University of Sheffield | Centre for Care | SANDWICH GENERATION SUPPORT

Supporting working carers: A practical reference guide for managers



Many employees combine paid work with unpaid care for a family member, partner, friend or neighbour who needs support because of illness, disability, mental health needs, addiction or older age. In the UK, 1 in 5 people combine paid work and caring responsibilities.

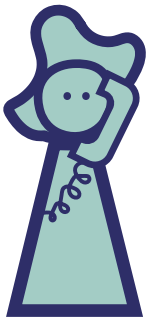
Some employees will recognise themselves as carers, and use this term. Many will not. They may simply see themselves as a parent, partner, daughter, son, friend or neighbour doing what is needed.

As a manager, your role is to listen, respond fairly and connect people with workplace support. Small, supportive conversations can make a real difference. Every day, 600 people across the UK leave their jobs because they can no longer combine work and care - this is a huge waste of talent and expertise.

1. Recognise: what might you notice?

Caring responsibilities are not always visible. You might notice:

- changes in working patterns: such as lateness, leaving early, short-notice leave or difficulty attending fixed meetings
- use of annual leave for appointments, care arrangements or emergencies
- tiredness, stress, distraction, reduced concentration or withdrawal
- Increase in personal calls during the day

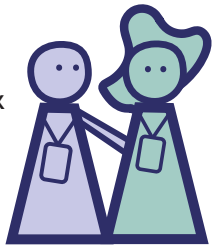


This guide draws on University of Sheffield, Sustainable Care and Centre for Care research on working carers, workplace support and carer-friendly employment practice.alongside lived experience and practical workplace expertise of Sandwich Generation Support.

2. Understand why people may not speak up

Many working carers do not disclose their caring role at work. They may:

- not see themselves as a carer
- feel guilty about "letting down" colleagues
- worry about being seen as less committed
- doubt that anything will change
- feel that caring is not something people talk about at work
- be unsure what support is available



Managers can help by making caring responsibilities easier to talk about before people reach crisis point.

3. Discuss: keep the conversation practical and respectful

A conversation does not need to begin with the word "carer". The aim is to understand whether something is affecting work, whether support may be needed, and what should happen next. Managers should:

- choose a private setting
- explain the purpose of the conversation clearly
- focus on work impact and possible support
- allow the employee to decide how much they want to share
- avoid asking for unnecessary personal, family or medical details
- check relevant policy or HR guidance before making commitments
- agree what, if anything, can be shared with others

The employee does not need to explain the full caring situation. Managers need enough information to respond fairly, practically and within policy.

4. Know carers' rights and policy options

Managers do not need to be experts in employment law, but they should know the main rights and where to find current organisational guidance.

Working carers have rights to:

- One working week of unpaid carer's leave per year
- reasonable time off for dependant emergencies
- request flexible working
- fair treatment when caring responsibilities affect work



Carers should not be treated as less committed or disadvantaged because they care. In some situations, the Equality Act 2010 may protect carers from discrimination linked to the age or disability of the person they support. Managers should seek HR advice if there are concerns about unfair treatment, equality or discrimination.

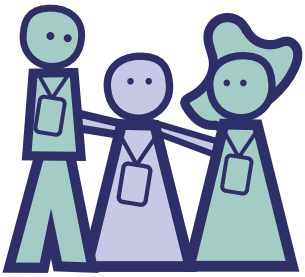
Your organisation may offer more than the statutory minimum, such as paid carer's leave, enhanced leave, flexible working guidance, a carer's passport or a carers' network.

Always ask HR or Employee Relations where formal requests, leave, equality issues, performance concerns or complex circumstances arise.

5. Explore practical support

Once you understand what is affecting work, explore what support may help. Options might include:

- carer's leave or other leave arrangements
- time off for dependant emergencies
- flexible working or temporary adjustments to hours, duties, meetings or start and finish times and hybrid working, where the role allows
- a carer's passport to record agreed support and reduce repeated disclosure
- wellbeing support, occupational health or an Employee Assistance Programme
- carers' networks, peer support or external signposting
- Support in the local area including carers services, Age UK, community groups, Social prescribing link workers and counselling.



The support implemented will depend on the employee's circumstances, organisational policy, the nature of the role, operational requirements and fairness across the team.

6. Follow up: caring situations change

Agree clear next steps:

- what support will be explored
- who will contact HR or another support route
- what, if anything, can be shared with others
- when you will review the arrangement
- who the employee should contact if things change before then

A review point matters because caring responsibilities can change over time. Support that works now may need to be adjusted later.

7. Advocate: help make support real

Managers can help create a culture where caring responsibilities are recognised and support is easier to access. You can:

- make sure team members know where carer policies and support routes are
- mention carer support in team communications, induction or wellbeing discussions
- support fair access to flexibility across different roles, including shift-based or frontline roles
- raise gaps in policy, communication or practice with HR or senior leaders
- encourage use of carer passports, carers' networks or staff forums where available

Remember: This guide is for reference. Every situation is different. Use organisational support, HR advice and the principles when responding to individual circumstances.

FAQs

? What is a carer's passport?

A carer's passport is a voluntary record of an employee's caring responsibilities and any agreed workplace support.

? What is the difference between carer's leave and time off for dependants?

Carer's leave is for planned or foreseeable caring needs, such as arranging care, attending appointments or providing care for someone with a long-term care need.

Time off for dependants is for unexpected problems or emergencies involving someone who depends on the employee.

Managers should check organisational policy because some employers also offer paid carer's leave, compassionate leave, special leave or enhanced arrangements.

? Does carer's leave have to be taken as a full week?

No. Statutory carer's leave can usually be taken as a whole week, individual days or half-days, up to the employee's usual working week over a 12-month period.

? Can I ask for evidence of someone's caring role?

For statutory carer's leave, employees do not need to provide evidence of their dependant's care needs.

? What should I do if I am unsure which policy applies?

Do not guess or promise an outcome. Check HR guidance, Employee Relations or the relevant policy.

Please get in touch if you would like to know more, or to work with us on related issues, by contacting our support team.

Email: centreforcare@sheffield.ac.uk
Website: centreforcare.ac.uk
LinkedIn: @Centre for care