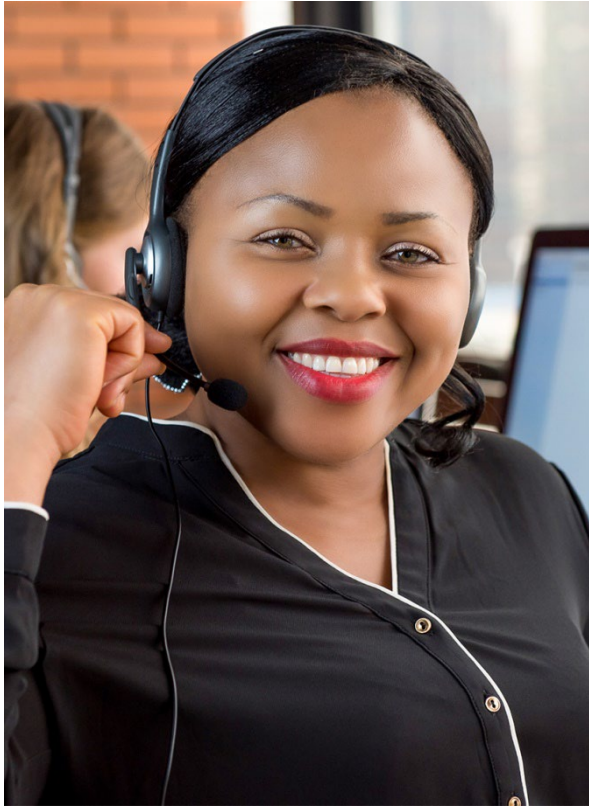


# Toolkit



## ENGAGING CARERS IN YOUR WORKFORCE

### 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. 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. Furthermore, the outbreak of COVID-19 saw an additional 2.8 million workers taking on caring responsibilities, with many employers estimating that 20-25% of their staff are looking after a loved one outside of work.

And yet, caring is still an issue which employers and employees find hard to recognise, discuss and plan for in the workplace. Carers UK research has identified that it takes an average of two years to self-identify as a carer. And 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.

#### 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:

- raise awareness about caring amongst your workforce and the impact it can have
- identify carers in your workforce including colleagues who might not realise they are caring
- reach out to carers to provide information about relevant workplace support and ask them about any further support needs they may have

### Engaging carers in your workforce

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Engaging carers in your workforce is about:

- creating a carer aware workplace
- communicating what support/policies you offer
- cultivating a supportive culture where people feel confident and comfortable about taking up this support

## Creating a carer aware workplace

The first step is to recognise the reality of caring in the workplace, even if it may seem to be a relatively hidden issue, and why it is important to support working carers (the business case). Also be aware that carers are not a static group – each year millions of people take on caring responsibilities whilst caring comes to an end for millions of others as the person they care for recovers, moves into residential care or passes away. A one-off awareness raising campaign is therefore not enough.

- Be clear about what you mean by ‘caring’ and ‘carer’ – use a simple and inclusive **definition** of this in your workplace, for example like the Employers for Carers one above.
- Identify existing **workplace support** for staff with caring responsibilities and ‘name it’ by ensuring that caring, and carers, are mentioned explicitly. For example, a **carers policy** or a **carers charter** is an obvious way of describing who may be a carer and relevant support available. However, if you don’t have a policy or charter, describe any applicable provisions – such as special leave or flexible working arrangements – as being relevant in caring situations. Furthermore, highlighting any specific support you may offer such as **carers leave**, a **carers passport** or a staff **carers network** will also help to raise awareness by prompting individuals to think about their own personal circumstances or those of colleagues in their team.
- Encourage individuals to identify as carers via a staff **survey**. A workforce survey is a really valuable way of helping to identify carers and also demonstrates that you are interested in and keen to support your employees. As a first step, including a question about caring within a wider (general) staff survey can help to raise awareness and capture some initial information about carers in your workforce. This could then be followed by a dedicated survey on caring issues to ask about support needs.

**Tip:** Try not to ask ‘Are you a carer?’; instead say something like ‘Do you look after a family member or friend who is ill, older or who has a disability? If so, you are a carer’ as this is more likely to enable colleagues to see themselves as carers. To encourage responses, it is also helpful to highlight the reason for the survey, for example, by saying something like: “The purpose of this survey is to understand the challenges of juggling work and care and help us develop better workplace support for working carers”. Efc has provided an employee survey on workplace support for

carers that can be used as a template for members to amend to suit their organisation which can be found [here](#).

- To raise awareness as widely as possible in your workplace, include information about caring and the impact that it can have in **several places**. For example, this could be on staff intranets, in payslips, posters around the office, in staff handbooks and all-staff bulletins and through internal social media platforms.
- Use specific awareness raising opportunities such as **Carers Week** and **Carers Rights Day** to highlight caring issues and support available. You could also use opportunities provided by other relevant awareness raising events such as National Inclusion Week, Mental Health Awareness Week etc to highlight caring issues.

## Communicate your workplace policies and support

The first step here is to have well written and easily accessible policies that explicitly support carers, as mentioned above. However, you need to go beyond this to ensure that workplace policies and support are **clearly** and **regularly communicated**. This is true for all workplace policies but particularly so for caring since so many people don't see themselves as carers – and this is also an ever-changing group in the workplace. Caring is also an issue that can seem irrelevant when you are not going through it yourself, but suddenly critically important when a crisis occurs.

