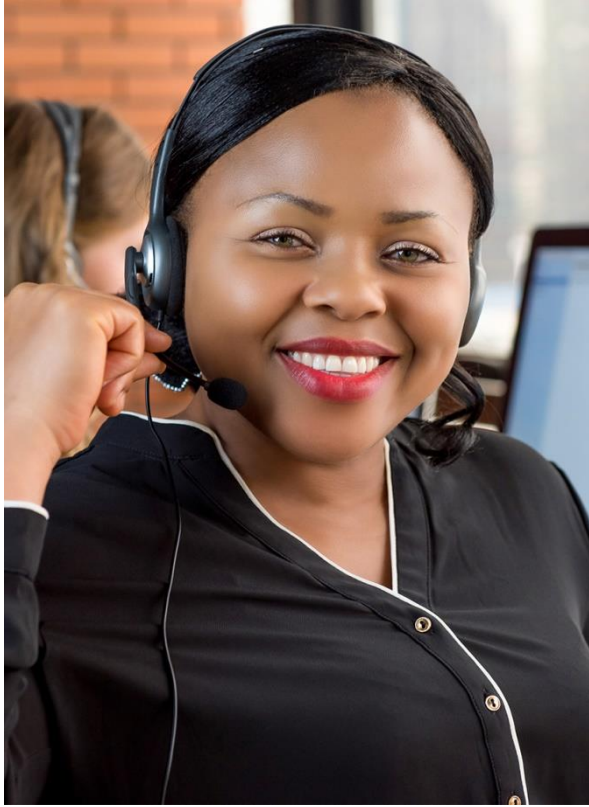


# Toolkit



# MANAGING CHANGE

## TOOLKIT FOR EMPLOYEES

### About carers in the workplace

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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 of us having to manage changing circumstances around supporting family members and friends, whether living with us 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

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

- recognise the changes that you may face as a carer
- learn different strategies to support you through those changes
- explore different types of support, whether that be in the workplace or externally

### Recognising the issues

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Whilst there are many challenges that we come across in daily life, caring for someone can mean experiencing different and sometimes unexpected milestones. Caring often involves dealing with changing and unpredictable support needs so managing change is a key part of coping as a carer.

## **Challenging transitions you may face as a carer**

Every carer has a unique caring situation and therefore changes will differ from person to person.

As a carer you may 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

You may also often experience ongoing transitions as the health condition of the person you 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.

## **The potential impact on your mental health**

The unpredictable and everchanging nature of caring means that it can be hard to plan for and cope with emotionally.

When dealing with these changes, it is important that you are aware of the potential impact on your mental health. It is completely understandable to feel the effect of the changes mentioned above.

A change in circumstances can leave you feeling uncertain and anxious about the future, or frustrated about having to give up more of your own time to care for the person(s) you love.

If your caring responsibilities have come to an end, it may be that you have lost a sense of self and you are trying to deal with the emotions of losing your loved one, whilst finding confidence in yourself again.

All of these different emotions can be difficult to deal with, so it is important to take the time to understand these feelings and try not be too hard on yourself.

## **Strategies to help you manage change**

There are different strategies you can use to help manage change:

- Try to accept that change is a normal part of life, however challenging it feels at the time. There are certain situations that can be out of your control, therefore accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you focus on those that can be altered.
- Avoid seeing crises as problems that cannot be overcome. Keep your mind open throughout and remind yourself that there will be a resolution. Try to look for ways forward and this can in turn change how you interpret and respond to these situations.
- Take control, with clear actions to manage your situation. Try to take decisive actions rather than detaching from the problem. Once you have managed your change, it might be helpful to look at other possible changes that you will have to overcome in the future.
- Keep things in perspective; focussing on the bigger picture can help reduce feelings of anxiety and stress.
- Nurture a positive view of your situation and of yourself. Taking time out of each day to focus on yourself through meditation, mindfulness exercises, physical exercise, reading and much more can help this. Even 30 minutes a day doing an activity that brings you joy can change your mindset. Taking care of yourself helps to keep your mind and body primed to deal with situations that require resilience, such as your caring role.
- Keep a sense of your own goals and ambitions. Whilst focusing on managing your changing situation may be a priority, it is important to revert back to maintaining the goals and ambitions you have for yourself outside of your caring responsibility. Do something regularly, even if it is a small accomplishment, that enables you to move towards your goals.

