**Supporting carers at work**

**Introduction**

It is estimated that there are over 6.5million carers in the UK. Many of them will be balancing work with their caring responsibilities. 1 in 9 of the workforce is estimated to be caring for someone who is older, disabled or seriously ill. Many carers reduce their hours or working commitments in order to provide care – some leave the workforce altogether.

Engaging with and supporting carers can help them to balance their responsibilities and reduce the likelihood that they will leave the organisation because of their caring role – thereby retaining their skills and experience. Managers can have a critical role to play in supporting carers in their teams

**The impact of caring**

Caring for someone can be physically exhausting and emotionally stressful, and often results in carers feeling unsupported, isolated and alone. These feelings can impact on a person’s overall health and wellbeing, particularly their mental health, which is likely to have an additional impact on their ability to work and perform effectively.

Employees who have significant caring responsibilities are twice as likely as those without caring responsibilities to be in poor health. Anxiety, stress and tiredness are some of the problems reported by carers who are not supported by their employer.

The stresses of both working and providing care can take its toll, so carers need regular respite to stay in good health. Carers may also have to get up through the night to care for someone, which can make them physically tired and drained during working hours.

## Supporting Carers

The most useful thing you can do as the manager of a carer is listen and let them talk about their situation. *Every care situation is different, so make sure you understand the individual needs of the member of staff.*

Some employees may be reluctant to identify themselves as a carer – if you believe that someone is providing care and may need some support, you may need to sensitively raise the issue and ask if they need any help. Due to the changing nature of providing care, *ensure that dialogue is regular* and that employees are aware that they can discuss their needs with you when required.

Flexibility is an essential part of supporting carers. Carers can make a flexible working request for permanent changes to their working arrangements under the University Flexible Working Policy. However, carers may only need minor changes or occasional flexibility as opposed to permanent or long term changes. For example, urgent needs may arise quickly, so allowing staff to take annual leave short notice is a small adjustment that can make a significant difference.

## Managers of carers should also signpost sources of additional support, such as the University counselling service and the carers support network, along with relevant policies that detail the time off the University provides in certain circumstances.

In the event that the employee needs to take leave from work to meet their caring responsibilities, ensure that you make arrangements to keep in touch, and support their return to the workplace in due course.

Remember:

* Caring needs can arise or change at short notice – especially as illnesses progress.
* When someone first takes on a caring responsibility, they may be unclear initially about what care will be required and what role they will need to play in it.
* Caring for someone can be unpredictable, because the circumstances of care vary from person to person.
* Some carers are concerned about sharing their caring responsibilities with their manager or colleagues.
* All members of staff have the right to request flexible working for any reason – including the need to provide care.
* The University has a carer’s support network where carers meet to provide peer support. More information can be found on the Equality and Diversity pages of StaffNet.
* Follow up regularly with the employee.

## Adjustments

Some minor adjustments to working processes or procedures can benefit carers, for example:

* giving employees time or a private space to make or receive personal telephone calls
* flexible start and/or finish times, which can be particularly helpful for employees who may, for example, need to attend medical appointments with the person for whom they provide care
* allowing occasional homeworking or shift swapping.
* allowing the carer to take time off to attend medical appointments and make the time up.
* flexibility on leave booking arrangements (for example, accommodating short notice requests).

Discuss with the employee what adjustments they require and agree how these can be managed and communicated to colleagues if appropriate.

More advice is available from HR on supporting carers at work.

## Related Documents

Flexible Working Policy

Career Break Policy

Special Leave Policy

Managing Stress at Work.