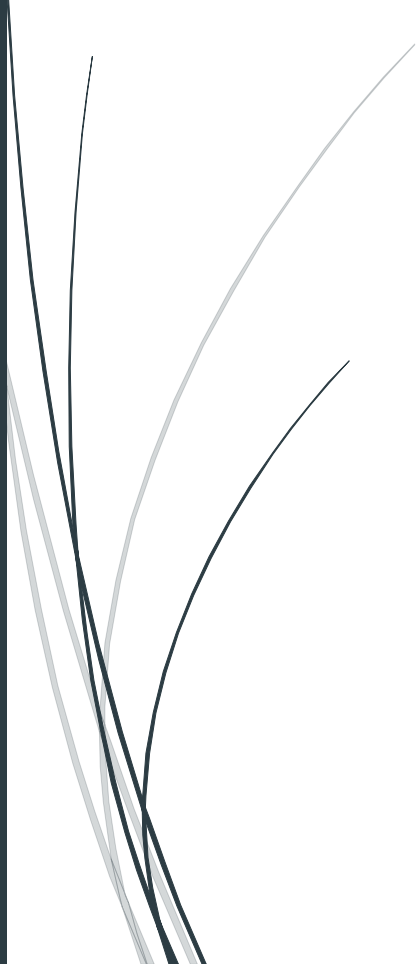


Supporting Working Carers

Guidance for Managers



Supporting Working Carers

Introduction

A carer's role is one that is pivotal in keeping families and individuals going, both mentally and physically. They help provide a better quality of life to friends and family with specific needs, and they provide immeasurable benefits to the community and to society as a whole. For a lot of carers, it can feel rewarding, but it can also feel overwhelming, stressful and isolating, especially if they are not getting the right support or help they need for themselves.

Individuals can become carers through unexpected circumstances (for examples as a result of a loved one having an accident or illness), or it could be a gradual process (for example elderly parents becoming unable to look after themselves). Every year, over 2 million people become carers overnight. Caring will affect most of us at some point in our lives with the [Office for National Statistics](#) highlighting that 3 in 5 of us will experience being carers, and furthermore, 1 in 7 will juggle work with their caring responsibilities.

Working carers are employees with caring responsibilities that have an impact on their working lives. These employees are responsible for the care and support of relatives or friends who are older, disabled or seriously ill (physically or mentally) who are unable to care for themselves.

- Employers for Carers working definition

Life can be challenging for working carers. In the UK almost a third of working carers have not discussed their caring role with anyone at their workplace, most commonly because they believed that nothing would change as a result. Additionally, a quarter of working carers were also considering leaving their job because of the difficulty in combining work and care on a day-to-day basis¹. Caring can have a huge impact on a carer's work life and they can often feel that the two are incompatible.

The experiences of working carers will differ. Some may need to provide long term or constant care, whilst others may provide support over a few hours a week. Carers may also have to travel to look after someone or they may live with the person they are caring for. There may also be

¹ https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/carer-friendly-workplace-guidance_tcm18-80345.pdf

busy times and periods where there is lower demand on the carer which is dependent on the health of the person being cared for. Caring responsibilities all vary and are hugely dependent on individual circumstances but there may be a lot of tasks and activities required from the carer which they may do themselves or share with others.

Staff with caring responsibilities undertake a wide range of activities and support, including, but not limited to:

- Help with personal care
- Help with mobility
- Managing medication
- Practical household tasks
- Emotional support
- Help with financial matters or paperwork
- Attend medical, legal, educational etc. appointments where support is needed

As a manager, your role is critical in ensuring that any carer in your team is well supported and managed, so they in turn can manage their caring responsibilities. A supportive and sensitive approach, along with the appropriate use of leave provisions, and flexible working, can all make a big difference to a working carer's life.

2. Covid-19 and the impact on working carers

COVID-19 may have impacted on many working carers in a number of different ways and could continue to do so. With what is often an already stressful and demanding role, the added pressure of the virus will exacerbate concerns and could increase the level of care they are needing to provide. 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 or I am self-isolating?
- How can I provide care for someone who is self-isolating?
- How can I provide care if we go into lockdown again?

Understanding that carers may have these worries at this time means we should ensure to be as supportive and flexible as possible during this period of stress and uncertainty.

3. How to support working carers

We need to ensure we create a supportive working environment for all carers, and as a manager, you are able to do this in a number of ways.

