



Carers' Charter

Introduction

Defra recognises the importance of providing a supportive workplace for employees who have caring responsibilities. Our aim is to enable individuals to undertake their caring responsibilities while at the same time feeling engaged and productive in the work they do.

One of the key components to getting inclusion right in Defra is providing the right support to carers through our HR policies and processes, and ensuring our culture enables them to meet their commitments at work and home.

The Charter

The purpose of this charter is to:

- set out in one place the policies and support available for employees who have caring responsibilities
- help managers understand how they can effectively support carers in the workplace
- provide further information and sources of support for employees and managers.

We ask our managers to give sympathetic consideration to requests for support from employees who have caring responsibilities. In some cases, these may be as straightforward as asking to go home at short notice or to come in later on a particular day. There is guidance in the section on 'Support Available' below.

All decisions should take into account the individual's situation as well as any possible impacts on the business. Managers and employees should work together to find the best way forward. Sometimes a sympathetic ear or a referral on to other sources of help will be all that is needed.

It should be viewed by all as acceptable for employees to request support and to feel confident that they will not be discriminated against or treated unfavourably because they have caring responsibilities. All requests will be dealt with promptly and in a confidential manner.

The department will treat all employees fairly and consistently, taking into account individual circumstances. As everyone's caring responsibilities are different, it is important for managers and colleagues not to make assumptions about carers or the support they need.



Who is a carer?

A carer is anyone who cares for a friend or family member who, due to illness, disability, a mental health problem, or an addiction, cannot cope without their support. The care they give is unpaid although they may be eligible for financial support, such as carer's allowance.

Becoming a carer can be due to a decline in a dependant's long-term health or an illness, injury or accident. A dependant is someone who relies on an employee for care. This could be, for example, a spouse or civil partner, partner, disabled child, parent or an elderly neighbour. The role can start suddenly and can be unpredictable in its impact and duration. It can affect all aspects of an individual's physical, mental, emotional, social and financial wellbeing.

Anyone can find themselves in this position at some point in their working lives. Often people do not think of themselves as a carer. However, recognising that you are carrying out a caring role is important if you are to access the support which will help you balance caring and work.

Although this charter does not cover people who have caring responsibilities for children who are not disabled, they may find the links useful for their own caring responsibilities.

The role of work

For carers, work often represents a lifeline, not only financially, but in providing a life outside of caring. Working, whether paid or unpaid, is good for our health and wellbeing. Our aim, as a department, is to support carers wherever possible to combine their caring and work roles.

The business can also benefit by having that member of their team in work. By having open and honest conversations with carers, managers can enable them to continue contributing their expertise and to remain a valued member of the team.

The importance of communication

Caring can be hard to plan and cope with emotionally, and what is required can vary at different times. Our aim as a department is to promote good communication between carers and their managers focused on finding constructive ways forward.

When you become a carer, it is important to let your manager know as soon as possible and to make them aware of the issues which might arise. Caring responsibilities can be unpredictable and combining work and care can be difficult. Help your manager to understand the challenges you face. The two of you can then explore options to help you balance caring responsibilities with work.

Many employees do not identify themselves as carers. If, as a manager, you think someone is a carer, have an open and honest conversation with them. Encourage them to talk about their caring responsibilities. Work with them to identify ways you can help them manage their caring responsibilities and workload.



Support available

Employee Assistance Programme

Our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) is a confidential, free service. It can provide carers and their managers with independent support to help explore options and come to the best solution. They can advise on sources of help and advice and can provide counselling to help with the emotional side of caring. The EAP can also offer legal and financial signposting, helping you to understand and navigate some of the practical aspects of becoming a carer.

They run a 24 hour helpline which you can contact on 0800 111 6387 or www.my-eap.com

Flexible Working

Flexible working can be key to enabling carers to combine their work and caring responsibilities. It can include flexible start and/or finish times, compressed hours, homeworking, job-sharing and part-time working. Many people also work flexi time.

It can enable carers to arrange hospital and other appointments on the days they don't work. It can also help cope with sudden crises reducing the need to use up annual or special leave.

