



# Supporting working carers

## A carer's guide

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# 1. Balancing work and care

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It may feel as if you are juggling two jobs when you are holding down a paid job and caring for a friend or relative. Caring can be unpredictable; it can happen overnight or creep up on you and often cannot be planned. You are not alone. Most of us will become carers at some stage in our lives, and more than one in seven people in any workplace is a carer.

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There are things that you can do to help you cope with the pressures of work and care. As a working carer you are likely to need a range of support in the workplace, and often different levels of support at different times – from access to a telephone to check on the person you care for, to flexible leave arrangements that can be used when someone is discharged from hospital.

This booklet sets out:

- basic information about carers at work
- your legal rights
- information you can give to your employer about the business benefits of supporting working carers as well as employers' legal responsibilities
- how to get practical help with caring
- changes you can make at work
- leaving work.

## 2. At work

### Do I have to tell my employer about my caring responsibilities?

It is up to you whether you tell your employer or not. However, you may need to tell your employer so that you can access any support that they provide – and remember that you are protected from discrimination. As an employee, you have some statutory rights (your employer must offer these), but your employer may also offer additional support.

For example, you may be able to use leave arrangements, paid or unpaid, at the discretion of your employer to cover intensive periods of care.

*“I can arrange to have time off for hospital appointments. And if I have to take a longer period of time, for example, when Mum is discharged from hospital, I take half the time as annual leave, and the company matches it by giving me paid carers’ leave for the rest. This means I don’t have to use all my annual leave to care.”*

Sometimes the support you need is very simple, like access to somewhere private to make a phone call or information and advice. Find out what support and/or policies your employer has before you decide by checking your contract, staff handbook, intranet or speaking to your:

- line manager
- HR team
- health and wellbeing or occupational health adviser
- union or staff representative
- colleagues.

Natalie is one of three million working carers in the UK and is chair of a carers staff network in her workplace:

*“I’m so grateful my organisation supports me as a carer with dedicated support, external partnerships and internal policies on flexible working, it has meant not only can I provide the best care possible, but I can still thrive in my career too.”*



## Should I tell other staff?

Colleagues can be very supportive, and it may help just to discuss your situation with someone you can trust at work.

You may find that other colleagues are also carers, and that together you are more able to talk to your employer about ways in which you could be supported. You might ask your employer to help you meet up as a group, to find out how, together, you can find better ways of juggling your job and caring.

Some organisations have carers' networks which offer information and support to working carers and work with HR to influence policies and practices.



## 3. Your legal rights

### A right to request flexible working

From 6 April 2024 all employees in England, Scotland and Wales can request flexible working such as changing working hours or working from home from the first day of employment.

Flexible working could include (but is not limited to); flexi-time, hybrid working, home working, annualised hours, compressed hours, shift swapping, team-based rostering, staggered hours, job sharing, term-time working, part-time working and flexible holidays and could mean that you can balance work and your caring commitments.

Your request to work flexibly must be made in writing. It must state that this is a statutory request for flexible working and include:

- the date of the request
- the change you are requesting to the terms and conditions of your employment in relation to your hours, times or place of work
- the date on which you would like the change to come into effect
- if and when you have made a previous request for flexible working to your employer

Up to two requests are now allowed in a year and any request granted will mean a permanent change to your terms and conditions unless a trial period is agreed. Your employer must agree to your flexible working request unless there is a genuine business reason not to. A decision to reject the request must be for one or more business reasons which are set out in the law. You can appeal against this decision.

Your employer must not reject your request without first consulting you. Unless your employer decides to agree to your written request in full, they must consult you before they make a decision, and invite you to a consultation meeting to discuss your request.

The [ACAS Code of Practice on requests for flexible working](#) (published 2024) recommends that you should be allowed to be accompanied to meetings to discuss flexible working requests.

Your request, including any appeal, must be decided and communicated to you within two months from when your employer first received it. (You and your employer may agree to extend this period.)

## A right to time off

The Employment Rights Act 1996, as amended by the Employment Relations Act 1999 and the Carer's Leave Act 2023, gives carers rights to help them manage work and their caring responsibilities.

### A right to time off in emergencies

All employees have the right to take 'reasonable time off' to deal with an emergency involving a dependant. Whether the time off is paid or not is at the discretion of your employer. To use this right to time off, you must inform your employer as soon as possible after the emergency has happened. This right can also give you some protection from victimisation and dismissal. If you think you have been treated unfavourably because of using this right, seek further advice from your union or a legal adviser.

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

The situations where leave might be taken are:

- 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 yourself)
- to deal with an incident involving a child during school hours
- to deal with the death of a dependant.

