



Supporting carers in your workforce

Employer's guide



employersforcarers.org

Efc is an employer membership service provided by Carers UK

The challenges of the modern workplace

The UK has over three million working carers – that is 1 in 9 of the workforce juggling the responsibilities of caring and paid employment. Employers can provide effective support for these working carers and achieve concrete business benefits.

In a complex modern world, achieving a work-life balance has become a priority for the many, not a concession for the few. To boost their business, employers require a more flexible and multi-skilled workforce and at the same time, employees need to balance multiple responsibilities inside and outside the workplace. The world of work is changing and we have to change with it if we are to remain competitive.

This guide is designed to help employers make the most of the business benefits of supporting working carers as well as understand their legal responsibilities to those carers.

Caring: an issue for us all

Who are carers?

Most of us will look after an older, ill or disabled family member or friend. Caring is part of life but without the right support the personal costs of caring can be high.

Changing demographics – an ageing population, smaller families and different family structures – mean that in the future most people's lives will include at least one episode of caring. Every year, over two million people become carers, some overnight, some more gradually – so there is a new population of carers in the workforce every day. Over the next 30 years the number of carers in the UK is set to rise from 6.5 million to 9 million, significantly increasing the number of people in the workforce with caring responsibilities. Today, 90% of working carers are aged 30 plus – employees in their prime employment years.

Carers have different needs

Caring is different from mainstream childcare and needs a separate response from employers. Caring for a sick or disabled relative or friend – for example, as a result of an accident or stroke – can happen overnight, and can be unpredictable. Every year in the UK, 152,000 people have a stroke, an estimated 80,000 people are seriously injured in a road accident and 30,000 children are born or diagnosed with a serious disability or rare syndrome. Caring milestones are different too – a disabled child may still be at home with parents as a disabled adult. Caring often ends with a move to residential care or bereavement, bringing its own complicated mix of emotions such as sadness, relief and guilt.

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The business case

Caring is an issue which affects us all and these responsibilities often cannot be planned – caring can happen over time, but it can also happen overnight.

Given the stresses and strains that can result from balancing multiple responsibilities inside and outside the workplace, it is unsurprising that 1 in 6 carers give up work to care full time. And many of these employees are an organisation's most valuable staff, the 45-64 year-olds at the peak of their careers. With fewer young people entering the labour market, organisations need to retain their skilled and talented staff. By recognising the needs of carers, employers can hold on to their experienced staff and reap the rewards of creating a supportive working environment for carers.

Business benefits

Employers need to support carers. Far from compromising business objectives, research shows that using a flexible working approach achieves impressive business results.

This flexible approach:

- attracts and retains staff
- reduces stress
- reduces recruitment and training costs
- increases resilience and productivity
- reduces sick leave
- improves service delivery
- produces cost savings
- improves people management
- increases staff morale.

The message is – it makes business sense to care for carers.

What employers can do

You can take simple and effective action to enable carers to balance their paid work with their caring responsibilities – and, as a result, retain the services of these valued employees. Carer-friendly policies can also help you tap into a new source of unrealised potential – the 1.5 million carers of working age in the UK who are not working currently.

Flexible working practices – such as flexi-time, home working, annualised hours, compressed hours, shift swapping, self-rostering, staggered hours, job sharing, term-time working, part-time working and flexible holidays – can help a carer balance work and caring commitments. These benefits support carers by addressing their individual situations rather than labeling them as people who need extra help or who have problems. Flexible working, open to all, reduces resentment about “preferential treatment”.

“People are not put into boxes: ‘carer’ or ‘disabled’. Every carer is different and will need an individual solution.”

*Diversity Manager,
utility company*

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Emergency leave is important to carers, who can be called home at short notice when care arrangements break down or the person they care for falls ill. Employers are required by law to give a “reasonable” amount of time off for emergencies involving a dependant. Although this does not have to be paid, many employers do pay.

“The cost of recruiting is incomparable to the cost of 2-3 days emergency leave.”

