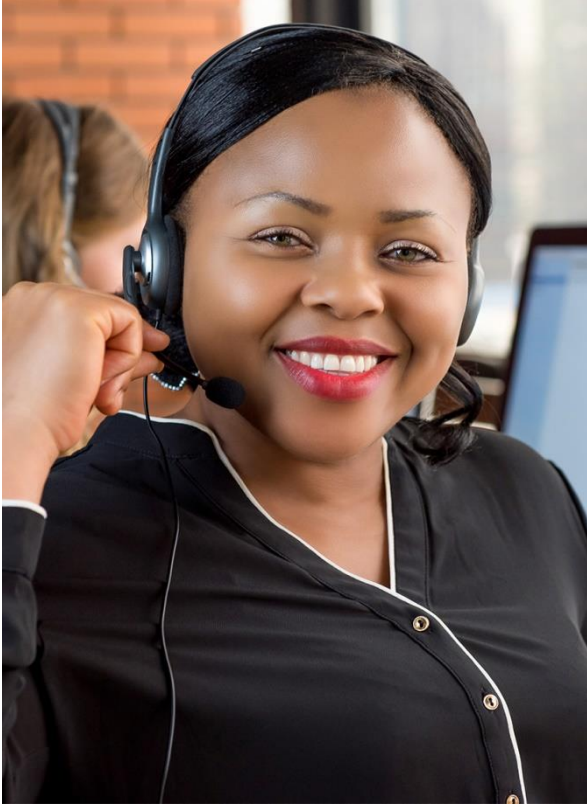


Toolkit



DEVELOPING A CARERS' POLICY

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. 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:

- think about what sort of approach is right for your organisation
- produce a specific carers' policy or include carers in existing policies
- reach out to carers in your workforce who might not realise that they are caring and enable them to access the support offered in your policies

Developing a Carers' Policy

Some organisations find it useful to have a specific policy for employees with caring responsibilities whereas others may want to include carers in their existing HR policies. The best results are often achieved by including carers in your generic policies and also having a specific carers policy or guidance document that signposts to relevant policies and support.

An important thing to take into account is that caring is very individual and therefore the experiences of your staff may vary considerably. Do bear in mind too that some staff may feel more confident about talking about their caring responsibilities, whilst others may wish to disclose little about their caring situation.

Remember also that caring is different from mainstream childcare responsibilities and needs a separate response from employers and managers. Caring is often more unpredictable than childcare and the milestones may be more challenging where dependency increases rather than decreases over time for example.

Equality Act

You should also include carers in your equality and diversity policies. This will highlight the fact that you recognise that caring is a workplace issue, even if often hidden, and that carers need to be treated fairly.

People who are looking after someone who is elderly or disabled are protected against direct discrimination or harassment in the workplace because of their caring responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.

Employers in the UK must ensure that they do not discriminate against the carers in their workforce by treating them differently to other workers, or subjecting them to harassment. For example by:

- not offering someone a job because of their caring responsibilities
- not offering an employee a promotion because of their caring responsibilities

What should a carers' policy include?

Your policy should include:

- reference to your organisation's definition of a carer and what this means
- details of the support your organisation offers to carers or references to other policies which are relevant
- details of the support available to line managers

Carers' support options

Many of the support options will be dependent on the employee's needs, and it is good practice to consult your employees when you develop your policy about what provision will be most beneficial to them. Some options to include are:

- flexible working practices
- emergency leave
- carers leave (paid and/or unpaid)
- carer awareness training for line managers
- carers Network

- Employee Assistance Programmes which help find carers find and access practical support for the person they care for
- practical solutions such as a parking space near to the workplace and being allowed to make/receive private phone calls to check on the person they care for

Communicating your policies and support

Once you have well written and easily accessible policies the next step is to make sure that your employees are aware of the support on offer and how to take it up.

Managers - especially line managers - play a key role in implementing and promoting carer-friendly policies and practices. One of the key things that carers say they want in the workplace is understanding from managers. However, in order to provide effective support to carers, managers need to be trained to interpret the policies in a flexible and empathetic manner which takes account of the kinds of issues that carers may face in the workplace.

Managers need to ensure that all employees are aware of the information and support available within your organisation. These resources and benefits can be promoted through induction procedures, performance reviews etc. And, ideally managers should be able to signpost employees to support outside the organisation, such as Carers UK and Employers for Carers.

Many employers find it useful to have a senior level carers' champion, to be an ambassador for carers support. They can help to promote the policies available and to reassure staff that they won't be seen as less able to do their jobs should they ask about needing support to enable them to juggle their job and caring responsibilities.

Alternatively, have someone with a carers remit where employees can go to discuss issues before formally asking for support from their line manager. This works well if the person has or has had caring responsibilities themselves.

It is important to be proactive in creating a workplace where caring is considered to be part of everyday life, just as childcare is and therefore policies and workplace support are on hand to improve working lives. A workplace which has policies in name only creates a culture where carers avoid taking up the support on offer in case they are treated less favourably as a result. Senior figures should be seen to be accessing workplace support, to show that it is no barrier to success and career progression.

Top ten tips

1. Decide whether to have a specific carers' policy or whether to refer to carers within existing policies, or indeed both. Alternatively, you could produce a guidance document that signposts to relevant policies.
2. Promote and publicise the policy *and* what you mean by carers and do this regularly; carers are not a static group and people will often only digest information when it becomes relevant to them. Carers Week (first week of June) and Carers Rights Day (end of November) are ideal opportunities to promote your support for carers.
3. Find a senior level person to champion the policy and encourage staff to take up the support on offer.
4. Go beyond circulating your HR policies, make it acceptable to ask about and take up the support on offer through your policies.
5. Normalise caring - make specific reference to caring, and your policies, at inductions and reviews/appraisals.
6. Include carers and caring in the workplace issues in your other diversity inclusion strands and networks, such as Health & Wellbeing, Family, Disability etc.
7. Use examples of how staff have benefited from your policies, these should include senior level staff who should lead by example.
8. Educate and train all managers to be carer aware and responsive. This could be through specific carer awareness training and/or including caring in other relevant programmes.
9. Don't underestimate how hard it is to identify carers and for carers to identify themselves and therefore access the support on offer. However even small steps can start to make a difference and help to create a culture where staff feel more comfortable about recognising themselves as a carer and come forward for support.
10. Monitor and evaluate the take up of support.

Three next steps

1. Tell your employees that you are a member of EfC and that all our resources are available to them. Circulate the EfC website guide so that all employees can register on the EfC website and access these resources.
2. Look at the sample policies on the EfC website in the resources/ good practice section.
3. Promote your new Carers' Policy and encourage a workplace culture where employees feel able to take up the support offered.

Contact Employers for Carers

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