## Seeking support within the workplace

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There are different types of support you could access within your workplace:

- Using your **Statutory Rights** in the workplace is important when you are facing changing circumstances. There are certain rights, that as a carer, you are entitled to. For example, the right to request flexible working, the right to time off in emergencies to care for dependents, and parental leave and shared parental leave. There is also the right not to be discriminated against because of association with disability or age (Equality Act 2010).
- Check out any **policies and provisions** in your workplace that could help you manage your caring responsibilities. This could be a specific carers policy, or a statement or guidance within existing policies, for example on flexible working and leave. Your

employer may also have a health and wellbeing scheme or Employee Assistance Programme that could give you information and support, both to help you with caring and to look after yourself.

- Speaking to your **line manager** is important to help ensure you are receiving the correct support in the workplace. If your line manager is aware of the changes you are experiencing, they may allow you to work flexibly or take a short amount of time off. If you do not feel comfortable raising this with your line manager initially, talk to a colleague first or, if available in your workplace, an HR colleague or union representative. There may be existing support that you are not aware of, or you may find that your employer is open to exploring ways to support you to manage your changing circumstances as a carer.
- If your organisation has a **Carers Network**, engage with others in the group and you may find there are other employees who have experienced the same changes in their circumstances as you. Finding common ground and someone who understands what you have been going through could give you a sense of relief.
- Your organisation may have a **Carers Passport** in place which can be used as a tool to facilitate a conversation between employee and line manager about caring responsibilities and any support needs. 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**. It can help to create a supportive working culture where you feel that you have ‘permission’ to talk about your circumstances in a safe environment.

## External support

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Carers UK provides practical information and advice about all aspects of caring including a number of things related to managing change, for example:

- **[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)**: key information for carers which is regularly updated and includes advice for working carers, FAQs from carers, looking after your mental wellbeing and advice on creating a **[contingency plan](#)** for you and those you look after.
- **[General Carers UK information and advice](#)** to help you manage challenging and changing situations including getting help with caring whatever your situation, managing someone’s affairs, looking after yourself and help during different stages including when your caring role changes or ends.

- Employees of Employers for Carers member organisations who subscribe to our [Digital Resource for Carers](#) platform can access a range of resources to support carers including e-Learning resources, essential reading guides and factsheets on navigating the system, managing time effectively, building physical and emotional resilience and strategies for coping with stress, including self-help and building networks.
- There are also lots of **online groups** and other sources of practical peer support including the Carers UK online [Forum](#) and local voluntary groups that may be able to help in practical ways. The [support where you live](#) section of the website includes contact details for local carers organisations across the UK.

There are a number of national and local organisations that offer information and advice for carers. These range from carer specific organisations (like carers' centres or hubs) to condition specific organisations or organisations offering advice on issues such as finances, housing, health, legal, etc.

## Top ten tips

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1. Understand that as a carer you will have to overcome change that may be unpredictable. Assess your situation and be aware of the possible changes you could be faced with.
2. Recognise that these unpredictable changes can impact on your mental health. Remind yourself that feeling anxious or uncertain is completely normal.
3. Keep things in perspective. Take decisive actions over the things that you can control and understand there are some things you are unable to control.
4. Ensure that you are looking after yourself to minimise the mental health impact of change. Use mindfulness, exercise or enjoyable activities to make sure you focus some time on you. This can help build resilience for future changes.
5. Connect with other colleagues through a carers network and share experiences of caring. You will learn that you are not alone and you can speak to others about what has helped them cope with change.
6. Speak to your line manager about the changes you are dealing with and they should be able to signpost you to support that can help you manage this. Letting your line manager know about your situation means that they can provide you with the relevant support.

7. Use a carers passport if your organisation has one in place. This means that you and your line manager can track the changes and update the support that is provided for you.
8. Be aware of the statutory rights you are entitled to in the workplace.
9. Find out, whether from your line manager or otherwise, what policies and provisions in the workplace are relevant to carers.
10. Reach out to external support and remember that it is important to ask your family and friends for help when going through these changes.

## Three next steps

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1. Talk about caring with your colleagues or managers and learn about what support your employer can offer you in the workplace. Share this toolkit with your colleagues to support them with managing change.
2. Tell your colleagues 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 colleagues so that they can access these resources.
3. Encourage your colleagues to sign up to the monthly EfC e-bulletin as people in your workplace could become carers at any time. Your colleagues can also sign up to receive the e-bulletin on the EfC website.

## Contact Employers for Carers

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