*Policy Development Manager,
utility company*

You can also introduce other **leave arrangements** to help carers. These

include offering compassionate or dependants leave, or a system of planned leave; for example, to provide care following discharge from hospital. Paid leave for emergency or planned caring can reduce staff turnover and absence thereby cutting employment costs. The evidence from employers themselves shows that it is rarely abused and increases loyalty and commitment.

“Retaining carers through support or special leave arrangements represents a saving to the company of about £1 million a year.”

*Manager and member of carers’
network, utility company*



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Support and understanding from managers. Managers - especially line managers - play a key role in implementing carer-friendly policies and practices and will benefit from specific training in order to provide effective support to carers. Creating a workplace culture that is supportive to carers also requires the endorsement of top-level management.

“I personally go that extra mile for them because I appreciate what they’re doing for me.”

Carer, utility company, caring for elderly parents

You can offer **workplace support** such as establishing in-house networking groups and employee assistance programmes. Publicising policies on the intranet or in handbooks is also important. Smaller businesses find that just being open and flexible goes a long way to support carers and multi-skilling, good communication and team working provide effective cover if carers have unexpected emergencies.

“I’m a believer in give and take. If you are flexible with your employees, they’ll be flexible with you, for example, when extra cover is needed.” Owner, SME

Large employers will often have a specific **Carers Policy** but smaller organisations may include carers in their generic policies or guidance. The important thing is that carers’ needs are distinct and that they need specific support.

“Carers only use the policy when they really need it, and then only take a few days off a year. And when they are at work they are motivated, loyal and never late.”

Manager and member of carers’ network, utility company

More **practical support** might include access to somewhere private to make a phone call and car parking close to the workplace to make getting in and out of work quicker and easier.

Other flexible benefits could include disability or healthcare insurance and childcare or care vouchers. Top of the list of carers’ needs is often information and advice and employers could also play a part in supporting employees in their caring role by signposting them to information about services to support the person they look after.

Changing the culture

An organisational culture which allows carers to be open about their situation is key if these policies and practices are to be used by the very people they are intended for.

The first step in developing workplace support is to identify carers and ask them what they need. Be sensitive to issues of confidentiality and give employees the option of providing information anonymously.

Decide how the whole organisation can respond – find a champion to lead the work and sell it in at all levels to ensure understanding and commitment.

Be proactive in creating a workplace which promotes the take-up of carer support to avoid carers feeling that they will be treated less favourably if they take up any of the policies.

Monitor the take-up of support and determine the benefits to employees and to your organisation.

Carers' legal rights

The right to request flexible working

“The average increase in production for flexible workers is 21% – worth at least £5-6 million on the bottom line.”

Director of People Network, Telecoms Company

All employees who have worked for their employer for 26 weeks at the date an application is made can request flexible working. This could include changing working hours or working from home.

Only one request is allowed in a year and any request granted will mean a permanent change to terms and conditions unless a trial period is agreed. Employers can refuse a request, but must give good business reasons from a specific list which is set out in the law. Employees can appeal against this decision.

A right to time off

The Employment Rights Act 1996, as amended by the Employment Relations Act 1999, gives carers rights to help them manage work and their caring responsibilities. (These laws are called the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 and the Employment Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 in Northern Ireland.)

A right to time off in emergencies

All employees have the right to take “reasonable time off” to deal with unexpected situations involving a dependant. At the discretion of the employer, this time off can be paid. To use this right to time off, employees must inform you as soon as possible after the emergency has happened.

A dependant includes a husband, wife or partner, child or parent, or someone living with the employee as part of their family. Others who rely on the employee for help in an emergency may also qualify.

The situations where leave might be taken are:

- a disruption or breakdown in care arrangements
- when a dependant falls ill, has been assaulted or in an accident (including when the person is hurt or upset rather than physically injured)
- to make longer term arrangements for a dependant who is ill or injured (but not to provide long term care themselves)
- to deal with an incident involving a child during school hours
- to deal with the death of a dependant.

Parental leave/shared parental leave

Employees who have at least one year’s continuous service and are responsible for a child aged under 18 are entitled to:

- 18 weeks (unpaid) parental leave per child to look after their child.

