



Supporting carers in your workforce

Employer's guide

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1. The challenges of the modern workplace

The UK has over three million working carers – that is 1 in 7 of the workforce juggling the responsibilities of caring and paid employment. Employers can provide effective support for these working carers and achieve concrete business benefits.

In a complex modern world, achieving a work-life balance has become a priority for the many, not a concession for the few. To boost their business, employers require a more flexible and multi-skilled workforce and at the same time, employees need to balance multiple responsibilities inside and outside the workplace. The world of work is changing and we have to change with it if we are to remain competitive.

This guide is designed to help employers make the most of the business benefits of supporting working carers as well as understand their legal responsibilities to those carers.



2. Caring: an issue for us all

Who are carers?

Most of us will look after an older, ill or disabled family member or friend. Caring is part of life but without the right support the personal costs of caring can be high.

Changing demographics – an ageing population, smaller families and different family structures – mean that in the future most people's lives will include at least one episode of caring. Every year, more than 4.3 million people become carers, some overnight, some more gradually – so there is a new population of carers in the workforce every day. 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.

Carers have different needs

Caring is different from mainstream childcare and needs a separate response from employers. Caring for a sick or disabled relative or friend – for example, as a result of an accident or stroke – can happen overnight, and can be unpredictable. Every year, in the UK, thousands of people have a medical incident like a stroke, or are injured in a road accident, and thousands of children are born or diagnosed with a serious disability or rare syndrome. Caring milestones are different too – a disabled child may still be at home with parents as a disabled adult. Caring often ends with a move to residential care or bereavement, bringing its own complicated mix of emotions such as sadness, relief and guilt.

Every year, over four million people become carers, some overnight, some more gradually – so there is a new population of carers in the workforce every day.



3. The business case

Caring is an issue which affects us all and these responsibilities often cannot be planned – caring can happen over time, but it can also happen overnight.

Given the stresses and strains that can result from balancing multiple responsibilities inside and outside the workplace, it is unsurprising that on average 600 people a day leave work to care. And many of these employees are an organisation's most valuable staff, the 45-64 year-olds at the peak of their careers. With fewer young people entering the labour market, organisations need to retain their skilled and talented staff. By recognising the needs of carers, employers can hold on to their experienced staff and reap the rewards of creating a supportive working environment for carers.

Business benefits

Employers need to support 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.

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

4. What employers can do

You can take simple and effective action to enable carers to balance their paid work with their caring responsibilities – and, as a result, retain the services of these valued employees.

Carer-friendly policies can also help you tap into a new source of unrealised potential – the hundreds of thousands of carers of working age in the UK who are not currently in employment.

Flexible working

Flexible working practices – such as 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 – can help a carer balance work and caring commitments. These benefits support carers by addressing their individual situations rather than labeling them as people who need extra help or who have problems. Flexible working, open to all, reduces resentment about “preferential treatment”.

“People are not put into boxes: ‘carer’ or ‘disabled’. Every carer is different and will need an individual solution.”

– Diversity Manager, utility company

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Taking time off

Emergency leave

Emergency leave is important to carers, who can be called home at short notice when care arrangements break down or the person they care for falls ill. 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

Planned leave

Leave for planned and foreseen caring commitments is also important to carers – from 6 April 2024 employers in England, Scotland and Wales are now 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 paid leave.

A dependant includes the employee’s husband, wife or partner, child or parent, or someone living with them as part of their family. Others who rely on them 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.

Other leave arrangements

You can also introduce other **leave arrangements** to help carers. These include offering compassionate or dependants 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.

The evidence from employers themselves shows that it is rarely abused and increases loyalty and commitment.

Paid leave for emergency or planned caring can reduce staff turnover and absence. Evidence also shows it can cut employment costs and increase staff loyalty and commitment.



“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

Managers – especially line managers – play a key role in implementing carer friendly policies and practices and will benefit from specific training in order to provide effective support to carers.

Creating a workplace culture that is supportive to carers also requires the endorsement of top-level management.

