



Working Carers

A GUIDE FOR CARERS

Are you a carer?

Many people looking after someone do not recognise themselves as Carers.

You are a Carer if you provide, or intend to provide, practical and/or emotional support to a relative, friend or neighbour who is disabled, ill or frail.

Their disability could be a physical disability, a hearing or sight loss, learning difficulty or mental health problem, or they may be frail due to old age.

You may be a child or young person who spends a lot of time helping someone who is disabled or ill, for example, one of your parents or a brother or sister. You might have been caring for some time or started caring more recently.

In most cases, it is likely that you are caring out of love, friendship or duty. Caring will not always be easy emotionally or physically. Caring



can have a major effect on your emotions, time, relationships and everyday life, and you have needs of your own that shouldn't take second place to your caring responsibilities.

Services are available to help and support you, as well as the person you are caring for, to cope with any distress you may be experiencing and to help with any practical problems that you might encounter.

Caring and working

As a carer, you may currently be juggling caring with paid work. You may be considering giving up work so that you can continue to care, or your role as a carer may have recently ended and you are looking for work.

No two carers are the same and caring can be unpredictable; it can happen overnight and it often cannot be planned.

It is important that you know your rights and the options available to you when making decisions about caring and paid employment. In this booklet, you will find information on staying in work, giving up work and returning to work.

Juggling work and care can be a challenge in the life of many carers. As a carer, you have rights at work that can make your caring role easier and there is support available to help you continue both working and caring. You have a right to request flexible working and you will find information on how to apply for this and how to challenge

decisions if you are not happy with the outcome. You may also have rights to various forms of time off from work.

Your employer may offer other forms of support such as unpaid leave or telephone access to the person you're looking after during your working hours.

If you're returning to work or thinking about it, we will have information on the benefits that can continue to be paid when you first go back to work, payments that help you return to work and the support that can be provided by Jobcentre Plus. You will also find information on career development, becoming self-employed, returning to your career and volunteering.

Support for carers at work

With all the stress that comes with being a carer, a little support from your employer goes a long way to making life easier.

There are different ways your employer can support you. Knowing how an employer can help may make it easier for you to ask for support.

You don't have to tell your employer that you're a carer; this is entirely up to you. However, as an employee, you will have some statutory rights that your employer has to offer, and in some cases they may go further than this and offer carers extra support. You can find out about the support available by speaking to your line manager, the personnel department, your welfare officer or occupational health adviser, or your union or staff representative.

Think about talking to someone you feel close to at work. You spend a lot of time with your colleagues each week and they

may be a great source of support. You may find other carers among your workmates, and be a mutual support to each other. You could ask your employer about setting up a support group, so you can make it easier to balance caring and work.

Sometimes it is the simplest things that can make a difference. For instance, letting carers take a longer lunch break so they have time to check on the person they care for, can do a lot to bring carers stress levels down. Here are a few ways in which employers may offer support.

Flexible working hours

Giving carers some flexibility in their working hours can be a great help. If you are late in because things have not gone smoothly at home, it is good to know that you will not have to apologise or explain yourself.



Access to a telephone

Being able to use a phone at work can give both you and the person you care for, a great sense of reassurance. It can also mean that if there is a problem you can take steps to sort it out quickly.

Car parking space near to work

Knowing that you will not have to hunt for a car parking space when you arrive for work can mean you have one less thing to worry about. A car parking space near work can also cut your journey time to and from work.

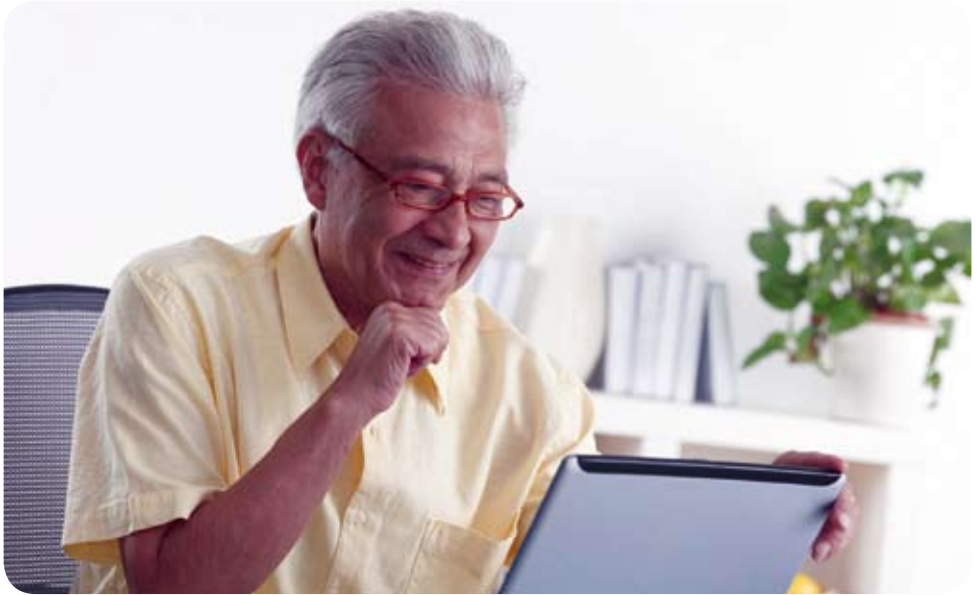
Working from home

Being able to work from home either on a regular basis, or occasionally, when you most need to, can be a real benefit. You can be at home with the person you are looking after and still be able to get a day's work done. This can give you a welcome break from the stress of commuting.