Leave can be taken in blocks of one week up to a maximum of four weeks leave in a year (for each child); or in one day, or multiples of a day if the leave is to care for a disabled child, again to a maximum of four weeks in a year. Collective or workforce agreements may allow employees to take leave in smaller blocks and/or may allow employees to take more than four weeks off in a year.

Employees must give at least 21 days notice in order to take parental leave and this can be postponed if taking leave at the time requested would cause particular disruption to the organisation, e.g. during a seasonal peak in work or if multiple requests for parental leave are made at the same time. If leave is postponed, employers must inform the employee within seven days of the request for leave being made, and the leave must be granted within six months. Parental leave cannot be postponed if it has been requested for the time immediately after the birth of a child or the start of an adoption placement.

Employees may also be entitled to Shared Parental Leave (SPL). This must be taken between the baby's birth and first birthday (or within one year of adoption).

For further information on Shared Parental Leave, please refer to www.gov.uk/shared-parental-leave-and-pay

Protection from discrimination

Although up until recently carers have not been directly (or explicitly) protected from discrimination in the workplace, this situation has now changed. If an employee is looking after someone who is elderly or disabled, the law – under the Equality Act 2010 – will protect them against direct discrimination or harassment because of their caring responsibilities. This is because they are counted as being 'associated' with someone who is protected by the law because of their age or disability. You will need to ensure that you do not treat carers less favourably than other employees. This could include:

- refusing to offer someone a job because of their caring responsibilities
- not offering an employee a promotion because of their caring responsibilities.

Case Studies

Centrica

Centrica have led on innovative family friendly and flexible working practices and in 2004 were one of the first employers to set up a carers' network. They reported quantified business benefits from their innovative flexible working programme, "work:wise", in 2004 and from a subsequent study in 2007 on the impact of flexible working on performance. The company have had particular success in retaining engineers, whom they had identified as leaving the workplace. More recently, they have estimated potential cost savings of £2.5 million through increased staff retention and £4.5 million through reduced unplanned absenteeism.

Centrica also have an innovative carers leave policy, which offers up to one month 'matched' paid leave per year to help with caring responsibilities. Carers leave is matched against annual holiday entitlement, for example for each day required an employee takes half a day's annual leave and half a day's planned carers leave.

Carers leave is in addition to dependant and emergency leave and there is no service requirement to be eligible. makes the definition of carer all-encompassing.

Geoff Kitchener, Chair of the Centrica Carers Network explains how he has benefitted from the carers leave policy:

"It has helped me in the past when my wife, who I have cared for since 2001 had a major episode. It allowed me the benefit of being able to take extensive time off using the matched leave option, and discussions with my Team Leader meant I could deal with the issues and not worry about work".

The policy includes close friends as well as family members, which makes the definition of carer all-encompassing. For any planned leave in excess of one month a career break would be considered. The company have found that few carers need to take weeks off, but some may need a few days at a time on several occasions in a year, for instance, to make long-term care arrangements.

Case Studies

Listawood (SME)

With a workforce of around 150 people, Listawood are a manufacturer of promotional products such as ceramic mugs, fridge magnets and mouse pads. The company have made a firm commitment to creating a culture of flexibility and support for those needing to balance their home and work lives, often at short notice, which they believe is a significant driver of their strong record of staff retention.

The recent economic downturn, and increased competition from emerging low wage economies, has placed enormous strain on Listawood's sector, creating pressure to keep staff costs low. As part of their performance management framework, Listawood regularly survey their employees to measure staff satisfaction. The company are aware that they do not offer the best salary levels in the area – indeed only 56 per cent of staff surveyed felt their pay was competitive when compared with other employers locally. However their deep rooted culture of flexibility is well recognised by staff – 97 per cent felt that the company offered better opportunities for work-life balance than other employers in the area.