- So, when planning your communications around workplace support for carers, be aware that you will need to have ways of getting the **right information to people at the right time**. People will often only take information about caring on board when it becomes relevant to them so there needs to be **continuous communication** and through **different channels**. (As mentioned above, these could include staff intranets, payslips, posters, staff handbooks and bulletins and internal social media platforms.)
- Include information on caring for your staff at **key points of the employment journey**, from start to finish. For example, within induction packs, any regular/relevant staff surveys, workplace training courses and mid-career/mid-life reviews.
- To help engage as many **managers** as possible, include information on caring and workplace support for carers within manager induction and development training and as part of wider training on equality, diversity and inclusion issues. Managers need to ensure that all employees in their team are aware of the information and support available within your organisation for carers including workplace policies and provisions (including a carer passport and carers network if available) and other

relevant employee benefits. 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, promote the policies available and to reassure staff that they won't be seen as less able to do their jobs should they talk about needing support to juggle their job and caring responsibilities. Alternatively, have someone in place with a carers remit where employees can go to discuss issues before formally asking for support from their line manager. This seems to work particularly well if the person has had caring responsibilities themselves.
- A workplace **carers network** or support group can be an excellent way not only of raising awareness but also communicating support in the workplace. This provides an opportunity for employees to join at any time during their caring journey and receive support from others who are going through similar experiences. Networks also play a key role in raising the visibility and profile of working carers by bringing caring issues to life especially through individuals' stories. Many employers say that these stories can be the most powerful way of communicating about caring, and what helps in the workplace, and encouraging more colleagues to come forward for support. Furthermore, networks can be an excellent way not only of promoting existing workplace support but also gaining valuable insights on how to build on this.
- Encourage colleagues to identify as a carer to either their line manager or HR. For example, this could be done via a **Carer Passport** scheme. A Carer Passport is essentially a record of (and tool to facilitate) a conversation about the flexibility and support needed to combine work and care. It provides a straightforward way to document flexibility and support and helps to 'normalise' caring in the workplace. More information about setting up a passport and promoting it in your workplace is provided in our [Carer Passport Toolkit](#).

## Cultivate a supportive workplace culture

Building an open and supportive culture is an essential part of ensuring that employees with caring responsibilities can balance work and care. You can have many good workplace policies and practices to attract and retain carers; however, carers won't access these if the culture is not supportive and inclusive for all. Related to this, one of the key things that carers say they want in the workplace is understanding from **managers**. All managers – and especially line managers - play a key role in implementing and promoting carer-friendly policies and practices. However, to provide

effective support to carers, managers need to be educated and trained in both the spirit and letter of policies and need to understand the issues that carers face.

- Be **proactive** in creating a workplace which promotes the take-up of carer support to avoid carers feeling that they will be treated less favourably if they take up any of the policies. To help put this into practice, senior figures should **model** this behaviour, to show that it is no barrier to success.
- As part of the workplace culture, there should always be opportunities for employees with caring responsibilities to feel able to discuss these in an open way. This is an important aspect in ensuring that policies are effective. Managers need to make it **OK to talk about caring**, however they need to be trained and supported in how to do so, in order not to feel like they are being intrusive and crossing professional and personal boundaries. It is about building successful and trusting working relationships.

**Tip:** It is often hard for individuals in the workplace to talk about their caring responsibilities and support needs as these can be difficult issues to raise. Managers can find it hard to initiate or respond to a conversation about caring too. EfC has provided a toolkit to help you [start a conversation](#) about caring, whether this is about your own caring situation or that of the colleague(s) you are managing.

- To cultivate and sustain a supportive workplace culture it is also important to include and embed – as ‘business as usual’ - education and training for **managers** on caring issues and workplace support available. EfC provides practical resources for managers that can complement your own **education** and **tools** to help managers recognise and support carers in their team. So, do remember to promote your membership internally and highlight that all EfC resources are available to colleagues including, for example, our induction, carer aware and line manager e-learning.
- Review your existing policies and provisions to see if there is more that you can do to cultivate a supportive workplace culture for carers. For example, if you don’t already do this, consider introducing a specific **carers policy** or a **carers charter** to describe who may be a carer and relevant support available. Dedicated support such as **carers leave**, a **carers passport** and a staff **carers network** also help to raise visibility of caring and to ‘normalise’ this in the workplace.
- Cultivate a supportive workplace culture from the start by encouraging prospective employees to identify as carers at the point of **recruitment**. For example, you could mention that you are member of EfC and/or accredited as a [Carer Confident employer](#) or highlight any specific support that you have in place for carers.

- You can also build carer support into all key points of the employment journey from **induction** packs and procedures for employees and managers, to regular and mid-career/mid-life reviews.

## Top tips

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1. Create a carer aware workplace by being clear about what you mean by 'caring' and 'carer' and using a simple and inclusive definition of this
2. Identify existing workplace support for staff with caring responsibilities and 'name it' by ensuring that caring, and carers, are mentioned explicitly
3. Encourage individuals to identify as carers via a staff survey and use open and inclusive language to describe caring so that people will recognise what you mean
4. Use a range of different channels in your workplace to raise awareness and communicate support including staff intranets, payslips and bulletins
5. Use relevant awareness raising opportunities such as Carers Week, Carers Rights Day and Mental Health Awareness Week to highlight caring issues and carer support
6. Include information on caring and carer support for staff at key points of the employment journey from recruitment and induction to regular and mid-life reviews
7. Educate all managers to be carer aware as 'business as usual'; include caring within manager induction and development training - and use EFC resources!
8. Encourage senior managers to lead by example and model inclusive behaviour; identify a senior level carers champion to be an ambassador
9. Cultivate an open workplace culture where it is OK to talk about caring; use practical tools that can help such as a carer passport and EFC's toolkit on 'starting the conversation'
10. Circulate information about caring regularly – people will often only digest information when it becomes relevant to them – and promote your EFC membership internally!

## Contact Employers for Carers

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