

CARERS UK
the voice of carers

Carers at work

Information for employers





The challenges of the modern workplace

Working and living in the twenty first century can be a hard act to juggle.

Employers increasingly need a more flexible and multiskilled workforce to get results.

At the same time, employees increasingly need to balance multiple responsibilities inside and outside the workplace.

In a complex modern world, work-life balance has become a priority for the many, not a concession for the few. This booklet is designed to help employers in the private, public and voluntary sectors think about the needs of employees, who are carers, and to adapt and develop workplace policies and practices to support them.

Who are carers?

Carers look after family, partners or friends in need of help because they are ill, frail or have a disability. The care they provide is unpaid.

An issue for you?

There are over six million carers in the UK, and more than three million of them juggle care with paid work. This means that one in seven people in any workforce may be a carer, dealing with what might seem like two jobs – one paid, one unpaid – and meeting the needs of both.

Caring is an issue which affects us all – demographic changes mean that three in five people will become carers at some stage in their lives. These responsibilities often cannot be planned – caring can happen over time, but it can also happen overnight.

The peak age for caring is 45-64; so many working carers will have significant skills and experience, which may be lost to a workplace unless they are supported. Whatever their job, their loss would have an impact. Given the significant skills shortages in some sectors, for example health care, employers now have to retain skilled staff of all ages, and increasingly widen their recruitment pool.

In the workforce of the future, more people will have to work smarter, for longer, and that includes carers.

And this is not only a women's issue – a DfEE survey of 7,500 employees found that 11% of all male respondents had caring responsibilities, and 13% of all women. Juggling work and care may be an issue for more of your employees than you think, as men and women of all ages across an organisation may have caring responsibilities or even multiple caring roles.

Changes in family structures also have an impact – the increase in divorce, the number of single parent families and the rise in the number of working women means that there is very often no longer an adult at home to manage and/or provide care.

So work has to be juggled with care – and employers ignore this at their peril.



The cost of no support

Combining paid work and caring can be stressful. A survey by the Princess Royal Trust for Carers found that 50% of working carers experienced stress and anxiety.

Peter cares for his wife who has multiple sclerosis. Her condition has deteriorated over the past year, causing increasing worry for Peter as he tries to juggle her care with his full time job. He has a heavy case load and feels under pressure to work the same long hours as his colleagues, feeling that he will let the team down if he changes his working pattern.

Caring can also have an impact on absenteeism. For example, in an emergency, many employees find it easier to call in sick than to admit they are having a problem with care arrangements.

Over the past year Peter has on occasions taken a day's sick leave to cover emergencies in his wife's care arrangements. He isn't aware of any kind of leave that could help him when things go wrong at home.

A large number of carers give up work to care. In one Carers UK survey, more than six out of ten carers providing substantial care had given up work to care.

Peter is suffering from stress and finding it increasingly difficult to manage. He is considering giving up work to care for his wife full time.



What do carers want from employers?

In a number of surveys, carers say they want:

Understanding from managers

Peter needs to be able to talk to someone at work who understands the conflicting demands of his work and caring responsibilities and can help him to manage them more flexibly.

Access to advice and information

Peter's employer should publicise the provisions it makes for emergency leave, and additional flexible leave arrangements for employees such as him. It could also provide or signpost employees to information.

Flexibility – often short term – including:

- Time off for emergencies
- Flexible working arrangements
- Flexible leave arrangements

Peter's employer has serious recruitment and retention issues. Flexible support for Peter at this stage would allow him to juggle his work and caring responsibilities, and his employer would save the costs of replacing a valuable and experienced member of staff.

The benefits of offering support

Support for carers in the workplace does not only benefit the carer – it also benefits the employer. And it is other employers who say so.

Increased retention

The NHS has included carer support as part of its 'Improving Working Lives' initiative. This aims to improve staff recruitment and retention.