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

– Carer, utility company, caring for elderly parents

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

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

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.

Other flexible benefits could include disability or healthcare insurance and childcare or care vouchers. Top of the list of carers’ needs is often information and advice and employers could also play a part in supporting employees in their caring role by signposting them to information about services to support the person they look after.

5. Changing the culture

An organisational culture which allows carers to be open about their situation is key if these policies and practices are to be used by the very people they are intended for.

The first step in developing workplace support is to identify carers and ask them what they need. Be sensitive to issues of confidentiality and give employees the option of providing information anonymously.

Decide how the whole organisation can respond – find a champion to lead the work and promote support at all levels. levels to ensure understanding and commitment.

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.

Monitor the take-up of support and determine the benefits to employees and to your organisation.



Carers' legal rights

A right to request flexible working

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

Up to two requests are now allowed in a year and any request granted will mean a permanent change to terms and conditions unless a trial period is agreed. 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. This right is provided for under the Employment Rights Act 1996 (as amended by the Employment Relations [Flexible Working] Act 2023), and the Flexible Working Regulations 2014 (as amended by the Flexible Working [Amendment] Regulations 2023).

“The average increase in production for flexible workers is 21% – worth at least £5-6 million on the bottom line.”

– Director of People Network, Telecoms Company

A right to time off

From 6 April 2024 the Employment Rights Act 1996, as amended by the Employment Relations Act 1999 and 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 unexpected situations involving a dependant. At the discretion of 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.

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

The situations where leave might be taken are:

- a 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 themselves)
- 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 the employee's husband, wife or partner, child or parent, or someone living with them as part of their family. Others who rely on them 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.

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.**

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.

Employees 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. If leave is postponed, employers must inform the employee within seven days of the request for leave being made, and the leave must be granted within six months. 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).

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).

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. This is because they are counted as being ‘associated’ with someone who is protected by the law because of their age or disability. 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.

Case Study: Centrica

As a founding member of Employers For Carers (EfC), Centrica has developed and championed support for carers over the last 18 years which is helping carers stay in work and thrive. Their approach includes:

- **Having a dedicated carer’s network** – Centrica’s employee network offers vital emotional and practical support to more than 2,000 Centrica carers. As part of this, they run campaigns throughout the year to inspire more colleagues to identify as a carer and access the help they need.
- **Providing paid carer’s leave** – Their industry-leading paid carer’s leave policy provides all Centrica colleagues with up to six weeks of paid leave. This includes an initial 10 days paid carer’s leave followed by another two weeks of discretionary leave, matched with two weeks annual leave. Line manager training has been rolled-out to ensure the policy and its benefits are fully understood and applied fairly.
- **Embracing flexible working** – The key to being able to manage working and caring effectively, is often the ability to work flexibly and openly discuss needs with line managers at different stages of caring. Towards this, Centrica embraces flexible working with the ability to request flexible working from day one of employment, which includes offering reduced or alternative hours as well as working from home wherever possible.
- **Ensuring access to wellbeing support** – A wealth of support is available – from their network of employee mental health first-aiders, to their 24/7 MyCare employee assistance line which provides free, independent, expert advice and services to ensure the wellbeing of employees and family members.

As a result of these activities and more, Centrica are one of the first companies to achieve the Carer Confident Ambassador mark from Carers UK. They have also successfully campaigned alongside Carers UK to enable all working carers in the UK to receive statutory carer's leave, through the Carer's Leave Bill which received Royal Assent in 2023.

“Nobody plans to be a Carer, you are generally thrown in at the deep end, the Centrica Carer's policy supported and allowed me the space to care and say goodbye to my beloved dad. Unfortunately at some point in your lives most people will become carers.”

– Vicky Donovan, Senior Deployment Lead & Co-Chair of Centrica Carers Network

Case Study: Listawood (SME)

With a workforce of around 100 people, Listawood are a manufacturer of promotional products such as ceramic mugs, fridge magnets and mouse pads. The company have made a firm commitment to creating a culture of flexibility and support for those needing to balance their home and work lives, often at short notice, which they believe is a significant driver of their strong record of staff retention.

