

# **CARERS WORKPLACE SUPPORT**

## **Carers Workplace Support**

National Highways is committed to providing an inclusive and connected working environment, in which differences are understood, valued, and respected.

We recognise the importance of supporting employees who are also carers as they face the challenges of managing caring alongside work.

We want to create an environment in which carers feel they can start conversations openly and comfortably with their manager, about their caring responsibilities and any support they may need.

### **Who is a carer**

A carer is someone who cares (unpaid) for family or friends who have a disability, illness or who need support in later life. Washing them. And their laundry. And their dishes. Keeping appointments. And records. And tempers. Giving medicine. And time. And hugs. Filling in forms. And fridges. And silences. Dealing with doctors. And nurses. And pharmacists. And social workers. And benefit agencies. And care workers. And a lack of sleep.

Often people do not think of themselves as a carer. It takes two years on average for someone to identify themselves as a carer. Many people consider caring as part and parcel of family life and see themselves primarily as a partner, wife, son, sibling, cousin, parent or close friend. As a result, they can miss out on vital support.

Carers can be any gender, any age and come from all backgrounds and levels of seniority.

Caring could be a few hours a week or a bigger commitment. A parent caring for a child is not considered as a carer in this context, unless the child is disabled.

### **Understanding carers**

Under the [Equality Act 2010](#) carers have legal rights against discrimination by association if the individual they are caring for has a disability.

### **What practical issues can carers face**

- A caring role starting suddenly and changing over time
- Having to liaise with care providers, doctors etc
- Caring services being difficult to access and not at a suitable level.
- Having to deal with sudden crises
- Concern about the impact on performance markings and progression
- Financial pressures due to caring costs
- A second caring role being added to an existing one
- Caring for someone living in a different part of the UK or abroad
- Having to attend appointments with the person they care for.

## Possible effects on a carer's wellbeing

- The impact on their own mental and physical health such as stress and exhaustion.
- The grief associated with caring for someone in the final stages of life and bereavement.
- The need to adjust to the loss of a caring role following a bereavement.
- Social isolation both at home and at work.
- Feeling emotionally drained. Feeling guilty because they resent their caring role.
- Feeling they are not doing their best in their work and caring roles.

## Support for carers

Carers should discuss their caring responsibilities with their manager, explaining the impact it has on their role and the support they need. [See Appendix A “A carers conversation - what can I do as a carer?”](#)

Managers should have an open and honest conversation with the employee, listening to them and exploring what they need to help them to manage their work and home life, and perform at their best. [See Appendix A “A carers conversation - what can I do as a manager?”](#)

## What adjustments may a carer need and what support is available?

- Time off for appointments. – [special leave](#) paid for special domestic responsibilities (if applicable), working flexibly, hybrid working, shift changes
- To make or receive personal calls in work time.
- A change of working hours – [flexible working](#) – informal temporary and formal permanent arrangements
- To start work late or leave early – working flexibly
- To leave work at short notice – discuss with manager
- To split working time between office/work location and home – hybrid working
- To work from a different location. – hybrid working
- Other flexible working options e.g a career break or compressed hours [special leave and career break policy](#)
- A listening ear, someone they can talk to- speak to manager, EAP, carers network
- Wellbeing support – speak to their manager, Occupational Health (OH) referral, Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) support, Carers network, Mental Health First Aiders.

The following provisions are available to carers. See [Appendix B](#) for a case study showing how a colleague used the support available.

## **Flexible Working Policy**

Our Flexible Working Policy provides a working environment that meets both the needs of the business and our employees.

Flexible working can be requested to change your working pattern on a temporary or permanent basis including working flexible hours (outside of normal working hours), temporarily working from home and/or reducing hours.

We encourage managers to support carers positively, by considering all requests for flexible working and where requests can't be accommodated, to seek alternatives and find a working pattern that can work for both parties. Carers have legal rights under the Equality Act not to be discriminated against if the individual they are caring for has a disability.

Guidance is available in HR Zone under [Flexible Working](#)

## **Special Leave and Career Breaks**

Carers can take reasonable time off to deal with illness, medical appointments, and care arrangements for an individual they look after, including for palliative (end of life) care. It may be taken as paid special leave under 'special domestic responsibilities' (up to five days per occasion).

In addition to 5 days unpaid carers leave, there are two other main categories of unpaid leave that can be requested to help support with caring responsibilities:

- Unpaid special leave for up to one month can be requested through the manager and recorded as such on PFP
- unpaid career breaks for absences of more than one month (up to a maximum of five years), using the career break application form. In exceptional circumstances manage's can complete this on behalf of the employee.

## **Employee Assistance Programme**

Our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) provided by Health Assured is available to support carers resolve issues and concerns that may impact their general wellbeing as sometimes carers can ignore or avoid their own health issues as they do not see it as a priority.

The EAP service provides a confidential helpline which can be accessed any time of day or night on 0800 028 0199 and is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for in-the-moment support or signposting.

