

## Line manager script

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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, and increasingly during our working lives. Already 1 in 7 people in the UK workforce have caring responsibilities and this ratio is set to grow as people live longer and retire later. An increasing number of workers are also 'sandwich carers', combining adult caring responsibilities with childcare. 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 an unforeseen caring event without knowing where to go for information and support.

Many working people do not recognise themselves as carers, know where to turn to for help, or feel comfortable about coming forward for support. Caring is still often a relatively hidden issue in the workplace because it can be hard to talk about, or plan for. Managers may therefore be unaware of carers within their team or find it difficult to start a conversation about caring.

We have put together a short template script to use as a prompt for a conversation about caring, including about the employee's current caring circumstances, any concerns they may have about current or future support needs, and any suggestions for addressing these in the workplace. Below you will find a range of questions as a guide. These can be adapted to best suit individual scenarios and the specific support you offer in your organisation.

### Why are these conversations so important?

- 7 in 10 working carers have felt lonely or isolated in the workplace because of their caring responsibilities. A small gesture such as sparking up a conversation about how they are doing can go a long way.
- Carers often do not feel comfortable talking about their caring responsibilities, therefore starting a casual conversation may provide an opportunity for employees to open up.
- Carers have said the top priority for workplace support was improved and consistent line manager awareness of caring issues. Having a flexible conversation may help you better understand an employee's situation and allow them to ask questions regarding any support needs they may have.
- Appraisals and reviews are also an opportunity to check if an employee is getting the support they need or if their circumstances have changed.
- Over four out of ten working carers have felt that colleagues and managers did not understand the impact of caring.

### Conversation starters

- 🗨️ How are things with you?
- 🗨️ We have all had a quite tough time lately, is there anything outside work such as supporting friends and family, that you are worrying about?
- 🗨️ How is your family coping? Is there anybody in a vulnerable category/shielding who you are supporting?
- 🗨️ Did you have a good weekend?

**Tip:** employees may feel apprehensive speaking about their caring experience, therefore always take a sensitive and tactful approach

### Follow-up questions

- 🗨️ How are you managing to balance your work with everything else?
- 🗨️ How are you finding things at work and at home?
- 🗨️ Are you getting enough time to yourself outside of work?

**Tip:** Before sparking up a conversation, remind yourself of policies/provisions that are available in your organisation

## Did your employee respond positively?

- 🗨️ Is there anything more we can do to help you?
- 🗨️ Please remember that I am fine with you working flexibly around your commitments if that's helpful.
- 🗨️ Are you aware of your rights as an employee and how the organisation can help you?
- 🗨️ We have a Carers Network, have you joined?
- 🗨️ Are you expecting your caring responsibilities to change in the future?
- 🗨️ I am aware that caring responsibilities can progress and sometimes involve a crisis or emergency, is there anything we can do to help if this happens?
  - Have you got a plan in place in case a crisis or emergency occurs – or would you welcome some help with doing this?

**Tip:** This could be a good time to suggest a follow up meeting to discuss future support

## Are they experiencing difficulties?

- 🗨️ We are members of Carers UK's business forum Employers for Carers where there is lots of information about support at work – have you accessed this?
- 🗨️ You can access free advice from Carers UK and join their membership forum
- 🗨️ Would it be helpful to talk about this another time?
- 🗨️ Would it be helpful to know of other people in the organisation with caring responsibilities?
- 🗨️ Would it help to share your situation with other members of the team?
- 🗨️ We can arrange cover in the event of a crisis or emergency – and support you to put a plan in place if needed for the future
- 🗨️ We have a Carer Passport scheme in place, is this something you would be interested in?
- 🗨️ Are you aware of the current policies/support that we offer? Around flexible working and special leave?

## Prompts for appraisals and reviews

- 🗨️ How are things with you?
- 🗨️ Are you getting the workplace support you need? For example (mention as relevant):
  - Carer passport information (mention passport or review existing information held on passport)
  - Flexible working and leave
  - Carers network or support group
  - Employee Assistance Programme or workplace health and wellbeing scheme
  - Other support provided e.g. through employer subscription to Employers for Carers and Digital Resource for Carers
- 🗨️ Do we have a plan (or the right plan) in place if a caring crisis or emergency occurs? For example:
  - Supporting you to put a plan in place in case of a future event
  - Arranging cover at work when an event occurs
- 🗨️ Is there anything more we can do to support you?