We ask our managers to take a positive, proactive approach, recognising that flexible working can work in different ways in different parts of the business. Managers and employees should be creative about the use of flexible working arrangements taking account of both caring and business needs. Teams should also consider how to ensure inclusive working practices are adopted e.g. providing alternatives to face to face meetings and considering caring commitments when choosing meeting times.

Guidance on our [flexible working policy](#).

Job Sharing

Employees looking for a job share partner are encouraged to use the Civil Service Job Share Finder to find a match. Further details can be found at <https://www.civilservicejobshare.service.gov.uk/>

The [Defra Job Share Network](#) supports colleagues working in, managing or trying to find a job share. Managers will also want to support their team members in taking forward this option.

Special Leave (Paid and Unpaid)

Special leave is a form of leave that managers may grant when other types of leave are not suitable or available. It can be paid or unpaid.



Special leave is usually planned, although it can also be granted on an unplanned basis depending on the reason, for example, an unforeseen event. There are some statutory rights to time off work, for example, to deal with an emergency involving a dependant.

We ask our managers to consider sympathetically requests from carers for special leave. Guidance on the factors to take into account are set out in our [special leave policy](#).

Career Breaks

A [career break](#) is a period of unpaid time away from work which may be requested for a number of reasons, including caring for dependants. Career breaks can last for a minimum of six months and a maximum of five years.

We ask our managers to consider sympathetically requests from carers for a career break taking into account the individual's circumstances and business needs.

Parental Leave (not to be confused with Shared Parental Leave)

Some carers are looking after disabled children. [Parental leave](#) is a form of statutory leave available to working parents to look after their child or to make arrangements for the child's welfare.

Carer's Passport

Drawing up a [carer's passport](#) provides carers and their managers with the opportunity to discuss the carer's needs in the workplace and to identify and record solutions. The passport will stay with the employee when they move across the department or to another department. It can then be shared with the new manager so they can see the arrangements previously put in place.

on setting up a carer's passport and ensuring your passport is kept up to date This includes passports set up in discussion with the Charity for Civil Servants.

External Sources of Support

Benefits and Credits

[This website](#) gives information about the benefits and tax credits available to both carers and those with a disability.

Carer's Assessments

[Carers' assessments](#) are for adult carers of adults (over 18 years) who are disabled, ill or elderly. They provide opportunities to discuss with the local council what support or services you need. The assessment will look at how caring affects your life, including for example, physical, mental and emotional needs.



Carers Organisations and Information

[Carers UK](#) is a charity offering advice, information and support for carers. It runs carers groups and volunteer networks and an advice line and online forums.

[Carers Trust](#) is a charity providing support, information, advice and services for people caring at home for a family member or friend. It also provides 24/7 helplines and online forums.

[Charity for Civil Servants](#) supports civil servants, past and present, throughout their lives, offering practical, financial and emotional support. Their website has a section on carers.

[Employers for Carers](#) provides tools and guidance for employers to help them support and manage employees with caring responsibilities.

[NHS guide to care and support](#) Provides advice on accessing local authority care services.

Other Sources of Information

[Age UK](#) information and support for the over 50s.

[Alzheimer's Society](#) gives advice and guidance on all types of dementia, including Alzheimer's.

[Cruse](#) provides support after the death of someone close.

[Disabled Living Foundation](#) advice and information on equipment for independent living.

[Mencap](#) information and advice for people with a learning disability and their carers.

[Macmillan Cancer Support](#) information and advice for everyone affected by cancer, their family and friends.

[Marie Curie](#) help and support for people impacted by terminal illness.

[Mind](#) support, training and consultancy for people of all ages who struggle with mental health problems.

[The National Autistic Society \(NAS\)](#) information and support for autistic people and their families.

[Rethink](#) information and services for everyone affected by mental illness

[Time to Change](#) information about mental health including links to other organisations working in the field of mental health.

[Working Families](#) Helps working parents and carers and their employers find a better balance between responsibilities at home and work.