### A right to carer's leave

From 6 April 2024 the Carer's Leave Act 2023 provides a flexible entitlement to one week's unpaid leave per year for employees in England, Scotland and Wales who are providing or arranging care for a relative or dependant with a long-term care need.

A dependant includes your husband, wife or partner, child or parent, or someone living with you as part of your family. Others who rely on you to provide or arrange care may also qualify.

A dependant has a long-term care need if they have an illness or injury (whether physical or mental) that requires, or is likely to require, care for more than three months, a disability (as covered by the Equality Act 2010) or require care for a reason connected with their old age.

The right is available from the first day of employment and allows employees to take the leave flexibly, as half or full days, for planned and foreseen caring commitments.

It offers the same employment protections to employees taking this leave that are associated with other forms of family related leave, meaning they will be protected from dismissal or any detriment because of having taken time off.

» **For more information** on the Carer's Leave Act please see information about your rights as a carer on the [Carers UK website](#)

## Parental leave / shared parental leave

If you have at least one year's continuous service with your employer and are responsible for a child under 18, you are entitled to:

- 18 weeks (unpaid) parental leave per child to look after your child, which must be taken by the child's 18th birthday.

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.

You 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. 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). To qualify for SPL, you must share responsibility for the child with one of the following:

- your husband, wife, civil partner or joint adopter
- your child's other parent
- your partner (if they live with you and your child).

» **For further information** on shared parental leave, please refer to [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)

From 6 April 2024 the Protection from Redundancy (Pregnancy and Family Leave) Act 2023 extends the period of special protection from redundancy to pregnant women and new parents returning to work from maternity, adoption or shared parental leave. Current protections will be extended through an expanded period covering from when an employee tells their employer they are pregnant until 18 months after the birth. You can read more about this on the [ACAS website](https://www.acas.org.uk).

## Statutory parental bereavement leave

The Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Act 2018 came into force in April 2020. This law gives all employed parents a day-one statutory right to two weeks leave if they lose a child under the age of 18 or suffer a stillbirth from 24 weeks of pregnancy. You can read more about this on the [ACAS website](https://www.acas.org.uk).

All employees in England, Scotland and Wales have a flexible entitlement to one week's unpaid carer's leave per year.



## Protection from discrimination

If you are looking after someone who is elderly or disabled, the law – under the Equality Act 2010 – will protect you against direct discrimination or harassment because of your caring responsibilities. This is because you are counted as being ‘associated’ with someone who is protected by the law because of their age or disability.

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** or advice about your statutory employment rights call the Carers UK Helpline on 0808 808 7777 or visit [carersuk.org](https://www.carersuk.org)

These rights apply to employees. Your employment status can affect your entitlement to statutory rights. If, for example, you are self employed, on a short-term contract or employed through an agency you may not be covered by these rights. If this applies to you it is important to seek advice from ACAS on 0300 123 1100.

You have the right to choose, and that means to choose to give up work as well as to stay in work.



## 4. An employer's guide

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Use this section of the guide to show your employer or line manager how they can help carers at work.

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### Caring: an issue for us all

Most of us will look after an older, ill or disabled family member or friend. As our population lives longer with illness and disability, more and more workers will be caring. Already the average person has a 50:50 chance of caring by age 50 – long before they reach retirement, with half of women caring by age 46. Employers can provide effective support for these working carers and achieve concrete business benefits.

#### Business benefits

Employers need to support working 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.

Organisations that support flexible working and special leave arrangements for carers have judged them a success.

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

## You can take simple and effective action to enable carers to balance their paid work with their caring responsibilities

### Flexible working practices

Examples include 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.

*“Stress-related absence has been reduced by 26% through flexible working alone.”*

*– Director of People Network, Telecoms company*

### Emergency leave

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*

### Carer’s leave

Employers are now also required by law to introduce a flexible entitlement to one week’s (unpaid) leave per year for planned and foreseen caring commitments for a dependant with a long-term care need. Although this does not have to be paid, a growing number of employers do offer some paid leave.

Other leave arrangements include offering compassionate leave, or a combination of paid and unpaid 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.

*“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*

### Support and understanding from managers

Creating a workplace culture that is supportive to carers is key to implementing policies and practices.

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

*– Carer, utility company, caring for elderly parents*

## Workplace support

You can also offer workplace support such as establishing in-house networking groups and employee assistance programmes. Publicising policies on the intranet or in handbooks is also helpful. 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

## Carers policies

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

## Other practical ways to help

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.

# Carers’ legal rights

## A right to request flexible working

From 6 April 2024 all employees in England, Scotland and Wales can request flexible working, such as changing working hours or working from home, from the first day of employment. Up to two requests are now allowed in a year. 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. The revised [ACAS Code of Practice on Requests for Flexible Working](#) (published 2024) provides practical guidance for employers and employees on the revised right to request.

