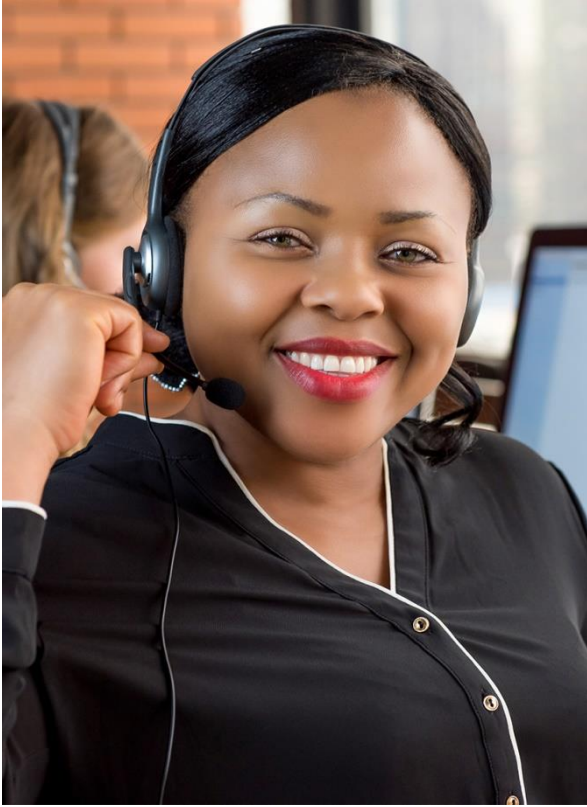


Toolkit



MANAGING CHANGE

TOOLKIT FOR EMPLOYERS

About carers in the workplace

Caring for an ill, older or disabled family member, partner or friend will have an impact on most of us at some point in our lives. Already 1 in 7 people in the UK workforce have caring responsibilities and this ratio is set to increase as people live longer and retire later. Recent Carers UK research identified that as many as 600 people a day in the UK give up work to care, often because they face a caring crisis without knowing where to go for information and support. The coronavirus pandemic has also brought caring issues into sharp focus with more employees having to manage changing circumstances around supporting family members and friends, whether living with them or at a distance. And yet, caring is still an issue which people find hard to discuss and plan for in the workplace.

Who are carers in the workplace?

Employers for Carers uses the following definition to describe carers in the workplace: *Carers are employees with caring responsibilities that have an impact on their working lives. These employees are responsible for the care and support of ill, older or disabled family members, partners or friends who are unable to care for themselves.*

About this toolkit

This Toolkit has been produced by Employers for Carers (EFC) to help you to:

- Identify and be aware of the changes carers in your organisation may face
- recognise your own concerns about managing change as an employer/manager
- support your employees by providing the relevant information available in your organisation

Recognising the issues

The challenges carers face

Caring often involves changing and unpredictable support needs. As an employer/line manager, to be able to support employees who have or may have caring responsibilities in the future, it is important to understand the changes that may occur and thus impact on work life.

Every carer has a unique caring situation meaning the changes experienced differ from person to person.

A carer could experience:

- a child moving towards adulthood
- a family member coming out of hospital
- a parent moving from their home into residential care
- a relative or friend coming to the end of their life
- bereavement and life after caring

Carers may also often experience ongoing transitions as the health condition of the person they are supporting changes over time. For example, some people's health conditions may fluctuate and vary from day to day, some may be unpredictable and worsen suddenly, while others will deteriorate more gradually. Carers often talk about facing 'crisis' or 'cumulative' challenges as caring situations may happen overnight or creep up gradually; however, in both cases they will involve managing change.

Recognising the changes in behaviour

As an employer, it is important to be aware of any changes in your employees' behaviour, especially if you know that they have caring responsibilities. A change in behaviour may suggest that they are finding it difficult to juggle their caring and work responsibilities.

As a carer, the changes they experience may often be unforeseen and unpredictable, and therefore allow no room for planning. This can, in turn, have an adverse effect on their emotional wellbeing.

Addressing your own concerns about managing change

As well as supporting employees to manage change, it is important to address your own concerns around managing any adjustments relating to this. As an employer or line manager, when you have an employee who may need, for example, to use emergency leave or work flexibly, it will be your responsibility to support them while keeping things running within your team.

To help you be in control of your own concerns about managing change, it could be useful to speak and open up to other managers in the organisation so that you can benefit from peer support. Sharing information about challenges they have faced and how they have overcome them could help you feel more confident about your ability to manage change in the workplace.