Knowing how an employer can help may make it easier for you to ask for support.





Unpaid and paid leave

As well as your statutory rights to take time off in an emergency, your employer may allow you extra time off, either unpaid or paid. This can help when you need to look after the person in your care for a longer period, e.g. when they come out of hospital. And you will not have to worry about using up all your holiday entitlement.

Career breaks

If working and caring become too difficult and you are thinking about giving up work, ask about a career

break. Some employers do offer paid or unpaid career breaks, so it is worth checking. It would mean that you could concentrate on your caring role for a while, knowing that you have your job to go back to. If you are on an unpaid career break, you may also be entitled to claim Carer's Allowance.

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The UK has over 3 million working carers - 1 in 7 of the workforce juggle the responsibilities of caring and paid employment.
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How long can I take at once?

You can take parental leave by the day, if you're using it to care for a disabled child, or in blocks of a week. In both cases, the most leave you can take is four weeks a year. And you cannot 'give' some of your entitlement to your husband, wife or partner. You both have an entitlement to 13 weeks unpaid leave per child (or 18 weeks for a disabled child). Some employers have workforce agreements that allow their employees to take more than four weeks off a year, so check your contract. It is always worth

checking your staff handbook or contract of employment as some employers are more generous with parental leave.

You must give your employer at least 21 days' notice of when you want to take parental leave. Employers can postpone your parental leave if you have asked to be away at a time that is difficult for them. For example, it could be during their busy season, or a lot of other employees have already asked to take parental leave at the same time.



If your employer is postponing your leave, they have to tell you in writing, within seven days of you asking them. They also have to give you that leave within the next six months. Your employer cannot postpone your leave if you have asked for it to start straight after your child's birth, or as soon as an adopted child comes to live with you.

What if my request is turned down?

If you have the right to take parental leave and your employer refuses to let you have it, there are steps you can take. First, talk to your employer or to the human resource department about why they have turned down your request.

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Large employers will often have a specific carers policy but smaller organisations may include carers in their generic policies. The important thing is that carers needs are distinct and they need specific support.

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If your employers will not change their decision, you could make a complaint through their internal grievance procedure. If you have a trade union representative, or someone similar, it is a good idea to ask them for help. If that does not work, you have the right to make a complaint to an employment tribunal.

You must make your application to the employment tribunal within three months of the refusal and this is a strict time limit. If you are going through the grievance procedure the time limit can sometimes be extended but to be on the safe side make sure you keep to the three-months time limit. It can sometimes be difficult to work out when the three-months limit starts. If you're not sure, you should get legal advice.

You can get help and advice on problems at work from ACAS. Their helpline, 08457 474747, is open from 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday.

Returning to work

You may want to work or return to work once your caring role comes to an end, or changes in such a way that you feel able to combine care with work.

If you are not sure what you would like to do, start by recognising the skills and interests you have. Think about what you have learned from:

- any paid work that you have done
- tasks and responsibilities in your role as a carer or parent, or in running a home
- any other activities that you do, for example, voluntary work, committees etc.

Then identify your interests. Think about:

- what you enjoy doing
- how you would like to use your skills
- things you miss doing that you once did.

You may feel that you need to gain confidence to use your skills in new ways. There are training courses

available in personal development which cover topics like confidence building, assertiveness training and managing stress.

City & Guilds has developed a learning programme, which can also lead to a qualification, specifically for carers and former carers. For more information go to: www.learning-for-living.co.uk or telephone 01455 201020.

Think about what employers want and value your own experience. Identify the transferable skills you have gained through caring and match these to employers' needs.

Think about your short and long term goals and make a plan of action. Don't demand too much of yourself – take small achievable steps.

About Southwark Carers

We are an independent, well-established charity with over 4000 carers currently registered with us. We provide information, advice and support to carers across Southwark.

We are the voice for carers in the Borough speaking on their behalf about the issues that are important to them.

We aim to raise awareness of the rights and needs of carers in Southwark - working in partnership with other local organisations to make sure that carers receive the support they require. Our services include:

- Advice and advocacy to support carers on issues such as benefits and dealing with social services.
- An information pack and regular newsletter to keep carers fully informed on what is happening.
- Financial assistance to help carers take a break.
- Carers peer support groups.
- Social activity groups.
- Massage and relaxation.



A Helping Hand for people supporting their disabled, frail or ill relatives and friends in Southwark.



- Fuel Debt Grants.
- Emergency Planning.
- Respite cover for carers to have a life of their own.
- Transport grants.
- Liaison with local health and social care to develop new ways of working.
- Forums.
- Counselling.

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