- Discuss your member of staff's needs with them; this might include regular one-to-one meetings.
- Encourage staff to be open with their situation. It is difficult to offer support if you are not aware of their situation. Open the conversation with your staff in a supportive and transparent way.
- Read the University Bereavement, Emergency, Dependent and Carers Leave Policy and understand the entitlements and provisions available to you and your staff.
- Caring can affect the **mental health and wellbeing** of your member of staff. Be aware and check in with them regularly.
- Consider how informal arrangements of working flexibly may help the member of staff. For example, later start times, earlier finish times, working from home or elsewhere, longer lunch breaks, etc.
- View the making of requests for support as acceptable and ensure that no one is treated unfairly because of their caring responsibilities.
- Handle requests for support with discretion and sensitivity.
- If the member of staff has asked, be sure to keep their caring responsibilities as confidential information and do not disclose their role to other colleagues.

4. Things to consider

- Work can often be a respite for those with caring responsibilities as it can provide them with a chance to be in another location or to focus on something else. Being in work may help some members of staff mentally and physically, particularly if they have a demanding caring role elsewhere. It is important not to assume that working carers would prefer to be with those they care for rather than being in work.
- It is important that you make your staff aware of their entitlement to leave and flexible working. Many working carers may not want to bring attention to their roles outside of work and so may not seek out the relevant policies that could help them. Signpost staff to the relevant policy and make them aware of the provisions they are entitled to and offer to talk through any points of concern they may have.
- If you require your member of staff to work different hours, cover unplanned activities, or travel for meetings, be sure to give them enough advanced notice so they can make arrangements of care for their dependent. Do not assume that working carers will not be able to or do not want to undertake opportunities like these. Always ask them but allow enough time for them to plan for these events.
- Your member of staff may have additional responsibilities and complexities including caring for more than one individual or having childcare obligations as well. Be familiar and signpost staff to all relevant policies and resources available and consider how informal flexible approaches could help them. Contact your HR Business Partner if you need clarity over the policies and how these apply to your staff's circumstances.
- Always seek any support you might need from your HR Business Partner if necessary.

5. Policy support for carers

The Bereavement, Emergency, Dependant and Carers Leave Policy highlights all entitlements and leave allowances for members of staff

who are carers. The key elements that you and your member of staff may be interested in to enable further support include the following:

- Carers can take up to 5 days paid leave in any 12-month rolling period to cover sudden unforeseen situations and allow staff to provide an immediate caring response to an emergency need.
- Where a dependent would be unable to attend a medical appointment without a carer, consideration should be given to treating the appointment as if it were for the carer and giving reasonable paid time off for them to attend.

Access the policy for more information and to understand how further support can be provided for you and your member of staff.

6. If caring responsibilities end

Caring roles may change or end over time for many reasons including recovery, remission or a condition deteriorating. Regular meetings with your member of staff will ensure you can provide appropriate support as circumstances change.

Whenever the end of care happens, your member of staff will need time to adjust and make plans for their future and they may need some extra support while at work. Be prepared to discuss their needs with them and offer support if possible.

7. Support and wellbeing

There are a number of support services at the University which you may want to offer your member of staff should they ask or need:

Employee Assistance Programme – This is a free 24-hour service available to all University staff and offers remote or face-to-face counselling sessions.

Staff Counselling Service – This service promotes and supports staff wellbeing through individual workplace counselling sessions, workshops, training, information and campaigns.

University Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing – The University provides a number of useful resources to support all members of staff including Well Action Plans, Breathing Space events and Mental Health Champions.

The Parents and Carers Staff Network – The staff lead network provides peer support and a forum to ask questions, share experiences and join events and activities with others who share similar life roles and responsibilities.

8. Additional Resources

- **Carers UK** - <https://www.carersuk.org/>
- **Carers Line** - <http://www.carerssupportcentre.org.uk/our-services/carersline/>
- **Carers Support Centre Bristol & South Gloucestershire** - <https://www.carerssupportcentre.org.uk/>
- **Bristol Black Carers** - <https://www.bristolblackcarers.org.uk/>
- **Rethink Mental Illness Carers Service** - <https://www.rethink.org/help-in-your-area/services/carers-support/bristol-carer-service/>
- **Dhek Bhal Support Service for carers of South Asian elders** - <https://www.dhekbhal.org.uk/>