

GUIDE | *June 2020*



# A guide to becoming a carer-friendly workplace





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## Guide

# A guide to becoming a carer-friendly workplace

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## 1 Introduction

Caring is an important part of being human. Carers keep families together, support friends and family to have a better quality of life, contribute immeasurably to society, and save the economy a substantial amount of money. While caring can be extremely rewarding, it can also be stressful and isolating if carers don't get the support they need. Many can feel stretched physically, psychologically and financially, juggling work, care and family commitments.

We know that life can be challenging for working carers in the UK, with almost a third of working carers having not discussed their caring role with anyone at their workplace, most commonly because they believed that nothing would change as a result. A quarter of working carers were also considering giving up their job entirely because of the difficulty they experienced in combining work and care.

The need to provide care is likely to affect most of us at some point in our working lives. With an ageing population and people living longer, many employees are finding themselves caring for older, disabled or seriously ill friends or family. Several people also fall into the 'sandwich generation' (those who care for ageing parents while supporting their own children) and have to juggle parental and caring responsibilities.

In order to address the challenges faced by working carers, it's helpful to first understand what we mean by a 'working carer' in the first place.

## 2 What is a working carer?

A working carer has caring responsibilities that have an impact on their working lives. These workers are responsible for the care and support of relatives or friends who are older, disabled, seriously ill (physically or mentally) and unable to care for themselves (working definition developed by [Employers for Carers](#)). This does not include individuals who are employed as a professional carer or whose caring role relates solely to a child or children who do not have a long-term illness or disability.

Caring experiences vary – a working carer might be providing constant support or a few hours a week; the care might be at home or they might have to travel to support someone. Caring might entail periods of high and low demand, depending on the health of the person being cared for. Caring may involve personal care, handling finances, co-ordinating with medical/care services, or providing things (such as doing the shopping). Caring might be a sudden experience (following an illness or accident) or it might be more of a gradual process, where the carer realises, for instance, that their parents can no longer manage on their own.



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## 3 The impact of COVID-19 on working carers

COVID-19 will likely have impacted on working carers in a number of different ways. What is often an already stressful and demanding role is likely to have become even more so with the continued impact of the virus on our society.

Working carers are likely to be concerned about a number of things:

- What if I pass the virus on to the person I am caring for?
- Who will fulfil my caring responsibilities if I get ill?
- How can I provide care for someone who is self-isolating?
- How can I provide care in a period of lockdown?
- How can I juggle my childcare and caring responsibilities, now that schools are closed?

It's important that organisations are aware of these concerns, and as supportive and flexible with working carers as they can be in this period of stress and uncertainty.

The situation might also have presented an opportunity for employers, particularly if it has prompted discussions with employees about any vulnerable household members or people that are dependent on employees for care. Employers may have, for the first time, gained an understanding of just how many of their employees have caring responsibilities.

We recommend employers build on that understanding and follow our guidance (covered in depth in section 5) to put in place proper and sustained support for working carers going forward.

## 4 Why we need carer-friendly workplaces

We are launching this guidance in a time of global pandemic that has far-reaching consequences for employers, employees and wider society. The impact of the pandemic makes it even more important for organisations to be properly supporting their working carers.

Demographic change means that we are all juggling more complex personal lives with increasingly demanding working lives. There are a number of compelling business, legal and moral reasons why your organisation should be a carer-friendly workplace.

From a **business perspective**, showing support for working carers is likely to enhance your reputation in the eyes of all employees as well as your customers and clients. It will help you to attract and, importantly, retain staff, and is likely to reduce stress and sickness levels and costs. Additionally, as our research shows, working carers who feel supported by their organisation are less likely to find it difficult to concentrate at work and are less likely to be considering reducing their hours or quitting their jobs.

From a **legal perspective**, as employers, we have obligations under flexible working regulations and equality legislation relating to disability which could apply to carers. Employers cannot treat carers less favourably than other people who do not have caring responsibilities. The Equality Act 2010 protects a person who experiences discrimination because they're associated with someone who has a disability. Carers also have the right to take unpaid time off work for dependants in an emergency. The Working Time Regulations



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1998 and the Human Rights Act 1998 have also been used in the past to stand up for the rights of carers, and those who are cared for. For more information on these laws, see the [CIPD's Knowledge Hub](#).