Supporting carers in the workplace

As an employer/line manager, it is your responsibility to provide the relevant support to any of your employees who may be carers.

- Be **approachable and open** to regular communication with your employee(s). Try to encourage individuals to share information about their caring situation, and support needs, without being intrusive and crossing professional and personal boundaries. Because carers are often managing changes as part of their caring responsibilities, it is important to continue conversations and have a regular, ongoing dialogue. Our 'Starting the conversation' toolkit can support you further with information on how to raise current and potential future support needs for the colleague(s) you are managing.
- If your organisation has a **Carers Passport** in place, this can help communicate and record support during changing times. It can also communicate existing workplace support for carers – including recording any contingency plans that have been made for an individual facing an unforeseen caring event. We have evidence on the benefits of its use from both employers and carers using the scheme, including Efc members. More information can be viewed on the [Carer Passport website](#).
- A **workplace contingency plan** can help to prepare for sudden changes. You can find more information in our [contingency management toolkits](#) for organisations and line managers.
- Make carers aware of the **statutory rights** they are entitled to and the **policies and provisions** in place at your organisation. Flexible working arrangements and leave can make a big difference for carers, especially when facing changing circumstances. In addition, sometimes relatively simple adjustments such as permission to take/make personal texts and phone calls, and informal flexibilities around start and leaving times, can make a real difference for carers. Making changes on a temporary or trial basis can also be helpful where caring situations are changing or unpredictable and can give both parties a chance to see how things work.
- As many working people do not consider themselves as carers, especially when they are new to caring, **think about the language you use** when talking about these issues. For example, it is better not to ask 'are you a carer?' but instead to say something like 'are you looking after?' or 'are you supporting a family member or friend who is older, seriously ill or disabled?'

Signposting support

Talk about the support you provide for carers and signpost them to it. This will make carers feel as though they are able to come forward for help if they need it.

If your organisation has a **Carers Network** this is a great opportunity for your employees to meet or connect with other carers and share their own experiences. Actively encourage carers to take up support. It is also important to engage other line managers to promote and support caring.

If you have a health and wellbeing or **employee assistance programme** this can provide practical support for carers in your workplace by helping them to maintain their own physical, emotional and mental health and resilience.

Signpost employees to **external organisations** like [Carers UK](#) which provide practical advice and support for carers. Carers UK provides information about all aspects of caring including transitions and changes around this. Most recently, this includes regularly updated information on coronavirus with specific advice for working carers on this and tips on creating a contingency plan for carers and those they look after.

Signpost line managers to these sources of help for their employees and ensure there is in house training and support for managers too. Managers will also inevitably have to manage change themselves, either due to their own caring responsibilities or because they are supporting an employee who is a carer.

Top ten tips

1. Understand the changes that can occur for carers. These can be unpredictable and difficult to plan.
2. Be aware of the emotional impact that changes may have on carers. The variable nature of caring means your employees may feel anxious and uncertain at these times.
3. Be approachable and open when speaking to your employees who have caring responsibilities. Caring can be a very difficult subject to talk about so it is important to make your employee feel at ease.
4. If your organisation has a carers passport, use it to facilitate a conversation about caring responsibilities and plan the support needed.

5. Know the statutory rights that carers are entitled to in the workplace, as well as relevant policies and provisions in your organisation like flexible working and leave. These can be a lifeline for carers when they are faced with a change in their situation.
6. Signpost carers to the policies and provisions in your workplace that will support them when they need it most.
7. Think about making a contingency plan so that when there may be a big change in a caring situation, there is support and guidance for that employee.
8. Signpost support to employees such as an EAP or carers network.
9. Address your own concerns about managing change in the workplace. Speak to other line managers and express the challenges that you have faced and how you have overcome them.
10. In the future it could be you as a manager who experiences caring whilst working. So make yourself aware of the challenges and support for carers - and remember that ensuring your employees receive the correct support can in turn benefit your business.

Three next steps

1. Circulate the related [‘Managing change for employees’](#) toolkit to your team and colleagues.
2. Tell members of your team that your organisation is a member of EfC and that all our resources are available to them. Circulate your organisation’s membership code to your team so that they can access these resources.
3. Circulate the monthly EfC e-bulletin to all employees as there will be new carers in your workforce regularly. Employees can also sign up to receive the e-bulletin on the EfC website.

Contact Employers for Carers

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