

WORKING CARERS

A working carer is someone in full or part-time employment, who also provides unpaid support, or who looks after a family member, partner or friend who needs help because of their age, physical or mental illness, or disability.

In Essex, around 180,000 people provide unpaid care or support to family members, friends and even neighbours. This support could be given in their own homes or out in the community. 1 in 9 of the workforce combines caring for a loved one with paid work.

It can be difficult to recognise yourself as a Carer when you simply think you are just being 'a good friend/good neighbour' or 'just doing what needs to be done' for a spouse or family member.

Caring for someone covers many aspects of everyday life. This could involve helping with personal care and dressing, helping at meal times or perhaps doing housework. It could also involve taking them to regular medical appointments or simply keeping them company when they feel anxious or lonely.

Legislation

A number of pieces of legislation currently give Carers statutory rights at work, whilst many employers go beyond this provision. However, there is often very limited awareness, amongst both employers and employees of the minimum legal rights which apply to Carers in employment.

Protection from discrimination

If you are looking after someone who is disabled or elderly the Equality Act 2010 will protect you against direct discrimination or harassment because of your caring responsibilities.

Flexible working hours

All employees have the right to request flexible working after they have worked for the same employer for six months, as long as they haven't already made a flexible working request within the last 12 months.

For example, it might help if you could start later and work later if you need extra time in the morning to help the person you care for get up and settled for the day, or you may need to wait for day care transport.

The right to time off in emergencies

All employees have the right to take a “reasonable” amount of time off work to deal with an emergency involving a dependent. This time off is unpaid unless your employer is willing to give paid time off as a contractual right.

The right to parental leave

If you have worked for the same employer for twelve months and you are responsible for a child under 18, you are entitled to 18 weeks leave per child, which must be taken by the child’s 18th birthday. This time off is unpaid unless your employer is willing to give paid time off as a contractual right.

Other ways your employer can support you as a Carer

Access to a telephone: being able to use a phone, in private, at work to check that everything is ok, or being able to keep your mobile phone on at work so you can be contacted can go a long way to reduce stress levels and help you concentrate at work.

Car parking space at/near work: this could shorten your journey time to and from work and might also help if you need to go home at lunch time to attend to the person you care for.

Working from home: either regular or occasionally, can be a real help. You can be at home with the person you care for and still be able to work.

Unpaid and paid leave: this may be an option for you if you need to take extra time off because the person you look after becomes ill, so that you can continue to use your holiday leave to maintain your wellbeing.

Seeking Support in the Workplace

Employers value skilled, experienced members of staff and are keen to keep them. Your employer may be able to help in ways you have not considered. Talk to your manager about your situation, directly or through your HR/ personnel officer or union or staff association representative. You should expect these conversations to be confidential.

Before you decide to speak to your employer, you should find out more about your employer’s policy for supporting Carers. If you decide to leave work, make sure you check all your options before you resign, for example can you take a career break, voluntary redundancy or early retirement.

Some things every Carer should know

Caring can affect your mental health. Depression is common in Carers for obvious reasons, but there are techniques you can use to stay feeling strong and positive

Caring can impact on your physical health. Looking after yourself may be hard - but it is important to eat, sleep and be physically well

If you are a working Carer, you have rights at work

Caring can be isolating, but you're not alone. There are many support groups, for you and the person you care for

There are advice and support services who can help with some of the practical things you might need when looking after someone

There are national Carers organisations that give advice: [Carers Trust](#) and [Carers UK](#)

You have a legal right to a Carer's Assessment. It sounds like a test, but it's just a chat with an advisor to find the best support for you and the person you care for

Nobody wants to think about the time when their caring responsibilities end, but there are things that have to be done. Being prepared could leave you with the space to grieve when the time comes

How can Action for Family Carers help you?

Action for Family Carers has a range of services for Working-age Carers to help you manage and maintain your caring role. This includes:

- ✓ **Feeling Good, Caring Well** programme that gives you the chance to meet other Carers and take part in activities to promote your wellbeing
- ✓ **Essex Befriends**: a befriending service aimed at adults and Carers who are most likely to experience loneliness or social isolation (Action for Family Carers in partnership with Mind in West Essex, Independent Age and Hamelin Trust)

- ✓ **Counselling** services
- ✓ **Day centres** in Maldon, Chelmsford, South Woodham Ferrers and Tiptree that may give you some respite, and provide an opportunity for the person you care for to have a stimulating day with others
- ✓ Support to re-enter the workplace including training through the **Essex Carers the Way to Work** programme
- ✓ **Young Carer** services such as support at school and respite clubs

For further information or assistance please contact:

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