Finally, from a **moral perspective**, it's simply the right thing to do. As employers, we need to provide the best support we can offer to our employees, particularly if they're experiencing challenges outside of work that impact their wellbeing in the workplace. This should be reflected wherever possible in the values and culture of our organisations.

## 5 How to create a carer-friendly workplace

### 1 Develop and communicate a carer policy, framework or guidance

#### Have a clear definition of what it means to be a carer

Having a clear definition of what it means to be a carer is important; many people do not identify themselves as carers and may not think to raise the issue with their line manager in the first place. Others might self-identify as carers but might not feel comfortable sharing that information with their employers if they don't think they would be supportive. It's worth re-emphasising that caring experiences vary – a working carer might be providing constant support or a few hours a week; the care might be at home or they might have to travel to support someone. Caring might be a sudden experience or more of a gradual process.

Identifying carers and understanding their circumstances is a helpful starting point for employers looking to support working carers. You might seek to do this through creating a 'carers' register', where employees who have indicated they're carers are listed, enabling access to carers' leave and other benefits. It's important to regularly update this as circumstances change.

Another formal process might be a voluntary carers' passport scheme, where employees hold a record detailing their individual needs and working arrangements. You might also seek to identify carers through staff induction, appraisals or employee surveys. Having carer role models who are willing to talk about their experiences at work would also help to encourage others to identify themselves as carers and ask for any support they might need. Whatever approach you take, carers' experiences should feed into how support is developed within an organisation, based on regular communication and consultation.

A workplace should have a supporting and comfortable environment where there is no stigma attached to carers identifying themselves. However, carers' decisions concerning whether or not they identify themselves as carers should be respected, understanding that some people may not want to disclose their situation.

#### Develop a carer policy, framework or guidance

Formally recognising working carers is an important step in developing effective formal measures, *and* in creating an organisational culture that's generally supportive of working carers. Our research shows that formal recognition of working carers and the challenges they face also supports self-respect – an important contributor to subjective wellbeing. It's therefore important that carers are recognised within an organisation's policies and procedures. This might be through a dedicated carers' policy or with specific mention



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made of carers within existing HR policies. To some extent this will depend on the culture of your organisation and your working practices, but it's important to have a carers' policy, framework or guidance in place so that everyone in your organisation is clear about how they can access support for carers.

Your organisation's policy, framework or guidance should detail the range of support provided to carers and the procedures for accessing that provision. These could include carers' leave or other special leave arrangements, flexible working options, information on career breaks, access to wellbeing sessions and carers' support networks.

You should also link to other helpful services, where relevant, if you offer them, such as occupational health and employee assistance programmes, or point to external sources of support if you don't offer them. Supporting the mental and emotional wellbeing of working carers, such as by offering counselling or wellbeing support, can have positive spill-over effects for both work and care.

Depending on your organisation's resources, a mix of solutions could be used to respond to a particular situation, such as flexible working combined with some paid/unpaid time off or special leave. Policies should be developed in order to be as flexible as possible, so that they're beneficial to working carers in different work and care circumstances.

### Outline different roles and responsibilities

It's also helpful to outline people's different roles and responsibilities within your policy, framework or guidance so that everyone's clear on how they can support working carers:

- **Employees** should be encouraged to talk to their manager or HR contact if they're caring for someone and need any support. Their line manager and HR will then discuss the support options available with them. Together they can explore and agree what is possible and suitable.
- **HR** should seek to provide advice about supporting carers (including leave arrangements) to line managers and employees as necessary. They also have a responsibility to record carers' leave and inform payroll of any required adjustments to pay and benefits contributions (in some organisations this might also rest with people managers).
- **People managers** should be familiar with the organisation's policy, framework or guidance for supporting workplace carers. They should be comfortable having sensitive conversations with working carers and finding out what support they need. They also need to ensure that all employees are aware of the organisation's approach and understand their own and the organisation's responsibilities in relation to it.
- **Co-workers** should be educated, wherever possible, on what it feels like to be a working carer and what they can do to understand and support their colleagues with caring responsibilities.

### Communicate your approach and embed a culture of support

Organisations can have great policies and support on paper, but if these aren't communicated or known throughout the workplace, they're likely to be of little benefit to carers. Our research shows that a lack of knowledge about existing support and how to access it were barriers for a significant number of working carers.

