A growing body of research suggests that flexibility works best for the business when work needs, not just personal needs are clearly met. Managers should evaluate all proposals with consistent work-based criteria, rather than focusing on whether an employee wants to adopt a flexible work arrangement to pursue athletic or artistic goals, care for children or elders or just improve a commute (see Evaluating, Managing and Measuring FWAs).

Depending on the nature of the relationship between a manager and employee, it may feel comfortable and desirable to discuss the circumstances surrounding the flexibility proposal. In many other cases, employees may be very private about such disclosures and managers may feel uncomfortable knowing about personal motivations.

However receptive to discussing the personal motivations for proposals, managers should avoid pressuring employees to provide a reason as part of the flexibility proposal and should avoid making judgments about reasons when an employee does disclose them.

If as a manager, you find that you must use the reason for the request as a factor in making a decision about a flexible work arrangement (FWA), keep in mind that discussions of personal considerations inevitably call on our biases. While it may seem obvious to you that one reason has more validity than another (e.g. school is more important than training for a marathon), it’s critical to avoid pitting one employee’s values against another’s. If you stay in the realm of workplace needs and work performance goals, you are less likely to be put in a position to arbitrate worthiness.

Harvard’s Employee Assistance Program (EAP) may be helpful to you in approaching conversations that may include discussions of a private or personal nature.

**Note:** If the proposal is related to issues of health, disability or family caregiving, managers must consult with the local HR office or University Disability Services (UDS) to determine if the employee’s proposal for a flexible work arrangement is covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) or should be explored as a reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Employees and managers are encouraged to visit the UDS website to learn more about reasonable accommodations.