## 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 you, 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.

## Carer’s leave

From 6 April 2024 employers in England, Scotland and Wales are now also required by law to introduce a flexible entitlement to one week’s (unpaid) leave per year for planned and foreseen caring commitments for a dependant. Although this does not have to be paid, a growing number of employers do offer some paid leave.

» **For further information**, please refer to [gov.uk/carers-leave](https://gov.uk/carers-leave)

## 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.

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). To qualify for SPL, employees must share responsibility for the child with one of the following:

- their husband, wife, civil partner or joint adopter
- their child’s other parent
- their partner (if they live with them and their child).

» **For further information** on shared parental leave, please refer to [gov.uk/shared-parental-leave-and-pay](https://gov.uk/shared-parental-leave-and-pay)

## Protection from discrimination

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.

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.

## 5. Practical help with caring

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At some point you may need to find someone else to help with caring. Finding the right kind of replacement or additional care is important for the person you look after and for your own peace of mind.

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There are many options and many depend on your resources:

- 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 a care agency
- using services provided by your local council following a community care assessment, such as day centre or respite services
- 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. If you are seeking help from a council or trust, it can vary enormously depending on where you live. It is also important to note that the law on care is different in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

» ***Find out more at [carersuk.org](https://www.carersuk.org)***

Remember that making alternative care arrangements so that you can work might cause anxiety and possibly feelings of guilt. However, what you decide must be right for you as well as for others.

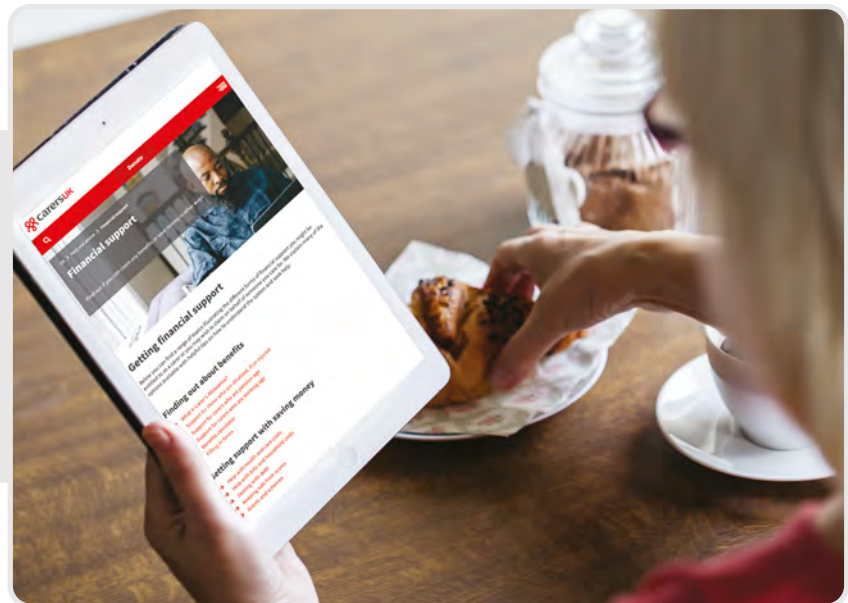


## Find out about financial support you might be entitled to

If you are thinking of giving up work or reducing your hours you may become entitled to benefits, or to increase the benefits you were already claiming.

You can call the Carers UK Helpline on 0808 808 7777 or ask social services (if they have a welfare rights team) or a local advice agency for a benefits check. This will tell you which benefits you will be able to claim and what your income would be if you were to give up work or reduce the hours you work and could help you to prepare for the change in your financial circumstances.

Carers UK's website [carersuk.org](https://www.carersuk.org) also has a list of all the main benefits for carers.



## 6. Leaving work

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If you are thinking of leaving work, consider whether or not you really want to, and if not, what could help you stay in work.

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Think about the things you would be giving up, and whether you really want to lose them.

- Will you manage with less money?
- Do you want to give up the independence and social contact you have through work?
- Will you lose valuable skills if you leave?
- How would leaving work affect your future pension entitlement?

Think about ways around the problem, could you:

- Make a request for flexible working?
- Take paid or unpaid leave to think about your long-term options?
- Take a career break?

### Talk to your employer

Remember that employers value skilled, experienced and committed members of staff and are keen to keep them. Your employer may be able to help in ways you have not considered. Talk to them about your situation, directly or through your HR team or union representative.

If you do decide to leave work, make sure you check all your options before you resign, for example could you take a career break, voluntary redundancy or early retirement?

