



Carers, health and work: **Carer rights** and good practice



**CARERS
TRUST**

This document is designed for employers to improve awareness of – and follow good practice on – supporting employees with caring duties in their workplace.

Who are unpaid carers?

A carer is anyone, who cares, unpaid, for a friend, family or neighbour who due to illness, disability, a mental health condition or an addiction cannot cope without their support.

There are around six million carers in the UK (England and Wales 2023 and Scotland Census 2024) – that is one in ten people. 2.5 million of these carers are in employment¹. Employers are very likely to have carers working for them, whether it has been disclosed or not.

There are so many different examples of unpaid carers and what their caring situation might be. Some examples of unpaid carers who might be in the workplace include:

Young adult carer

Name: Alex

Age: 21

Background: Alex is a new employee who is balancing his first job with caring for his younger sibling who is autistic.

Responsibilities: Helping with daily routines, managing meltdowns, attending therapy sessions, and ensuring their sibling's educational needs are met.

Strengths: Empathy, resilience, time management, and a deep understanding of autism.

Challenges: Balancing a new job with caring, limited social life, and dealing with emotional stress.

Goals: To begin his career, developing skills whilst advocating for better support systems for young carers.



¹ Based on ONS 2021 Census – England and Wales. Scotland Census 2024 (data from 2019) data not available which accounts for full time students at time of writing this resource.

Parent carer for a child with complex needs

Name: Sarah

Age: 35

Background: Sarah is a full-time carer for her 10-year-old son who has cerebral palsy and epilepsy. She left her job to provide the necessary care for her son as no other option was available.

Responsibilities: Administering medication, physical therapy, coordinating with healthcare professionals, and providing emotional support.

Strengths: Patience, medical knowledge, advocacy skills, and a strong support network.

Challenges: Financial strain, physical exhaustion, and navigating healthcare systems. Sarah finds it difficult dealing with her stress when she has deadlines at work, and how to manage both sets of stress at once.

Goals: To ensure her son has the best quality of life possible and to find time for self care, whilst holding down her job.



Adult carer from a distance

Name: Taylor

Age: 50

Background: Taylor lives in a different city from their elderly parent who has dementia. They coordinate care remotely while visiting as often as possible.

Responsibilities: Managing finances, coordinating with local caregivers, regular check-ins, and handling medical decisions.

Strengths: Organisational skills, resourcefulness, strong communication and emotional intelligence.

Challenges: Guilt from not being physically present, logistical issues, ensuring effective communication with local paid care workers and work/life balance due to feeling stressed.

Goals: To ensure their parent receives quality care and to find ways to stay connected despite the distance. Taylor wants to be a supportive colleague at their workplace and offer to help at crunch points, but can struggle to know whether they can offer this help reliably with managing their caring role which often brings up unexpected changes in their routine.



Staff with caring responsibilities may not recognise themselves under the label 'carer', and many may not be aware of workplace support that is available to them. Employers can make a huge difference to how well-supported and recognised carers feel by making information clear and available as early as possible.

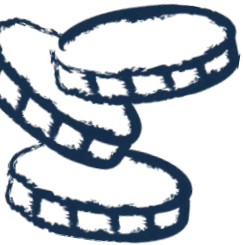
Why it makes sense for employers to support carers



Carers Trust's 2024 YOUNGOV polling found that 49% of the UK population didn't think workplaces are doing enough to support unpaid carers in employment.

Carers often feel unsupported and do not know how their employer, or potential employer, can support them – and so do not feel comfortable or confident when applying for jobs. They often end up leaving their jobs because they don't feel able to balance caring and work. This means that lots of employers are missing out on talented, skilled workers who are also unpaid carers.

On average, Carers UK research² found that 600 people a day leave work to care – with over 500,000 people leaving work to provide unpaid care pre-pandemic. Carers Trust's 2024 research found that 88% of carers with health needs were considering reducing their hours of work, 63% were considering switching their career for a different organisation or company which seemed more flexible, and 80% were considering leaving their job all together.



With the average recruitment cost of filling a vacancy totalling £6,125 and £19,000 for a manager role – and considerably higher for senior and executive roles or if recruitment is outsourced³ – there is not only a moral, but also an economic incentive, to support carers to enter and remain in the workplace.

To enable more carers to stay in work, both employers and carers need a change in approach.

Employers need to create an open atmosphere with clear information that encourages carers to come forward, and systems in place to ensure carers in the workforce feel supported. This will decrease absenteeism and increase productivity, as well as help carers feel supported, receive recognition for the complexity of their situation and help them feel empowered and less isolated.

² Carers UK, Juggling Work and Care.

