

Parenting or planning a family in grad school

Many members of our graduate community are parents (or prospective parents), on top of their other roles as learners, leaders, instructors, and professionals. These are a lot of responsibilities to balance, in addition to the economic challenges often associated with parenthood.

- 14% of students indicated that they have 1 or more **children** (Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey (CGPSS) 2019)
- 51% of students indicated that **family obligations** are an obstacle to their academic progress (CGPSS 2019)

The good news is that you aren't alone. There are opportunities and supports available to you that can help you and your family.

Funding opportunities

University of Waterloo's Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs (GSPA) has created a funding opportunity that aims to minimize the financial pressure of balancing graduate studies with family obligations.

The *parental leave* program at the University of Waterloo has a long-standing history of providing a supportive and accessible environment to graduate students. In 2017, this bursary received national recognition when the University of Waterloo won the 2017 Canadian Association of Graduate Studies (CAGS) Award of Excellence and Innovation for Enhancing the Graduate Student Experience.

Graduate studies parental leave bursary

The Graduate Studies Parental Leave Bursary provides funding to eligible students for up to two terms, to allow them to spend valuable time with their growing family. The value is determined based on the student's previous income to a maximum value of \$8,000. For more information, visit the [Graduate Studies Parental Leave Bursary Webpage & Application Form](#).

Eligibility and selection criteria

- Open to candidates of all genders (not just birth mothers).
- Must be a full or part-time graduate student and have been registered for at least one academic term prior to the leave.
- Must have been receiving financial support.
- Must be taking a parental leave.
- Must not take up employment at the University of Waterloo during the term in which the bursary is being paid.
- If both parents are graduate students, only one of them may apply for the bursary at a time.
- Must return to graduate studies after their leave.

Outcomes

- On average we fund approximately 40 students per year.
- Up to 2 terms of funding, however can be inactive for up to 5 consecutive terms.
- Students eligible for Tri-Agency Paid Parental Leaves will be topped up with a Graduate Studies Parental Leave Bursary, if applicable, to maximize their funding.
- GSPA will assist eligible students with receiving Tri-Agency Parental Leave funding (either through their scholarship or a faculty member's research grant).

Tips from students

Many University of Waterloo graduate students are also parents. Some of them have shared their experiences to provide some general tips for others trying to balance the demands of parenthood and graduate work/study.

Raising children as a grad student

- Choosing a family friendly school is the first step, and the University of Waterloo is one of the best family friendly schools.
- Build your support system. This includes making sure your supervisors and peers understand your situation and not hesitating to ask for help or opt out of meetings and/or activities to take care of personal matters.
- Stay organized and manage your time well: This can be achieved by having your assignments due dates, Parent-Teacher meetings, doctor's appointments, Research meetings etc. in your calendar and set reminders so as not to miss out on important dates.
- Bond with your kid(s)/family. This is achievable by spending quality time with them e.g. discuss about your day and ask about theirs as well, have game nights, movie nights, family cook time, etc..
- Pay attention to yourself, know when to stop and have some sorts of coping mechanism to relief stress. When the going gets rough, always remember the reason why you started and do not lose focus.

Feeding or storing breast milk on campus

If you are someone who is expressing breastmilk, there can be added logistical challenges to your experience as a graduate student. For support with this, you can contact the Equity Office at equity@uwaterloo.ca. They can help you to:

- Find a private, clean, lockable space on campus to breastfeed or express breast milk as needed.
 - The Equity Office will connect with the Manager of Space Planning, who will work with your Department/School of Faculty to locate a space that meets you needs in the building where you work and study.
- Find a safe, reliable means of storing breastmilk while on campus.
 - If you don't have access to a fridge near where you work or study, the Equity Office has access to a limited supply of mini-fridges that can be loaned to you. They will contact Central Stores, who will arrange a delivery to your work/study space on campus.

Finding the right childcare provider

Based on their own experiences with childcare, University of Waterloo graduate students have identified three major factors to assess when trying to find the right childcare provider.

- Proximity to the university is very crucial. Travel logistics can add up quickly and centralizing childcare as much as possible is greatly beneficial. The Waterloo main campus hosts the [Bright Starts daycare](#), which could be a useful option.
- Check the childcare provider's track records where possible, using trusted reviews or word of mouth. Ontario's Ministry of Education has a valuable [child care search tool](#) to find appropriately licensed providers, filtered by location, your child care needs, and other factors.
- A low children-caregiver ratio is ideal. When assessing childcare providers, try to find information about the number of children they care for compared with the number of staff they have available. This ratio is one of the major factors in the overall care that children receive from providers.

Supports for parents at the University of Waterloo

- **Bright Starts:** A co-operative early learning centre, with facilities located on the Waterloo main campus. They offer high-quality daycare services from 7:30 am to 5:30 pm.
- **Family Health Clinic:** A unit of Health Services focused on providing primary health care to the families of graduate students.
- **Graduate Student Parental Leave Bursary:** An eight-month birth, adoption, and parental leave bursary available to eligible graduate students, with a maximum value of \$8000.
- **Human Rights, Equity, and Inclusion Office:** A UW organization that can help you identify your rights and needs within the academic and professional contexts of the university. They can advocate for the support you need, and help you determine and/or understand your options.
- **OneList Waterloo Region:** A comprehensive list of schools and daycare in the Waterloo region, alongside access to a central [registry and waitlist](#) for licensed child care.
- **Whole Family Lab:** A research group focused on childhood development and family support. They have compiled a list of [community resources](#) focused around mental health support services for parents and children in the Waterloo Region.