# 7. Returning to work

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You may want to work or return to work once your caring role comes to an end, or changes in such a way that you feel able to combine care with work.

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If you are not sure what you would like to do, start by recognising the skills and interests you have. Think about what you have learned from:

- any paid work that you have done
- tasks and responsibilities in your role as a carer or parent, or in running a home
- any other activities that you do, for example, voluntary work, committees etc.

Then identify your interests – think about:

- what you enjoy doing
- how you would like to use your skills
- things you miss doing that you once did.

You may feel that you need to gain confidence to use your skills in new ways.

There are training courses available in personal development which cover topics like confidence building, assertiveness training and managing stress.

Think about what employers want and value your own experience. Identify the transferable skills you have gained through caring and match these to employers' needs. Skills you may have developed include:

- managing a budget
- time management
- planning and problem-solving
- prioritising, organising and negotiating.

Think about your short and long term goals and make a plan of action. Don't demand too much of yourself – take small achievable steps.



## 8. Support into training and work

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Find out if your area has a local carers centre or project which offers advice and guidance for carers wishing to return to work.

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Ask your local authority for a carer's assessment, which will take into account your wish (or need) to work.

Find out from your carers centre, local authority or voluntary organisation such as Carers Trust what alternative care is available that would enable you to train or work.

Call a learning helpline such as the National Careers Service which offers careers advice, including signposting to training opportunities. You can call them free on 0800 100 900.

You can also get help from your local Jobcentre Plus office (you can get help from your social security office in Northern Ireland). A Jobcentre Plus adviser can help with:

- training programmes to learn new skills or refresh existing skills
- support in writing job applications, CVs and preparing for interviews
- financial help when you start work.

If you make a claim for Jobseeker's Allowance, you will have a jobseeker's interview that looks at your skills and qualifications, the type of work you want and the steps you will take to find work. When you are asked about your job skills and experience, make sure that you include the skills you have gained and used as a carer as well as those you may have from previous employment.

# About Carers UK

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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.

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Across the UK today 5.7 million people are carers – supporting a loved one who is older, disabled or seriously ill. Caring will touch each and every one of us in our lifetime, whether we become a carer or need care ourselves. Whilst caring can be a rewarding experience, it can also impact on a person’s health, finances and relationships. Carers UK is here to listen, to give carers expert information and tailored advice. We champion the rights of carers and support them in finding new ways to manage at home, at work, or in their community.

**We’re here to make life better for carers.**

## Contact Carers UK

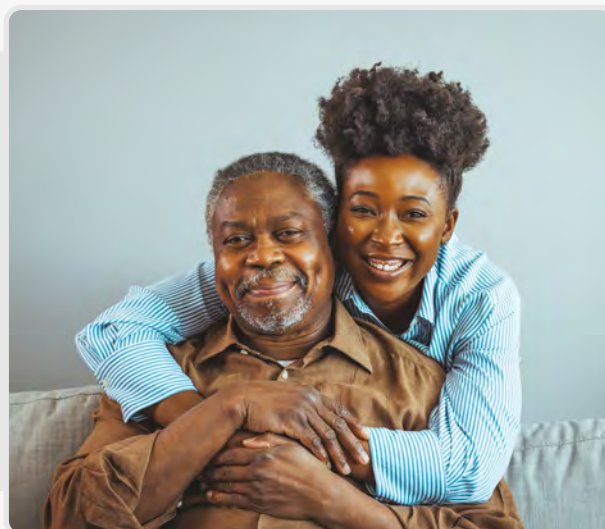
**T** 020 7378 4999 | **Helpline** 0808 808 7777

**E** [info@carersuk.org](mailto:info@carersuk.org)

**carersuk.org**



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.



# About Employers for Carers

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Informed by business and supported by the specialist knowledge of Carers UK, Employers for Carers (EfC) provides practical, 'hands-on' help to employers to support the carers in their workforce.

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Member services include a dedicated web platform with a range of practical resources including e-learning, toolkits, model policies and case studies, access to expert training and consultancy and employer networking events.

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.

## Contact Employers for Carers

**T** 020 7378 4956

**E** [client.services@carersuk.org](mailto:client.services@carersuk.org)

**[employersforcarers.org](http://employersforcarers.org)**





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

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



## Employers for Carers

Carers UK, 20 Great Dover Street, London SE1 4LX

**T** 020 7378 4956 | **E** [client.services@carersuk.org](mailto:client.services@carersuk.org)

**in** [linkedin.com/showcase/efc-employers-for-carers](https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/efc-employers-for-carers)

[employersforcarers.org](https://employersforcarers.org)

EfC is an employer membership service provided by Carers UK.



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The information is correct as of April 2024.

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