³ Talent insight figures, available on their [website](#) – based on CIPD data

Recognising and supporting carers in the workforce and supporting their health and wellbeing which can be affected because of their caring role can:

- Reduce stress and improve job performance
- Improve job satisfaction
- Improve commitment to the organisation
- Increase retention
- Widen application pool for new roles.




Employers need to improve their communication on what support is available for carers. Unlike parents, many carers are invisible in the workforce, reluctant to discuss their personal situation due to fear or stigma and unaware of the support workplaces may have available to them.



What support did carers tell us helps?



Understandably, bringing up caring roles can be an intimidating experience. Fear of stigma, being seen as unfit for the job, or a lack of understanding of what their caring role entails creates barriers for carers to talk openly about caring or what support they need.



“I think that absolutely there are some [unpaid carers] who are struggling with physical issues themselves, but I think there is also this fear to come forward with it. They want to keep their jobs; they would rather not be replaced. So again, it’s hard unless we can actually see any physical evidence ourselves, it’s almost impossible to find out. So, we hear it through the grapevine, if I’m being honest with you, office chat.”

Line manager, Admin manager, medium-sized organisation, Business Services

This document sets out what tools can support carers in applying for a job or role, and once they are in the workplace.



Recruitment and onboarding practices

Employers can maximise their inclusive recruitment practices that will help carers know they will feel supported when they are thinking of applying for a job. This includes:

- Including commitments to inclusive working on websites
- Engaging in national campaigns, such as Young Carers Action Day, Carers Week, Carers Rights Day
- Including early identification options in equal opportunities monitoring forms at application stages of job opportunities
- Not closing job opportunities early
- Including flexible recruitment options such as flexible interview times and locations
- Making it clear what benefits and carer support are available.

Local carer organisations may be able to support carers in looking for work or training. Employers can signpost these organisations on their [website](#). Other places of support also include JobCentre Plus, who might be able to help if a carer tells them they need support.



Carers Leave

The Carer's Leave Act 2024 and associated Carer's Leave Regulation 2024 mean that all employees can take up to one week of unpaid leave a year if they have caring responsibilities. This support is available from the first day of employment as a statutory right.



Emergency leave

Employees additionally have the right to reasonable unpaid time off if a dependent is ill or injured, or if their care arrangements are disrupted.



Flexible working

Carers, like other employees, have the right to request flexible working from their employers. Carers in Carers Trust's research have told us how important flexible working is to them. This includes:

- Working from home
- Starting/finishing work earlier or later
- Working full-time hours over fewer days
- Reducing your hours of work
- Entering a job-share agreement
- Changing your shift patterns
- Working school term-time only
- Annualised hours – working set hours over the year, but with flexibility about when those hours are worked
- Changes to working patterns, such as work around hospital appointments.



If carers require flexibility in the short-term, they may make a non-statutory (informal) request. Informal requests can also be made if a carer is worried about committing to a permanent change and want a trial period.

Protection from discrimination

Carers are protected from discrimination or harassment 'by association' while at work. Discrimination by association is when a person is treated less favourably because of their association with another person who has a protected characteristic, such as age or disability.

Parental leave

If an employee has been working somewhere for at least a year, they can take unpaid leave to look after a child under the age of 18. An employee can take 18 weeks' leave per child in total, and a maximum of four weeks per year. They must give 21 days notice.



Bereavement leave

Anyone classed as an employee has the right to time off if a dependent dies. There's no legal right for paid time off for bereavement leave, but some employers might offer pay. This should be in contracts or organisational policies.



Carers also may be entitled to benefits if they are not working or are on a low income. This includes Carer's Allowance in England and Wales, or Carer Support Payments in Scotland and also includes other benefits such as Universal Credit.

Carers also have the right to an assessment of their needs. Carers can contact their local council, or local carer organisation, about organising an assessment.



Employers going beyond statutory rights to support carers: good practice



Through Carers Trust 2024 research, we heard several examples of good practice. Carers and employers shared stories of support they felt were making a positive difference. This included:

Recording data on carers, so employers know who they are, and how they are getting on



“We do a survey twice a year of employees, to ask them the question in terms of what level of support they feel they’re receiving. That all scores really highly.”

HR Manager, Large utilities company

Once an employer knows that an employee is a carer, they can ask questions in line management meetings, meetings with HR or support networks within workplaces, such as: ‘is your caring role impacting on your work/life balance in any way, and what can we do to support you?’. This should be asked regularly.

Carer Passports are a record which identifies an unpaid carer and leads to the provision of support, services or benefits in response. Organisations can set up Carer Passports on the [Carer Passport Website](#), which gives resources and guidance.

Flexible, paid Carers Leave

Some carers cannot afford to take unpaid leave from work. Carers Trust and Carers UK are calling for the introduction of a statutory right to paid Carers Leave. 32% of businesses in a 2024 YOUNGOV survey told Carers Trust that they offered paid Carers Leave.