Creating a culture of support within an organisation will ensure that carers feel comfortable in the workplace and able to raise any issues they might be experiencing with managing their work and caring responsibilities. Good communication of carer policies, frameworks or guidance is essential. This can be done in a number of different ways, from



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providing basic information through staff induction processes, detailing information on the organisation's intranet or staff message boards, through to wider workplace awareness-raising sessions involving colleagues and managers.

### Key takeaways

- Have a clear definition of what it means to be a carer.
- Recognise carers within your policies and procedures and regularly publicise your carers' policy/framework or guidance to all employees.
- Support could include the provision of carers' leave or other special leave arrangements, flexible working options, career breaks and access to wellbeing sessions.
- Link to other resources, if you have them, such as occupational health and employee assistance programmes, and point to external sources of support (see point 5).
- Raise awareness of the organisation's support for carers (through posters, leaflets, social events).

## 2 Introduce flexible working to support working carers

Flexible working can be a great support to working carers struggling to juggle work and caring commitments. Caring responsibilities can be sudden and unpredictable, so it's important to think about how to provide informal as well as more formal options of flexible working. In fact, flexible working is beneficial to all employees, so employers should take steps to create flexible working cultures across their organisation. Our [cross-sector case studies](#) show that flexible working in some form can be accommodated across most contexts.

### Hire flexibly wherever possible

When recruiting, consider including the tagline, 'happy to talk flexible working'. Offering a job on a flexible basis increases the talent pool, helps retain staff and saves on sickness absence. Use the CIPD's [flexible hiring guidance](#) in association with Timewise and Working Families to think through how a role can be done flexibly from the start.

Try to ensure that job requirements are properly aligned to the flexible working pattern, and vice versa. You might want to assess:

- Time – how many hours are needed to carry out the job? Is this a full-time role, a more than full-time role or a part-time one?
- Location – where do the activities need to be carried out?
- When – what activities have to be done when?

### Be transparent about your flexible working practices

Aim to be as transparent about your flexible working policies as possible by publishing these on your website. That way both prospective and existing employees will have a clear understanding of the type of flexibility that you offer, and line managers will feel empowered to support flexible working in their teams as much as possible. Being transparent about your flexible working policies will also help you to be an employer of choice and will be a key way of helping you attract and retain valued employees.





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### **Get creative – understand and make use of a variety of different flexible working options**

Get creative when it comes to thinking about flexible working. There are a whole array of flexible working patterns that you can make use of. While flexible working arrangements may vary across different sectors and job roles, it's possible to consider some form of flexible working arrangement in almost all roles – even in roles that are traditionally seen as being difficult for flexible working, including senior or customer-facing roles, and in sectors like manufacturing. Our research suggests that carers are particularly appreciative of flexible start and finish times and the opportunity to work from home on certain days.

### **Empower line managers to support flexible workers**

Give line managers support and guidance to help them feel confident in dealing with flexible working requests and managing flexible workers. Good management practices support flexible working and should include:

- being inclusive of flexible workers (such as being considerate of working patterns when scheduling meetings)
- reviewing whether flexible working is going well for both the individual and the team
- having regular conversations, both informally and through the appraisal/performance review system
- including a 'good people manager' performance objective against which a manager is assessed and a team supported
- ensuring ongoing access to development and career conversations for flexible workers
- encouraging and recording training sessions and continuing professional development so that flexible workers can catch up on them later
- implementing flexible working fairly.

### **Key takeaways**

- When recruiting, use the tagline 'happy to talk flexible working'.
- Be transparent about your flexible working policies.
- Get creative: make use of a variety of different formal and informal flexible working options.
- Help line managers to support flexible workers.

## **3 Provide carers' leave (paid or unpaid) and be adaptable when carers need leave at short notice**

### **Provide carers' leave**

We believe carers should have the right to paid leave of five days annually. This would ease some of the financial burden that carers often face and is likely to improve their wellbeing. If you can't give paid time off currently, try to limit the effect on pay wherever possible, such as agreeing for carers to make up the time where it's possible.

### **Provide time off for emergencies**

Employers are required by law to give a reasonable amount of time off for sudden or unexpected emergencies involving a dependant (there is no set amount of time, as it depends on the situation). A 'dependant' could be a spouse, partner, child, parent or



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anyone living in the household. It could also be someone who relies on an employee for their care or for help during an emergency, such as an elderly neighbour or friend. Although this time off does not have to be paid, many employers do so to ease the financial burden many carers face.