## Health and wellbeing App

The Health Assured service also provides access to practical self-help information and wellbeing tools – including information about work-life balance and being a carer. This service is accessed using the [Wisdom](#) app: you can register on the app using your work or personal phone and you will need to enter the code MHA147782.

## Carers Employee Network

The Carers Employee Network has been established to improve awareness of the challenges carers may have managing caring alongside work, and of the support that is available to them.

It can provide practical and emotional support to those who are carers looking for opportunities to share ideas to make life easier.

Sometimes a few words from someone who understands the situation can be a lifeline. Being a carer can be difficult and isolating, so speaking to someone who knows what you are going through can make a big difference.

The Carers Employee Network has a Viva Engage group which is open to everyone to join and includes a section with recordings of previous sessions for colleagues to access.. If you want further information about the network please email the [carers inbox](#)

## Useful websites

Information for carers is available in our Who We Are library [carers page](#).

For information about caring, visit [Carers Uk](#) and [Carers Trust](#).

We are members of the Employers for Carers scheme which entitles everyone to access the members platform - [EFC digital](#). This provides a range of online practical resources and [e learning](#) for carers and for managers. You can create an account by visiting [efcdigital.org](#) and selecting 'create free account'. You will need to add our Membership Code: **EFC2015**

Employees who joined before April 2015 can also access support from the [Charity for Civil Servants](#).

## **Appendix A – A carers conversation**

### **What can I do as a carer**

Think about what information you are happy to share with your manager about your caring responsibilities. Do you know what flexibilities or support you might need? Do you know what support is available.

Discuss your caring responsibilities with your manager explaining the impact it has on your role and what support you need. Have an honest conversation to determine how you can be supported and agree solutions. Your manager should balance your needs with the needs of the business. You may find it helpful to talk through the following questions (this list is not exhaustive).

- What are your caring responsibilities?
- How do they affect your work?
- What impact does work have on your caring responsibilities?
- Do you already receive any support in work to help combine caring with work?
- What further support would help you?
- Do you need to apply for flexible working to continue your caring responsibilities?
- How would you prefer to communicate with your manager if you are unable to come to work?
- What would help ensure that the needs of the team/organisation continue to be met?
- Do you need any support from occupational health, the Employee Assistance Programme or external organisations?
- How do you expect your caring responsibilities to change in the future?

While it is up to you to decide how much detail to share, it is important that you give your manager enough information for them to understand your issues and challenges. You may find it helpful to share the information in an email with your manager first as it can be emotional talking about caring responsibilities.

If you feel your manager is not being reasonable in their approach to your caring needs, you can contact either your countersigning manager, or HR by calling 0300 470 3000 (option 4) or by raising an HR service [query](#) on [HR Zone](#)

### **What can I do as a manager?**

Create an environment in which carers feel they can openly and comfortably start conversations with managers about their caring responsibilities and any support they may need. You may find it useful to confirm the support agreed in an email to prevent the carer having to keep sharing their caring information.

Be aware of the support available to carers and share this information with your team, and talk to your team members to see if they are carers and to understand their issues.

Actively listen to the carer. Be approachable, flexible and supportive. Treat information discussed with individuals about their caring responsibilities in the strictest confidence.

Encourage a carer to discuss their caring responsibilities and what support they need. It is for the individual to decide how much to disclose about their caring role.

Understand how their caring responsibilities affects their day-to-day work and what you can do to support them.

Be clear what flexibilities can be offered and where business takes priority.

Take account of carer needs when implementing hybrid working arrangements.

Arrange regular wellbeing checks.

Agree with the carer what information can be shared with others.

Agree with the carer what communication you need to keep the business going.

Treat each carer as an individual. Don't make assumptions.

The kind of support you may wish to consider with your employee are set out above.

You may wish to discuss:

- flexible working including working hours flexibly, informal arrangements and formal arrangements such as part-time, temporary working from home, compressed hours and job sharing,
- hybrid working – having flexibility in the day individuals attend an office
- arrangements for notifying you and making cover arrangements for immediate, short-term crises
- any likely need for paid or unpaid special leave or an unpaid career break
- any issues around working temporarily in a different location if the person being cared for does not live locally.
- make them aware of the support available: Employee Assistance Programme, Carers UK, Employers for Carers scheme
- Suggest they join the Carers network Viva engage group

## Appendix B - Case study 1

Here is a case study showing how a carer used our policies to manage work alongside their caring responsibilities:

A colleague needed to provide support to an elderly parent with dementia during her 5-year caring journey.

Initially she compressed her hours. Working four days instead of five to allow her one day a week to devote to hospital appointments and other caring requirements (flexible working application agreed with the manager).

Then as her career continued with a promotion, she reverted to standard working hours, five days per week but ensured that she started and finished at the same time each day. This allowed her to undertake a caring call early evening, every day.

During one point in the colleagues caring journey, the carer was impacted by a breakdown in the daytime caring arrangements for her parent. Following discussion with her manager, it was agreed she could take a short period of 'paid special leave - domestic responsibilities' to help manage the situation and have time to put alternative provisions in place.