Improved recruitment

Centrica's carers' policy has improved recruitment into British Gas and Scottish Gas call centres. The development and proactive promotion of the carers' policy has enabled managers to recruit and support staff juggling work and care. The result has been a win-win for both employer and employee, with managers noting the motivation and productivity of recruits. Centrica believes that the policy has resulted in benefits throughout the whole company.

Reduced absenteeism

Understanding the link between flexible working practices and bottom line benefits has led to BT developing a wide-ranging portfolio of flexible working arrangements. This has enabled great employees, be they in sales, customer service, or elsewhere, to continue to deliver great results whilst also fulfilling their caring responsibilities. This has delivered productivity gains of over £10m, accommodation savings of over £40m annually and reduction in sickness absence and recruitment costs of over £7m for their business.

Improved productivity

The Department for Constitutional Affairs has developed a work-life balance policy, which includes carers in response to the broader and changing needs of its employees. It has established an in-house Caring Network, which offers information and support to employees with caring responsibilities across the Department and seeks to raise awareness of carer's issues and raise concerns at a senior level. It also seeks to influence policies as they affect carers. Feedback from network members shows that they feel more able to focus on work at work when their caring responsibilities are acknowledged and supported.

Enhanced management of diversity

By looking at carers as a diverse group, which can include anyone at any time in their working life, employers are linking the managing diversity and flexible working agendas together to achieve gains in service delivery.

'Our flexibility of working practices means we can offer clients very flexible strategies, for example varying the lead-in times to meet the requirements of individual orders' Listawood



Changing the culture

- The first step in developing workforce 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.

The Metropolitan Police carried out an audit of the carers in its workforce, and set up focus groups to ask them about their support needs. The process was facilitated by a carer's organisation to guarantee confidentiality. The result is a policy that works for employer and employees across all departments – and a commitment to developing an organisational culture that allows carers to be open about their situation.

- 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.

The Metropolitan Police has identified a senior officer to lead on carer support, and is planning training for line managers to ensure consistent implementation of carer policies and practices across the whole organisation.

- Be proactive in creating a workplace, which promotes the take-up of carer support.

The Metropolitan Police is promoting its support for carers by including it in written policies and staff handbooks, to ensure that staff are confident about using it without fear of discrimination.

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

'[EOC Scotland] surveyed companies with family-friendly policies and found that only half monitored their take-up and success. This meant that they were not able to evaluate their provision, and were missing opportunities to improve support and retain staff.' Director, Carers Scotland



What employers can offer

There are a number of workplace practices, which can support carers. Some are generic, some specifically designed to meet carers' needs. You should review your work-life balance policies to ensure that they encompass working carers.

Not all employers will use all practices; many will 'mix-and-match' to the requirements of their workforce.

Flexible working

- flexible starting and finishing times
- compressed working hours
- annualised working hours
- job sharing or part-time working
- homeworking and teleworking
- term-time working
- flexible holidays to fit in with alternative care arrangements

Special leave arrangements

- emergency leave (paid/unpaid)
- carers leave (paid/unpaid)
- compassionate leave
- borrowing/buying leave
- career breaks

Workplace support

- carer-aware managers at all levels
- welfare officer or occupational health advisor informed about carers' needs
- in-house information and advice
- in-house counselling
- in-house support/networking groups
- subscription to a carer's organisation such as Carers UK, which provides information and advice to carers
- subscription to an employee resource service such as Lifeworks, Family Life Solutions or Family Matters

Flexible benefits

- disability insurance
- healthcare
- long-term care insurance
- childcare/eldercare vouchers

Other measures

- access to a telephone
- a reserved car parking space, to make access in and out of work quicker and easier
- reasonable notice if overtime or working away from home is required

Legislative support

Government regulation has a part to play in carer support.

The Employment Relations Act has introduced leave entitlements, which can benefit carers.

It includes:

A right to time off for emergencies

Employees now have a right to take a 'reasonable' amount of time off work to deal with an emergency involving a dependant. This right also includes some protection from victimisation or dismissal for employees using it. It is at the employer's discretion whether the leave is paid or unpaid.

