

Carers and Work

“Carers look after family, partners or friends in need of help because they are ill, frail or have a disability. The care they provide is unpaid”

Carers UK Definition

Introduction

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

Employers often prefer to consider flexible working for their staff rather than incur substantial costs for advertising and re-training.

Carers' Right to request flexible working

The Work and Families Act 2006 gives carers the right to request flexible working while employers have a duty to consider such requests. This right applies to parents of disabled children and carers of adults who have worked for their employer for a minimum of 26 weeks.

For carers of adults this right applies to those employees who are currently or expect to be caring for another adult who:

- is married to, or is the partner or civil partner of the employee; or
- is a near relative of the employee; or
- lives at the same address as the employee.

A “near relative” includes parents, parents-in-law, adult child, adopted adult child, siblings (including those who are in-laws), uncles, aunts or grandparents and step-relatives.

What you could request from your employer:

- Flexible starting and finishing times
- Compressed working hours
- Annualised working hours
- Job-sharing or part-time working
- Home-working or tele-working
- Term-time working

To make your request, you need to write to your employer detailing the changes you would like explaining how these would help you. You should

also show how any proposed adjustments will fit in with the demands of the business work patterns. By giving as many details as possible you will be able to build a good business case which should, in turn, help your employer give you a positive response.

You may only make one request for flexible working a year and any adjustments 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 proceeding with your application. If your employer refuses your application, you can appeal against the decision. Employers may choose to offer flexible working to all employees, so it's worth asking about the company's policy first.

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 exercise this right. It is at the employer's discretion whether the leave is paid or unpaid. Situations where this leave might be taken include:

- Disruption of breakdown in care arrangements
- Where a dependent falls ill or has been assaulted or involved in an accident when the victim is hurt or upset rather than physically injured.
- Where there has been an incident involving your child during school hours
- Where you need to make longer term arrangements for a dependent who is ill or injured
- Where a dependent has died

Parental Leave

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

- Up to 13 weeks for children under 5
- Up to 18 weeks for disabled children (in receipt of Disability Living Allowance)

You can usually take up to 4 weeks a year. If your child is disabled, you can take leave for a day or multiples of a day or, for under-5's in weekly blocks. Parental leave is usually unpaid but some employees may choose to offer paid leave, so check the company's policies.

Career Breaks

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

If you are thinking of giving up work, it is worth asking whether your employer offers 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 remain in touch with the world of work while you are away.

Action for Carers and Employment

This service provides support and advocacy to carers who are either; juggling work and care or who wish to return to some form of paid employment or voluntary work. The service also provides information and help for those carers who wish to undertake vocational training.

Services available include:

- Providing independent information and advocacy in relation to employment and training opportunities. This could be helping you to talk to your employer about flexible working or referring to social care staff regarding any additional support you may need with your caring responsibilities to remain in your job
- Seeking funding for training
- Supporting carers in their career changes and choices
- Supporting during the job application process. Where appropriate, referrals are also made to other agencies offering support for those returning to work
- Working with employers, training providers, careers and employment services to raise awareness of the needs of carers in employment
- Encouraging employers to adopt carer-friendly employment practices.

For further information: contact Action for Carers & Employment on 01483 565874 or visit www.carersnet.org.uk

Carers Assessments

Carers' Assessments are undertaken by Surrey County Council. A carer's assessment is your opportunity to talk about your own needs and ways which could make caring easier for you. Any carer's assessment must also show how carers are managing to balance work and caring. The assessment can identify what types support might be available from a range of organisations.

If you are thinking about giving up work, ask for a carers' assessment or reassessment if you have already had one. If you believe your job is seriously at risk because of pressures of caring, the County Council will need to look at what types of support are available to enable you to continue working.

For more information about Surrey County Council's services, or to request a carers' assessment, call the **Surrey Contact Centre on 0846 009 009** or visit www.surreycc.gov.uk

For More Information

www.carersnet.org.uk has information on a variety of topics specifically for Carers and people supporting them. You will also find useful links to other websites.

The Surrey County Council Contact Centre on **0846 009 009** also has information about available help and details of other services in the County.