#### Examples of emergency situations (see [Carers UK](#) for more information):

- a disruption or breakdown in care arrangements
- the death of a dependant
- if a dependant falls ill or is involved in an accident
- to make longer-term arrangements for a dependant who is ill or injured (but not to provide long-term care yourself)

#### Other leave

Other leave that might be relevant to carers includes:

- **Career breaks:** There are no laws that deal specifically with taking a career break – it's only an agreement between the employer and the employee. However, several employers offer career breaks and these might be beneficial to working carers, depending on their circumstances.
- **Parental leave:** Parental leave is time off that employees who are parents can take to spend time with their child up until the child's 18th birthday. It's usually unpaid. Employees are entitled to take up to 18 weeks of parental leave per child.

#### Key takeaways

- Provide carers' leave.
- Be adaptable about short- and longer-term leave.
- Provide time off for emergencies.
- Be as flexible as you can about providing short- and longer-term leave to support working carers.

### 4 Help line managers to empower carers

#### Promote an open culture

It's important that people managers promote an open culture for their teams and hold regular one-to-one conversations with team members. Managers should always ask their employees about their wellbeing and workload (as well as if they have any concerns) as part of any conversations about their objectives and performance. This will give individuals the opportunity to raise any issues they'd like to discuss beyond work matters.

Use positive language when talking about carers in the workplace. Having a supportive manager will enable carers to feel that they can continue to work while fulfilling their caring responsibilities. This is likely to encourage employees to come forward and let their manager know that they're a carer and may need some support and flexibility. It's important



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that options are fully discussed and considered from both the employer's and employee's perspectives. Flexibility, fairness, communication and co-operation are important on all sides, between carers, their colleagues, and their managers.

However, the choice of carers to self-identify themselves should still be respected, understanding that some people may not want to disclose their situation. If someone tells their manager about their role as a carer, this should be treated as confidential. If they want this information shared, consent must be explicit. Managers should discuss with them who will be told and by whom, as well as the information they do or don't want shared with colleagues. It's therefore helpful for line managers to have access to a space where they can have private, quiet and personal conversations with employees.

### **Be knowledgeable about your organisation's approach to supporting carers**

Managers should be knowledgeable about their organisation's approach to supporting carers. Whether your organisation has a carers' policy, framework or guidance, it's important to understand this and ensure that all employees are aware of the policy, and understand their own and the organisation's responsibilities in respect of it.

#### **Examples of workplace support for working carers:**

- carers' leave or other special leave arrangements
- flexible working options
- information on career breaks
- access to wellbeing sessions
- carers' support networks
- occupational health and employee assistance programmes
- access to an external carers' advice support line
- drop-in lunchtime carer support sessions
- access to a personal telephone to be able to contact people in case of emergencies

Remember, a mix of solutions could be used to respond to a particular situation, such as flexible working combined with some paid/unpaid time off or special leave.

Remember to also talk to carers about what they believe would help them. Some of the best solutions and suggestions come from the carers themselves.

### **Provide training for people managers to empower carers**

People manager training is especially important in ensuring that an organisation is treating carers fairly across all departments and areas, and in providing a consistent approach when a manager leaves and is replaced by someone new. Training can help managers to be empathetic and understanding to the challenges working carers face – as well as some of the workplace solutions that could ease those challenges.

Don't forget that managers may have caring responsibilities themselves. Significant numbers of working carers have management responsibilities, and combining their own work and care can have adverse effects on how they manage employees. Measures aimed specifically at managers who are working carers could have 'trickle down' effects that could also benefit those that they manage.





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### **Engage senior leaders in supporting carers and creating inclusive cultures**

Finally, we mustn't forget the important role senior leaders can play in supporting carers and creating wider cultures of inclusion. If line managers know that they have the support of senior leaders, they're likely to feel much more confident and comfortable supporting and empowering working carers. It's important that senior leaders promote flexible working to help normalise this way of working. It's also helpful to get them to share any examples of caring that they may have experienced. Finally, senior leaders and HR have an important role to play in ensuring that policies and practices that support working carers are applied in a consistent and fair way across the organisation. See the CIPD website for further information on [building inclusive workplaces](#).