Explaining their approach, Managing Director **Alex Turner** said:

“Losing highly trained staff is incredibly disruptive in any business. In the sales environment it fractures customer relationships which can result in reduced levels of business, and in the factory it compromises manufacturing efficiency. On top of this you then have to bear the costs associated with recruitment and training for their replacement. We are in no doubt that our staff retention levels are driven by our attitude to work-life balance rather than the generosity of our remuneration packages. This makes it possible for us to remain competitive and profitable in a highly competitive market, even during these unusually difficult trading conditions.”

Case Studies

Aviva

Aviva has introduced a carers' policy and enhanced its bereavement leave benefit for its 16,000 UK-based employees.

The carers policy, which became effective on 2 October 2017, enables full-time employees who have caring responsibilities to take up to 35 hours of paid leave per holiday year for planned events, such as to attend hospital appointments. The policy also allows full-time working carers to take up to 35 hours of paid leave for emergencies, per holiday year. The amount of paid leave available for part-time employees who are carers is pro-rated.

In addition, the new carers' policy extends to parental leave arrangements to carers, meaning that employees who have caring commitments can request up to four weeks of unpaid leave per year, subject to a maximum 18-week cap. Aviva's working carers will also be able to request adjustments to their working patterns if needed, for example moving to part-time hours.

Alongside the introduction of the new carers' policy, Aviva has increased its bereavement leave, from 35 hours to 70 hours.

Andy Briggs, Chief Executive Officer, UK Insurance and Global Life and Health at Aviva, said:

“Changing demographics and an ageing population mean that 3 in 5 people in the UK will end up caring for someone at some point of their lives. So we’re taking this step now, to support our employees and the people they care about.”

The new policy follows a pilot that was undertaken at the organisation's Bristol site in November 2016. This included 100 employees taking part in the We Care initiative, which provided a support network for employees to share their experiences, as well as the challenges, of juggling work and care commitments. The pilot further enabled Aviva to collect feedback on the issues that its working carers faced.

The carers' policy has been launched as part of Aviva's wider employee wellbeing programme, Wellbeing@Aviva. The programme aims to provide employees with a range of products, policies and advice to help support staff's overall wellbeing.

About Carers UK

Carers UK is the national membership charity for the millions of people who look after older, ill or disabled family and friends in the UK.

At times, caring can be profoundly joyful. There's nothing more natural and human than helping our loved ones get the most out of life.

There's also nothing more difficult than focusing on someone else's needs without neglecting our own. Whether we're caring around the clock or balancing caring with work and family life, it can be exhausting. The 'system' can be bewildering. The emotions can be shattering.

However caring affects you, Carers UK is here with support, information and advice, campaigning for lasting change and innovating to find new ways to make life better.

carersuk.org

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About Employers for Carers

Employers for Carers is Carers UK's membership forum for employers who want to support the people in their workforce who are carers. Its purpose is to:

- provide practical advice and support for employers seeking to develop carer friendly policy and practice and retain skilled workers
- identify and promote the business benefits of supporting carers in the workplace
- influence employment policy and practice to create a culture which supports carers in and into work.

employersforcarers.org

Email: client.services@carersuk.org

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Member organisations of Employers for Carers and their employees get free access to guides and resources specifically designed to help make working and caring easier.

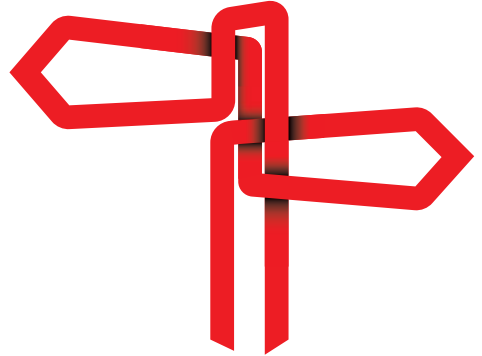
employersforcarers.org

You can also choose to join Carers UK, and become part of our supportive community and movement for change. Here you'll find expert information about every aspect of caring and a world of support from other carers who know what it can feel like to look after loved ones and live your own life too.



Enabling carers to combine work with care is better for business and better for everyone.

We are building a network of carer positive employers to lead the way.



Employers for Carers

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Publication code: UK 9032. Copyright Carers UK December 2018.

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