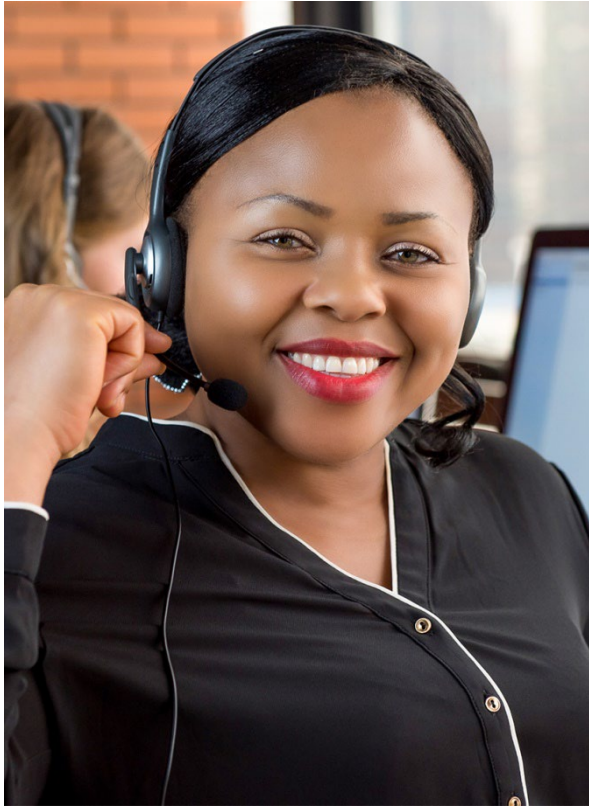


Toolkit



DEVELOPING A STAFF CONTINGENCY PLAN FOR CARING

TOOLKIT FOR LINE MANAGERS

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 line managers to:

- Prepare and use a staff contingency plan at line manager (and team) level as part of line management of individuals
- Build caring, and support for carers, into this plan

Developing a workplace contingency plan for caring

Why is it important for line managers to have a staff contingency plan, and include caring as part of this?

A contingency here is anything that happens outside the range of normal operations that can affect your, or your team's, ability to function. Having a plan is about being prepared for such circumstances and having a procedure in place to keep things running. It should be part of your general line management of individuals and 'business as usual'.

As mentioned earlier, caring is likely to affect many working people, and any part of your organisation, including your own team. While some employees will have long term caring responsibilities, for many others this situation will be relatively short term. However, in either case, caring is likely to involve unforeseen events, for example a family member being taken ill or having a fall, and line managers can plan for some of these occurrences.

How can you prepare a contingency plan for caring as a line manager?

Line management roles and responsibilities (like organisations) vary considerably; some workplaces will have contingency plans covering a range of different circumstances which are cascaded to (and developed with) line managers and others will not. However, whether you line manage one employee or more, having a staff contingency plan - and including caring within this - is an essential part of employee support, retention and productivity. It will help to ensure that you have always got a backup option if anyone you manage faces an unexpected event including because of caring.

Here are three steps to preparing a staff contingency plan that covers caring:

1. Include caring in your day to day planning and management activities

- Think about examples of possible **caring situations**, including unexpected events, that might be faced by anyone you manage. For example, these could range from an employee's parent living at a distance having a stroke or fall, their disabled child's health deteriorating suddenly, or their partner being involved in a road accident.
- If you are managing more than one member of staff, encourage a **team approach** by speaking openly about caring issues at team meetings. Making it 'OK to talk about caring', by mentioning that this could happen to anyone at any time, will help make the issue more visible and encourage conversations among colleagues. (You can then do contingency planning within your team to address possible impacts of unforeseen caring events on other team members and encourage responses from them so that they are part of the conversation and solutions too.)
- Think about any **key roles or functions** in your team which would need to be covered as a priority if the employee(s) concerned had to be away from work suddenly due to an unexpected event for any reason, including for caring.
- Consider how you would arrange **staff cover** at short notice, either within your team or organisation. Many unforeseen caring events are likely to be relatively short term so in such cases another team member may be able to cover on a temporary basis.

2. Be well informed about workplace support which can help carers

- Ensure you are aware of **existing workplace support** which could be helpful for anyone in your team with caring responsibilities. For example, these could include

flexible working and leave arrangements, a health and wellbeing scheme, Employee Assistance Programme or carers passport etc, as outlined below.