As part of their performance management framework, Listawood regularly survey their employees to measure staff satisfaction. The company are aware that they do not offer the best salary levels in the area – indeed only 56 per cent of staff surveyed felt their pay was competitive when compared with other employers locally. However, their deep-rooted culture of flexibility is well recognised by staff – 97 per cent felt that the company offered better opportunities for work-life balance than other employers in the area.

Explaining their approach, Managing Director Alex Turner said:

“Losing highly trained staff is incredibly disruptive in any business. In the sales environment it fractures customer relationships which can result in reduced levels of business, and in the factory, it compromises manufacturing efficiency. On top of this you then have to bear the costs associated with recruitment and training for their replacement. We are in no doubt that our staff retention levels are driven by our attitude to work-life balance rather than the generosity of our remuneration packages. This makes it possible for us to remain competitive and profitable in a highly competitive market, even during these unusually difficult trading conditions.”

Case study: Aviva

Aviva introduced a carers' policy and enhanced its bereavement leave benefit for its circa 17,000 UK-based employees.

The carers policy, which became effective on 2 October 2017, enables full-time employees who have caring responsibilities to take up to 35 hours of paid leave per holiday year for planned events, such as to attend hospital appointments. The policy also allows full-time working carers to take up to 35 hours of paid leave for emergencies, per holiday year. The amount of paid leave available for part-time employees who are carers is pro-rated.

Aviva have a wide range of support mechanisms for Carers which include Flexible Working, Smart Working, Job Shares as well unpaid leave. In addition, the carers' policy extends to parental leave arrangements to carers, meaning that employees who have caring commitments can request up to four weeks of unpaid leave per year.

Aviva's working carers can also request adjustments to their working patterns if needed, for example moving to part-time hours.

In the event of unfortunate serious and/or emotional events, Compassionate Leave can be requested and paid leave for unique or rare situations to include unpaid leave if circumstances mean employees need a longer period of time off.

The Carers policy follows a pilot that was undertaken at the organisation's Bristol site in November 2016. This included 100 employees taking part in the We Care initiative, which provided a support network for employees to share their experiences, as well as the challenges, of juggling work and care commitments.

The carers' policy was launched as part of Aviva's wider employee wellbeing programme, Wellbeing@Aviva. The programme aims to provide employees with a range of products, policies and advice to help support staff's overall wellbeing.

Jonny Briggs, Diversity Equity Inclusion and Resourcing Director of Aviva plc said:

“Changing demographics and an ageing population mean that 3 in 5 people in the UK will end up caring for someone at some point of their lives. So we're taking this step now, to support our employees and the people they care about.”

Aviva committed to supporting the Private Member's Bill to introduce carer's leave which successfully passed through Parliament and became the Carer's Leave Act 2023. Aviva did this through evidencing the commercial benefits of supporting their Carers community who wanted to remain in the workplace.

About Carers UK

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.

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

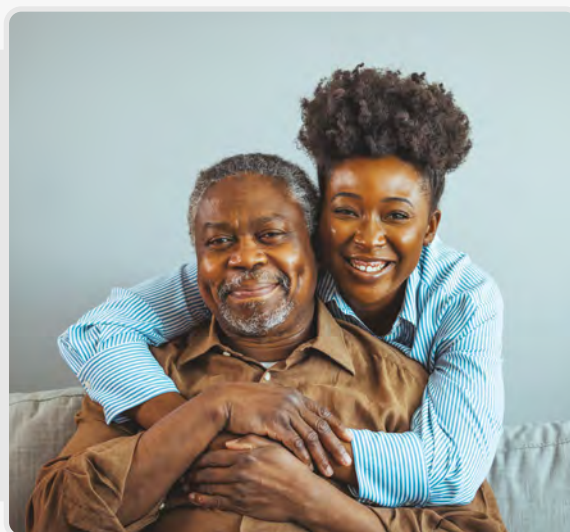
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carersuk.org



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

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.

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

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

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

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