Situations where leave might be taken include:

- a disruption or breakdown in care arrangements
- if a dependant falls ill or has been assaulted or in an accident including when the victim is hurt or upset rather than physically injured
- to deal with an incident involving a child during school hours
- to make longer term arrangements for a dependant who is ill or injured
- to deal with the death of a dependant

Parental Leave

Employees with one year's service are entitled to thirteen weeks parental leave to care for a child, eighteen weeks for a disabled child. A child counts as disabled here if they are entitled to Disability Living Allowance.

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. A collective or workforce agreement can set out more generous provisions.

Employees may take leave at any time up to a child's fifth birthday. If they have adopted a child, they will be entitled to take 13 weeks' parental leave during the five years from the date of placement for adoption or before the child's 18th birthday, whichever is the sooner. For the parents of a disabled child, leave may be taken any time up to the child's eighteenth birthday.



Flexible Working

Parents of children under six, or 18 if the child is disabled, have a right to request flexible working such as changing hours or working from home. This applies to employees who have worked for their employer for 26 weeks. Employees will have to make a written application to make a permanent change to their terms and conditions. Only one request is allowed in one year so it is important that employees think carefully about the financial and caring considerations. If their request is refused, employers must give good reasons and employees can appeal.

At the time of writing new legislation to extend the right to request flexible working to carers of adults was in its final stages in Parliament. It will come into force in April 2007.

Age Discrimination

New legislation from April 2006 means that employees are protected against discrimination at work on the grounds of their age. For more information contact carersLine (0808 808 7777) or visit www.carersuk.org

Changes in pension, taxation and social policy could help carers in the workforce too.

- Carers are now entitled to a second tier pension
- Carers UK is campaigning for the introduction of a carer's Working Tax Credit
- Carers UK is campaigning for a review of the main carers' benefit, Carer's Allowance

Help improve carers' lives



If you have experience of looking after someone with an illness or disability, you will know it can be rewarding. But it can also be exhausting, making a huge impact on your life. Without the right support, caring for someone can all too easily take its toll on your health, lead to money worries and make it difficult to stay in work. It can be difficult to pick up the pieces when caring comes to an end.

Carers UK is here to change the lives of the UK's six million carers. We make sure carers have information about their rights and where to get help. We campaign for changes in the law and practical support so that carers can live full and varied lives where their loved ones are cared for with dignity.

You can support Carers UK by becoming a member or making a donation to help us achieve our vision of full support and recognition for every carer.

Join Carers UK

Carers UK welcomes carers, former carers and others who support our aims. As a member you will receive a free regular copy of our magazine *Caring* which will provide you with practical ideas on how to cope and keep you in touch with changes and developments to your rights. Also, your voice strengthens our campaigning power to achieve lasting change for you and all carers.

Please tell us whether you are a carer former carer or supporter

Carers UK understands that carers have many calls on their finances. There is no fixed subscription fee. All we ask is please give as generously as you can.

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If you are a carer or former carer and would like free membership please tick here

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Help us make a difference to carers' lives

Our commitment is to use your donation to run our free helpline, provide free information for carers and campaign for better support.

I wish to make a donation towards Carers UK's vital work.

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Issue no. (Switch/Maestro only)

Amount £

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Signature

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Data Protection

Carers UK takes your privacy very seriously. We will not pass your details to other organisations. Occasionally we would like to send you further information about how you can support the work of Carers UK. If you do not wish to receive this information, please tick here

Please detach this form and return to:
Carers UK, FREEPOST NAT 8132,
Crawley RH11 7BR

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3 Branch sort code (from top right-hand corner of your cheque)

4 Bank/Building Society account number

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5 The amount you would like to pay and how often

Amount £ frequency Annually/Monthly

6 Instructions

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Signature

Date

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- You can cancel a Direct Debit at any time by writing to your Bank or Building Society. Please also send a copy of your letter to us.

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The information in this leaflet is for guidance only
and is not an authoritative statement of the law.

The information is correct as of April 2006.



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