- **Flexible working arrangements and leave** are top of the list of things that can make a difference for carers, especially when facing unexpected events. Check what your organisation offers in this area and how this could help staff with caring responsibilities and communicate this to your team.
 - Remember that support doesn't have to be complicated. In many cases **relatively simple things** like a small change in working hours or flexible arrangements, or a day or two of paid leave, can make all the difference to being able to continue working, or cope as usual. Be open to trying any new support arrangements on a temporary or trial basis to allow adjustments on both sides as this can help minimise risk for both parties.
 - Think about **additional options** for support that would help and be ready to mention these when you are talking to the individual(s) you manage. Small adjustments like permission to make private calls or car parking close to the office can make a real difference to someone facing an unforeseen caring event. Other support could include a health and wellbeing (or employee assistance) programme and signposting to practical information and advice on caring, for example from in-house champions, staff networking groups and external organisations like Carers UK. The Employers for Carers membership platform **EfC Digital** provides information and good practice examples on offering such support for carers in the workplace.
 - Check whether your organisation has a **workplace carers passport** in place. If it doesn't, consider introducing one. This is essentially a tool to help facilitate a conversation between an employee and their line manager about caring responsibilities and any support needs, and a record which identifies that an employee is a carer and sets out an offer of support in response. 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 individuals feel that they have 'permission' to talk about their circumstances in a safe environment. We have evidence on its benefits from both employers and carers using the scheme, including EfC members. More information can be viewed on the Carer Passport website (<https://carerspassports.uk/>).
- 3. Communicate about caring, and support available for carers, to your team**
- Talk about the **support** you provide for carers so that the individual(s) you manage are aware of it and feel able to come forward for help if and when they need it.

- Talk about **caring**; aim to ‘normalise’ it and see it as something which can happen to anyone, at any time, including at work. Think about it as part of your wider work-life balance or health and wellbeing support for your team, and include it in relevant staff induction conversations, training and one-to-one meetings etc.
- Think about **language**. Many of us don’t see ourselves as carers so try not to ask ‘Are you a carer?’ but instead say something like ‘Do you look after someone because they are older, ill or have a disability?’ This is more likely to help individuals identify themselves as carers and come forward for support.
- Try to be **approachable** and have regular conversations with the individual(s) you manage to open up communications, including about any caring responsibilities they may have. The more you can encourage sharing of information about caring situations, and support needs, the more you can plan for potential caring events.
- People will often only take information about caring on board when it becomes relevant to them. So, ensure you **communicate regularly** with your team about existing workplace policies and provisions which may be relevant to caring situations so that you are best equipped to deal with unforeseen caring events when they arise.
- Highlight to the employee(s) you manage both **workplace and external support** available for carers, including signposting them to external organisations who can help such as Carers UK. For example, [Carers UK’s](#) website has up-to-date information about getting practical support and looking after yourself as a carer. There is also a free online tool, [MyBackUp](#), to help carers create a contingency plan for themselves or the person they look after.

Top ten tips for line managers: Summary

1. Include caring in your day-to-day planning and management activities. Aim to ‘normalise’ it by covering it in staff inductions, training and one-to-one meetings etc.
2. Ensure you are well informed about current workplace support offered by your organisation that is relevant to carers, especially flexible working and leave.
3. Think about other practical support options that could be provided including things like permission (and space) to make private calls or car parking close to the workplace.
4. Consider other support provided by your organisation that could be helpful for carers, for example a health and wellbeing (or employee assistance) programme.

5. Signpost individuals to practical information and advice on caring, for example from in-house champions or staff networking groups, if you have these, and external organisations like [Carers UK](#).
6. Check whether your organisation has a workplace carers passport and, if it doesn't, consider introducing one. Use this to record any contingency plans that have been made for an individual facing an unforeseen caring event.
7. Communicate about caring, and support available for carers in your workplace, regularly to your team.
8. Try to be approachable and have regular conversations with the individual(s) you manage so that you can talk about caring and plan together for the unexpected.
9. If you are managing more than one individual, encourage a team approach by speaking openly about caring issues at team meetings to help encourage conversations among colleagues.
10. Think about any key roles in your team which would need to be fulfilled as a priority if an individual had to be away for caring reasons and encourage a team conversation and approach about you could provide cover.

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