A Working Carer’s Guide

Information for employees who provide unpaid care to a friend or loved one.
Are you currently in full or part time employment in addition to an unpaid caring role?

Gateshead Carers Association provide tailored support to help you in your caring role.

If you require:
• help with benefits
• support obtaining a carers assessment
• support liaising with social services
• a short break from caring or help obtaining respite
• social activities or mutual support from other carers
• or if you just want to talk to someone...

Gateshead Carers Association can help you.

Confidential Carer Support

Working Carers often find it difficult to speak to us in person due to time constraints and hectic lifestyles, so we also offer direct support via email and through our website. For private, confidential support please contact the Working Carer Support Team

Call 0191 4900121
enquiries@gatesheadcarers.com
www.gatesheadcarers.com
Care for your career

Balancing the demands of caring with the responsibilities of a paid job is a tough call. People often feel pulled in two directions and as many as 1 in 5 people with significant caring responsibilities end up giving up work.

Those who fall out of work pay a heavy price – facing financial hardship and missing out on their own pension. So it pays to think carefully amount the support you need to maintain your caring role while continuing to be a valued member of staff for your employer.

Support

Over half of all carers are in some sort of paid work. As a working carer, you are likely to need a range of support at different times - from access to a telephone to check on the person you care for, to leave arrangements to deal with someone coming out of hospital.

Talking to your employer about your caring role is not always an easy step. You might feel it depends on whether your employer is likely to be supportive. Find out by asking your colleagues, personnel officer or union representative. There may be existing support that you are not aware of, or you may find that your employer is open to exploring ways to support you. At Gateshead Carers Association we can help to support you in discussions with your employer by providing an
advocacy service and providing your employer with information ensuring that they are aware of their rights and responsibilities to you as a working carer.

**A brief guide to flexible working for Carers**

A carer is defined as an employee who is, or expects to be, caring for an adult who is married to, or the partner or civil partner of the employee; or is a near relative of the employee; or falls into neither of those categories, but lives at the same address as the employee.

‘Caring’ has a wide meaning and may include simply spending more time with a child or relative, as well as practical tasks such as settling a child into a new school, taking a relative to a medical appointment or doing their shopping.

While some employees already have a legal right to request flexible working and their employers have a duty to consider the requests seriously, many employers are also willing to consider requests on an informal basis from any of their employees. They may even have an established formal procedure for employer and employee to follow.

Anyone thinking about changing to a flexible working pattern should speak to his or her employer as early as possible in order to explore what opportunities might be available. Gateshead Carers can help you to do this:

**Caring for you**

As a working carer it can often be difficult to find time on top of your work commitments and caring responsibilities to look after you. Gateshead Carers Association can provide a chance to gain a short break from your caring responsibilities and give you the training you need to carry out your role as a carer.

- Short Spa/leisure breaks
- Time to carry out your own personal and social activities
- Shopping and day trips out
- Assertiveness training
- Manual handling training
- Informal support and social groups
Your work and career

Currently over three million working carers in the UK. It may feel as if you are juggling two jobs when you are holding down a paid job and caring for a friend or relative but work can be important for your well-being, income and for maintaining social contacts.

There are things you can do to cope with the pressures of work and care. As a working carer you are likely to need support at work, and often different levels of support at different times - from access to a telephone to check on the person you care for, to taking leave to help out when someone is being discharged from hospital.

The good news is that carers have some statutory rights and more and more employers are realising the benefits of supporting carers.

Carers’ rights at work

Did you know that you might have the right to take some time off work, request a change in working hours or get some financial help to enable you to combine work and caring?

As a carer you have legal rights under the following legislation.

The Work and Families Act 2006
This Act gives employees, who have worked for an employer for at least 26 weeks and who are the carer for an adult, the right to request flexible working.

The Employment Rights Act 1996 as amended by the Employment Relations Act 1999
Gives an employee the right to take “reasonable” time off to deal with unexpected situations involving a dependant.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995
This law relating to discrimination against disabled people should also apply to their parents and carers (European Court of Justice ruling in the Coleman Case).

Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004
Placed a duty on local authorities making a Carer’s Assessment, to consider whether or not a carer wants to take part in work, education, training or leisure activities.
Check to see if the following policies could help you.

**Rights**

Colleagues can be very supportive and it may help simply to discuss your situation with someone you can trust at work. You might even find that other colleagues are also carers, and that together you are more able to talk to your employer about ways in which you could be supported.

**Time off for dependents**

All employees have the right to take a reasonable amount of unpaid time off to deal with emergencies involving someone who depends on them and to make any necessary arrangements.

**Parental Leave**

You will qualify for this if you have worked for your employer for at least one year and you have legal parental responsibility for a child under five, or a disabled child under 18.

You can take up to 13 weeks’ leave for each child or 18 weeks for a disabled child. A maximum of four weeks can be taken in one year for each qualifying child. Parental leave is unpaid unless your contract says otherwise, but if you are on a low income you might get Income Support, always check your employment contract or staff handbook for your employer’s own parental leave scheme, or ask for support from Gateshead Carers Association. They may have extended parental leave to include other workers, for example foster carers, grandparents or employees who have worked there less than a year.

**Carers’ Assessment**

If you need help in your caring role you can ask your local council for a carer’s assessment. This is to find out your needs - for example, what help you might need to be able to work.

You’ll get the chance to discuss issues such as:

- is your caring role affecting your health?
- do you get enough sleep?
- are you worried you may have to give up work?
- do you get enough time to yourself?
Flexible Working

Some employees have a legal right to request a flexible work pattern. This right applies if you or your partner have or expect to have responsibility for a child under 17, a disabled child under 18 or a disabled adult, and you have worked for your employer for at least 26 weeks.

The right to request flexible working covers the hours an employee works, the times they are required to work and the place of work, such as home or workplace. Employers have to consider such requests seriously and can only refuse for certain business reasons.

Benefits

If you’re in work, you may be entitled to certain benefits to supplement your wages. These include Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. Contact our Advice Service to find out if you qualify for any of these benefits.

“My employer understands my needs as a carer which makes my life so much easier now”
Flexible working arrangements

There are many different ways of working flexibly. You could work from home or have flexible starting or finishing times. Other working arrangements might be:

• compressed working hours (where you work your normal number of hours in a shorter time - typically fitting five days working time into four days)
• working during school terms
• job-sharing
• part-time working
• flexible holidays to fit in with alternative care arrangements

The right to request flexible working regulations gives working parents of disabled children under 18 the right to request flexible working arrangements from their employer. You also have the legal right to ask your employer for flexible working if you’re caring for an adult who:

• is a relative
• lives at the same address as you

A good employer

In addition to your statutory rights, your employer may offer more support. This will be outlined in your contract and the organisation’s policies. For example, you may be able to use leave arrangements, paid or unpaid, at the discretion of your employer to cover intensive periods of care.

If you are thinking of giving up work, a career break (or sabbatical) allows you to keep your options open, ensuring you can go back, and keeping you in touch with the world of work. Some employers offer paid and/or unpaid career breaks, often after a specified period of service with them, so check your organisation’s policies.

Sometimes the support you need is very simple like access to a telephone or information and advice, if you are having any difficulties balancing your role as a carer alongside your employer we can help.

Contact Gateshead Carers today...
Call 0191 4900121
Gateshead Carers Association
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