

Carers and Work

You may be working when you start being an unpaid carer. Many unpaid carers wish to continue working, perhaps for financial reasons but also because it provides a break from caring.

Some unpaid carers shoulder the responsibility for juggling work and caring in isolation. They are anxious that their role as unpaid carers will be seen as a difficulty or something undesirable by their employer / manager. They fear that, at some point, this will be held against them and harm their future career prospects. However, 90% of working unpaid carers are aged 30+ and they are at the peak of their careers with a valuable amount of experience and knowledge. They are vital to the success of any organisation.

Caring for someone can often mean unexpected demands, and care arrangements can be complex. So it is a good idea to talk to your employer about your concerns and commitments. Employers value committed, experienced and capable staff so it is in their interests to help you to continue to work and care.

Often little things can make a difference such as

- permission to 'phone home to check that the person for whom you care is all right,
- a guaranteed parking place
- permission to go home at lunch time

Working unpaid carers have the legal right under The Work and Families Act to request

- part time working
- job sharing
- working during term time only
- working school hours
- staggered hours
- compressed hours
- a change in shifts

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Or possibly another work pattern that suits them and their personal circumstances. As part of the Act, a strong business reason must be given by an employer if an unpaid carer's request is declined.

All employees have the right to take 'reasonable' time off to deal with an emergency involving a dependant. This time off does not have to be paid and a dependant could be a mother, father, son, daughter partner or, anyone who lives with the employee and is solely dependent on them. Part-time workers have the same rights as their full-time counterparts.

Carers Wales have a booklet about flexible working, and how to start the conversation with your employer, which can be downloaded from their website

www.carersorg/media/221jdtju/lets-talk-about-flexible-working-guide-2020.pdf

They also have a hub with information for carers in employment, which discusses your rights as a working carer, including discussion about being a carer with your employer and what sort of support might be available:

www.carersuk.org/wales/help-and-advice/work-and-career/carers-in-employment-hub/

The Carer's Leave Act 2023

This new act will come into force in 2024.

It will

- introduce a new and flexible entitlement to one week's unpaid leave per year for employees who are providing or arranging care for a relative or dependant
- be available from the first day of their employment
- allow employees to take leave flexibly for planned and foreseen caring commitments
- offer the same employment protections to employees taking this leave that are associated with other forms of family-related leave, meaning they will be protected from dismissal or any detriment because of having taken time off.

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However, working part-time or taking unpaid holidays could affect your redundancy or maternity rights. So it is a good idea to discuss the balance between work and caring with your manager, human resources (personnel office), union representative or local carers' organisation.

Returning to work

If you would like to combine your caring role with paid employment, Jobcentre Plus offers a range of training and financial help for you if you want to start, or restart, work at some point. They have advisers trained to understand unpaid carers' needs and they can talk to you about what is available. For more information, go to www.gov.uk/moving-from-benefits-to-work/help-for-parents-and-carers or contact your local jobcentre to make an appointment to see an adviser. It won't affect your benefits and there's no obligation to do anything else.