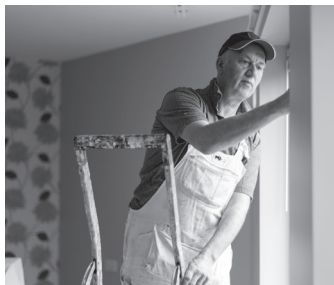


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# Balancing work and care

A carer's guide

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“we're here to support you to work and care”



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# Balancing work and care

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When people need help with their day-to-day living including their care, they often turn to their family and friends. Looking after each other is something that we do. If you are providing this help regularly, on an unpaid basis, you are a carer.

It can feel like you are juggling two jobs when you are holding down a paid job and caring for someone.

There are six million people in the UK caring unpaid for an ill, frail or disabled family member or friend and so you are not alone; three million of these carers juggle work and care — that is 1 in 7 in every workplace.

Caring can be unpredictable, it can happen overnight or it can creep up on you. You could live with the person you care for or you could be caring for someone in another house, town or another part of the country.

If you are balancing a paid job with caring for a family member or friend, this guide is for you. It sets out basic information about carers at work including how your employer might be able to help you, your legal rights at work, information about the business benefits of supporting working carers which you could pass on to your employer and information about practical help with caring.

# How could your employer help?

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As a working carer you might need a range of support in the workplace, and often different levels of support at different times. Here are a few ways in which your employer may be able to offer support:

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**Flexible working hours:** it might help if you could start later and work later if you need extra time in the morning to help the person you care for get up and settled for the day, or you may need to wait for day care transport, for example.

**Access to a telephone:** being able to use a phone, in private, at work to check that everything is ok, or being able to keep your mobile phone on at work so you can be contacted can go a long way to reduce stress levels and help you concentrate at work.

**Car parking space at/near work:** this could shorten your journey time to and from work and might also help if you need to go home at lunch time to attend to the person you care for.

**Working from home:** either regularly or occasionally, can be a real help. You can be at home with the person you are looking after and still be able to get a day's work done.

**Unpaid and paid leave:** you could use this, rather than your holiday leave, if you need to take a longer period of time off if the person you care for comes out of hospital or if they are unwell.

**Career breaks:** if you are thinking about giving up work, do check your options before handing in your notice. A career break could mean that you have a job to come back to after spending some time on your caring role.

**Knowing how your employer can help may make it easier for you to ask for support.**

# Your legal rights at work

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In addition to any workplace support that your employer offers it is important to know that most carers have the following legal rights:

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## **The right to request flexible working**

If you have worked for your employer for at least 26 weeks you can apply to make a permanent change to your contract. One request is allowed in a year. Your employer can refuse a request, but must give you good business reasons and you can appeal against this decision.

## **The right to unpaid time off in emergencies**

All employees have the right to take 'reasonable time off' to deal with an emergency involving a dependent. Whether the time off is paid or unpaid is at the discretion of the employer. You must inform your employer as soon as possible after the emergency has happened.

## **The right to parental leave**

Employees who have at least one year's continuous service and are responsible for a child aged under 5, or under 18 if the child receives Disability Living Allowance, are entitled to:

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

## **The right not to be discriminated against or harassed**

If you are looking after someone who is elderly or disabled you are protected against direct discrimination or harassment because of your caring responsibilities. Direct discrimination is where you are treated less favourably than someone else because you are caring for an elderly or disabled person. This could include your employer:

- refusing to offer you a job because of your caring responsibilities
- not offering you a promotion because of your caring responsibilities

**For more information about these rights go to:**

**[www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/looking-after-you/your-work-and-career](http://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/looking-after-you/your-work-and-career)**

# Why should your employer help – the business benefits

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

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## **The flexible supportive approach:**

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

Carers also develop many skills by caring that are of great benefit to employers; for example, negotiation, time management, multi-tasking, liaison with professionals and advocacy. Therefore, keeping carers in the workplace ensures your skills are used to the benefit of all.

Organisations that have introduced flexible working and special leave arrangements for carers have judged them a success. Their message is: it makes business sense to care for carers.

# Where can you get help?

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## Support at work

Find out what support and/or policies your employer has by checking your contract, staff handbook or intranet and/or speaking to your:

- line manager
- human resources (HR) /personnel department
- welfare officer or occupational health adviser
- union or staff representative
- colleagues.

You could talk to someone you trust at work - we spend a lot of time with our colleagues and they may be a great source of support. You may find other carers at work and could support each other. You could also ask your employer to help you set up a support group, if there isn't one already.

## Support outside the workplace

At some point you will probably need to find some practical help with caring, if you haven't already. Finding the right kind of replacement care is important for the person you look after and for your own peace of mind.

There are many options and many depend on your resources. These include:

- asking family and friends to help out on a paid or unpaid basis
- employing someone directly
- using local voluntary or community services, such as befriending or community transport
- using assisted living technologies that can help monitor/improve the well-being of the person you care for whilst you are at work
- using a care agency
- using services provided by your local council following a community care assessment, such as a day centre, homecare or a short break service.
- arranging time in a care home or for someone to live in at home so you can have a rest.

You will have to pay for some or all of the above, depending on your income or the income of the person you are caring for.

# For further details

To determine what sort of help is needed and how much it might cost social services can carry out an assessment of the person to be cared for. This is called a community care assessment. They should also look at your needs and carry out a carer's assessment, to see how best you can be supported in your caring role. This should include planning for how best to support you to remain in employment.

Even if the person you care for refuses help and doesn't want to be assessed by a social worker, you can still have a carer's assessment in your own right.

The best way to request a carer's assessment is to write to or email the adult social care section of the local council responsible for the person you look after.

To contact your local council adult social care service, go to your local council's website and then look for 'adult social care' or, alternatively, phone your local council and ask for this service.

## For further details of where to get information and support, you can:

Visit **Carers UK** at [www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org)

Visit **Carers Direct** at [www.nhs.uk/carersdirect](http://www.nhs.uk/carersdirect) (or call 0808 802 0202).

Ring, email or visit your local carers centre or carers support service (find where yours is by going to [www.carers.org/carers-services/find-your-local-service](http://www.carers.org/carers-services/find-your-local-service) or email [support@carers.org](mailto:support@carers.org)



Skills for care  
West Gate  
6 Grace Street  
Leeds  
LS1 2RP

Telephone: 0113 245 1716  
Fax: 0113 243 6417  
[info@skillsforcare.org.uk](mailto:info@skillsforcare.org.uk)  
[www.skillsforcare.org.uk](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk)

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