources your employees depend on – and supporting many more working families across our region.

- 211 helpline and emergency assistance
- Financial Empowerment Center services
- ALICE research and employer education
- Community programs that strengthen families

Advocate

Use your voice to advocate for policies and partnerships that strengthen families and communities.

- Tell your family-friendly success story
- Mentor other employers starting their journey
- Champion policies that support working families
- Speak at community events and forums

Volunteer

Connect your team with meaningful community service that builds both workplace culture and community strength.

- Participate in GivingTuesday
- Create custom team volunteer experiences
- Host workplace giving campaigns
- Sponsor family-friendly workplace initiatives

Visit [uwwt.org](https://www.uwwt.org) to learn more.

United, we're building a West Tennessee where every family can thrive.



uwwt.org/meet-alice
@liveunitedtn

