

DIVERSITY, INCLUSION & ACCESS

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Inclusion Icebreakers: Maternal Bias

Maternal Wall

How to use this Lean In card in a group setting:

- Read the situation on the front of the card aloud, including “Why it Matters”
- Discuss times when people in the group have witnessed or experienced this situation and possible actions to take to address it. *We strongly recommend anonymity and confidentiality when sharing stories.*
- Flip the card over and read “What to do” and “Why it Happens” aloud
- Encourage people in the room to think of one thing they will do when they see bias at work, or one thing they learned that they’re going to share with others. Take turns, go around the group and share.

Maternal bias: Motherhood triggers false assumptions that women are less committed to their careers—and even less competent.

Someone suggests that a woman on your team be given a big, high-profile project, and a colleague says, "I don't think this is a good time for her since she just had a baby."

WHY IT MATTERS

Your company likely wants to retain and promote talented women. Sidelining them—even with good intentions—works against that goal by denying them opportunities that can lead to advancement.

LEAN IN**WHAT TO DO**

Remind your colleague that this could be a career-changing project for whoever gets it, so it's better to let the new mom decide for herself whether or not she wants to take it on.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Rooted in maternal bias

Motherhood triggers assumptions that women are less competent and less committed to their careers. As a result, they are held to higher standards and presented with fewer opportunities. Studies show that the "maternal wall" women face when they have kids is the strongest gender bias.³²



Keep in mind: Bias isn't limited to gender. People can also experience biases due to their race, sexual orientation, a disability, or other aspects of their identity.

Reference:

50 Ways to Fight Bias, *LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company's Women in the Workplace Study, 2015.*