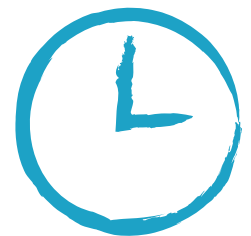
Furthermore, caring is often unpredictable. Policies such as Carers Leave need to include flexibility to change arrangements as caring responsibilities change, and recognise the likelihood of emergencies arising. Good practice includes not having to book paid Carers Leave in advance, but enabling carer employees to take it as and when they need it.

“Paid leave enabled me to attend medical appointments without worrying about the financial implications of taking leave. It’s allowed me to deal with urgent issues”.

Carer, F, 51, caring for someone with frailty and severe respiratory disease with arthritis and chronic pain themselves. Full time employee.

Autonomy over setting work hours

Carers told us that there can be challenges in getting flexibility in their job, as they might not have autonomy to set their own work hours or location. Trust and respect from employers is vital. **46% of employers surveyed said that autonomy is a key challenge carers are facing when seeking support for their health and wellbeing in the workplace.**

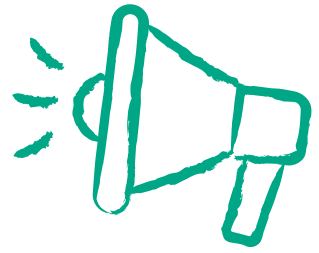


“[My new workplace] were quite supportive, so I didn’t really ask for anything specific, but they did say, ‘we can be flexible, in terms of working patterns, and time off when you need it’. So, I was quite reassured I’d say.”

Unpaid carer, F, mental health condition, Administrator, caring for their mum. Full time employee.



Clear information and informal support such as carer forums which allow carers to meet together occasionally – for mutual support, information sharing and to raise awareness of caring and carers in the organisation.



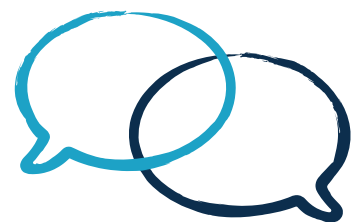
Employers can find out if any carers in their workplace would be willing to share their story and write about their caring role and balancing work and care for any internal newsletters they have. This may encourage others to identify themselves as carers.

“ I think there is information available [on caring/carers], and an encouragement [to share] through various groups within the organisation. There is a Disability Advisory Group that will constantly be looking at, ‘What do we do as an organisation to support people with disabilities, or indeed carers with their own health conditions, or indeed folk that are unpaid carers?’ So, there are lots of networks out there. We publish that information on a frequent basis, we will have Lunch & Learns, we’ll have various webinars. There’s a daily update and news articles on our intranet, and information will come from that to encourage people that if they came forward to seek assistance, then it would be provided for them.”

HR Manager, Large utilities company

Most importantly – codesign your policies with carers. Ask them what will help them to successfully combine work and caring.

Surveys, focus groups and employee carer groups are all useful to find out what the carers you employ would value.



Employers can then develop a specific Carers in Employment policy which sets out the various ways the organisation will support carers in the workforce.

[Employers for carers](#) is a useful resource for employers.

A good starting point for employers – how to help your carers feel seen and heard



Assessment and identification:

- From the offset, do you provide introductory information on carers to all potential employees which might help them to identify themselves as such?
- Do you perform regular assessments to understand carer-employees' needs over time, and conduct employee surveys to quantify the carers, including those with their own health needs, to ensure you know how many may need support?

Accessibility and information:

- Do you proactively offer support and information to carers? Is this information accessible and does it help keep employees up to date as situations and policies change?
- Do carers know the route to support within your organisation? Do you offer several ports of call that carers know about so they may seek support in the manner that best suits their needs?



Autonomy:

- Wherever possible, do you empower unpaid carers with health needs to work with team members to manage their own work and adjust their hours around their responsibilities? This may help aid employee retention and morale.

Acceptance:

- Culture is key. Do you work with your employees – but especially those in managerial roles/with direct reports – to understand how to communicate with unpaid carers with health needs in an empathetic, kind and proactive manner?
- Do you offer (or signpost to) carer groups/communities to provide a safe space with those in similar situations, so that carers know they aren't alone and can develop a sense of community?
- Do you welcome carers and celebrate them as an asset to the workplace due to their unique skillset?



Resources

DWP (England), '[Working and Supporting Someone's Health or Care](#)'

House of Commons Library, 2024. [Informal carers' employment rights and support](#).


Carers UK provides a wealth of information related to the rights carers have in the workplace on their website. Carers UK (2024), [Your rights in work](#).

You can find more information out about local carer organisations carer services near you on Carers Trust's [website](#).



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