

Assistance for caring while working

Who are carers?

'A carer spends a significant proportion of their life providing unpaid support to family or potentially friends. This could be caring for a relative, partner or friend who is ill, frail, disabled or has mental health or substance misuse problems.'

National Carers Strategy

Carers and work

Juggling work and looking after someone can be difficult. Having an understanding and knowledgeable employer or manager can help make this easier. It is helpful to have access to information and advice in your workplace. Some companies operate counselling services and have advice packs about flexible working.

Employers are often happy to consider flexible working for employees rather than incurring substantial costs for recruitment and re-training.

Carers right to request flexible working

Carers across the UK are able to benefit from the right to request flexible working and employers have a duty to consider these requests. The Work and Families Act 2006 is the legislation that gives carers that right. This right applies to parents of disabled children and carers of adults who have worked for their employer for more than 26 weeks.

The carers of adults with this right are employees who are or expect to be caring for an adult who:

- is married to, or the partner or civil partner of the employee; or

- is a relative of the employee; or
- lives at the same address as the employee.

The "near relative" definition includes parents, parent-in-law, adult child, adopted adult child, siblings (including those who are in-laws), uncles, aunts or grandparents and step-relatives.

What you could ask for

This could mean asking your employer for:

- flexible starting and finishing times
- compressed working hours
- annualised working hours while working
- job sharing or part time working
- home working or tele-working
- term-time working

To apply, you need to write to your employer asking for the changes you would like and saying why these would help you. You should also say how your proposed change will fit in with your business' work patterns. This should help make it more likely that your employer will agree. You can only make one request a year and changes agreed will mean a permanent change to your contract of employment. It is, therefore, important to think carefully about any financial and practical implications before you apply. If your employer refuses you can appeal the decision. Employers can choose to offer flexible working to all employees so it is worth asking about your company's policy first.

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Time off in Emergencies

You have the right to a “reasonable” amount of time off to deal with emergencies involving a dependent. This right also includes some protection from dismissal when you use it. It is at the employer’s discretion whether the leave is paid or unpaid. Situations where this leave might be taken include:

- disruption or breakdown in care arrangements
- if a dependent falls ill or has been assaulted or in an accident including when the victim is hurt or upset rather than physically injured
- to deal with an incident involving a child during school hours
- to make longer term arrangements for a dependent who is ill or injured
- to deal with the death of a dependent.

Parental Leave

If you have worked for your employer for more than a year and are responsible for a child born on or after 15 December 1999 you are entitled to parental leave.

This entails:

- Up to 13 weeks (unpaid) leave for children under five
- Up to 18 weeks (unpaid) leave for disabled children (for whom Disability Living Allowance is received).

You can usually take up to four weeks a year. If your child is disabled you can take the leave as a day or multiples of a day or for under fives in weekly blocks. Parental leave is usually unpaid but employers can choose to offer paid leave – so check your company’s policies.

Career Breaks

You may be able to use annual leave or unpaid leave to cover intensive periods of care.

If you are thinking of giving up work it is worth asking whether your employer has a career break scheme. A career break would allow you to keep your options open. If agreed you would have a job to return to and be kept in touch with the world of work while you are away.

Benefits and Employment

If you are thinking about moving into work, you need to be aware of the possible impact on any benefits you receive. For example, if you earn more than £95 pw (less certain deductions) you will lose your Carer’s Allowance and any help you were getting with your rent or council tax could be reduced or removed completely. On the other hand, you may be entitled to Working Tax Credit as a top-up to your earnings. You may, therefore, want to seek advice about how better off you will be (see below).

Help Getting Back To Work

Your local Job Centre Plus can help and advise you with this. Find out more, or contact your local Job Centre Plus office:

www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment

Carers Assessments

A carer’s assessment is your opportunity to talk about your own needs and things that could make caring easier for you. Carer’s Assessments are undertaken by Hampshire County Council but can look at the support available from a range of organisations. Carer’s assessments must look at how carers are managing to balance work and caring.

If you are thinking about giving up work, ask for a carer’s assessment or a reassessment if you have already had one. If your job is seriously at risk because of pressures of caring, the Council will need to look at what help it can provide to enable you to continue working.

For more information

For more information including a range of useful links to other websites go to

www.hants.gov.uk/health

www.hants.gov.uk/carechoice/helpforcarers

www.carersuk.org/Information/Workandcaring

www.direct.gov.uk

For more information about social care services or to request a carer’s assessment, call Hampshire County Council on 0845 603 5630.