#### **Key takeaways**

- Encourage line managers to promote an open culture by:
  - holding regular one-to-ones and getting to know their staff properly as individuals
  - listening to employees and empathising with them in order to build trust and encourage people to talk about issues that are affecting them or concerning them
  - using positive language when talking about carers in the workplace
  - providing access to a telephone/letting carers access their own phone in case of emergencies.
- Help line managers to be knowledgeable about the organisation's approach to supporting carers.
- Provide training for line managers.
- Engage senior leaders in supporting carers and creating inclusive cultures.

## **5 Provide information and peer-to-peer support**

### **Provide information on workplace support for carers**

It's important to provide information on workplace support for carers in your carers' policy, framework or guidance. As mentioned in point 1, this could include, amongst other things, carers' leave or other special leave arrangements, flexible working options, information on career breaks, access to wellbeing sessions, and carers' support networks. You should also link to other helpful services if you offer them, such as occupational health and employee assistance programmes.

### **Develop an in-house support group for carers**

You could consider supporting or encouraging the forming of an in-house support group for carers, where they could easily get together to have coffee and a chat about their caring responsibilities. Many workplaces now use digital and social media to communicate with staff and could also use this technology to create an online support group.

However, it's worth noting that some carers might not want to talk about their caring responsibilities and might be looking for social groups and activities that take them away from their responsibilities and give them a chance to relax, unwind and feel included with others and society in general.

### **Point to sources of further information and guidance**

It's also helpful to point to sources of further information and advice (see below) and signpost carers to useful support they can access externally, such as:



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**Attendance Allowance:** [Attendance Allowance](#) helps with extra costs if someone has a disability severe enough that they need someone to help look after them.

**Carer's assessment:** If you have a caring responsibility, you can ask for your local social services department to conduct a [carer's assessment](#) to check you're getting the support that you need.

**Carer's Allowance:** You could be entitled to £66.15 a week if you care for someone at least 35 hours a week and they get certain benefits. You don't have to be related to, or live with, the person you care for. See [Carer's Allowance](#) for more information.

**Mygov.scot:** If you live in Scotland, you may be eligible to receive the [Carer's Allowance supplement](#). You may also be interested in hearing more about the [Young Carer's Grant](#).

**Carer Passport Scheme:** A [Carer Passport](#) is a record which identifies a carer in some way and leads to the provision of support, services or other benefits in response. This website makes the case for setting up a Carer Passport scheme and providing resources and guidance to help transform recognition and support for carers.

**NHS health check:** The [NHS health check](#) is a health check for adults aged 40–74 in England. It's designed to spot early signs of stroke, kidney disease, heart disease, type 2 diabetes or dementia and help to find ways to lower this risk.

**Acas:** [Acas](#) gives employees and employers free, impartial advice on workplace rights, rules and best practice. They also offer training and help to resolve disputes.

**Carers' Resource:** [Carers' Resource](#) provides support for carers and delivers services in Bradford, Craven, Harrogate and Selby Districts.

**Carers Scotland:** [Carers Scotland](#) provides help and advice to carers in Scotland, working as part of Carers UK.

**Carers Trust:** [Carers Trust](#) provides support, advice and services for carers and the people they care for.

**Carers UK:** [Carers UK](#) provides expert advice, information and support. You can contact Carers UK for free, impartial advice about caring on 0808 808 7777 or [advice@carersuk.org](mailto:advice@carersuk.org)

**Carers Wales:** [Carers Wales](#) provides help and advice to carers in Wales, working as part of Carers UK.

**Crossroads Care:** [Crossroads Care](#) co-ordinates schemes for care of disabled people in their own homes.

**Crossroads Caring Scotland:** [Crossroads Caring Scotland](#) provides short breaks for carers across Scotland.

**Employers for Carers:** [Employers for Carers \(EfC\)](#) is Carers UK's membership forum and service for employers. Its key purpose is to ensure that employers have the support to retain and manage employees with caring responsibilities. In January 2019, EfC launched [Carer Confident](#), a UK-wide employer benchmarking scheme dedicated to carer support.

**FamilyCarersNet:** [FamilyCarersNet](#) provides direct support for carers from carer advisors, health professionals and other carers with lived experience. UK-wide, they support employers, carers and families. They offer live chat, online carer chat via [The Pod app](#) and counselling, seven days a week.

**GOV.UK:** Provides information on relevant employment rights, such as [flexible working](#).

### Key takeaways

- Provide information on workplace support for carers and point to sources of further information and advice.
- Develop an in-house support group for carers.
- Signpost carers to support they can get externally (such as an NHS health check or information about the Carer's Allowance).



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