

# Work and caring

It is estimated that over 3 million people in the UK combine work and caring responsibilities. Of these Carers, approximately 400,000 people combine full time work with caring more than 20 hours a week.

Most people don't plan to become Carers and often face many difficulties juggling work and caring responsibilities. If caring happens suddenly, it can be difficult to put in place temporary arrangements or have time to arrange long-term support. However, changes in legislation may enable greater flexibility for Carers in employment or for those thinking about returning to work.

## Work and Families Act 2006

There is already an entitlement for parents of children aged 6 and under or aged 18 and under for a disabled child, to request flexible working hours. The Work and Families Act 2006 has extended this right to Carers who care for an adult – now they also have the right to request flexible working. For this entitlement, a Carer is defined as an employee who is or expects to be caring for an adult who is married to, or the partner or civil partner of the employee; or is a near relative of the employee or falls into neither of those categories but lives at the same address as the employee.

Examples of flexible working might be:

- Annualised hours
- Compressed hours
- Flexi time
- Home working
- Reduction in hours
- Job sharing
- Staggered hours
- Term time working

It is important to remember the right to *request* flexible working is not an absolute entitlement. An employer has to consider the request and it can only be rejected if there is a recognised business reason for doing so.

If the request is accepted you will need to think about permanent changes in your contract and salary. A request can be made yearly, but clearly if there is a dramatic change in caring responsibilities, a sympathetic employer may consider further changes to working hours.

There may be other changes in working patterns and conditions that could be easily

applied in the workplace, and which may help to reduce the stress of working and caring. Examples might include:

- Access to a telephone/mobile so that contact can easily be made in emergencies
- Availability of a parking space to give ready access to your transport
- Sufficient warning of expected overtime or extended working hours for particular periods of time.

A few small adjustments can make a big difference and may benefit your employer as well. Employers can retain skilled staff and reduce recruitment costs. If an employee is able to balance work and caring they are more likely to be committed to their job.

## **Time off for emergencies**

You have the right to take time off work to deal with emergencies, which relate to someone who depends on you. This might be a parent, partner, or child or anyone living in your household as a member of your family. A dependant may also be someone who relies on you as their sole carer for assistance.

You can take a reasonable amount of time off to deal with the emergency so that you can make alternative arrangements for care. Time off is usually unpaid but this depends on the terms of your contract of employment. If you need to take a longer period of time off, there may be other types of leave that you can take, like compassionate leave or parental leave. Some employers also have Carers leave.

## **The Carer's Assessment**

A Carer is entitled to a Carer's Assessment which should look at your need to be supported so that you can continue to work. For more information about the Carer's Assessment and the Community Care Assessment, please see Factsheets 4 and 5.

As a Parent Carer, working and caring for a disabled child, you may need information about childcare. Cheshire Children's Information Service provides information, advice and support on services and childcare for children in Cheshire including children with additional needs.

## **Leaving work**

Caring for someone does not automatically mean that you will have to leave work. But if you decide to leave paid employment then you need to think about:

- Your income and how it will change
- What will happen to your occupational pension
- Your national insurance contributions
- Lack of social contact

- How you will keep your work skills up to date if at some time you plan to return to work

## **Work, Caring and Benefits**

If you change your working hours, return to work or leave work altogether and claim benefits, it is important to let the Department of Work and Pensions know. Any changes in your income may affect some benefits. If any one in the household receives Disability Living Allowance, Child Benefit or, Attendance Allowance, these benefits are not affected.

You may be able to claim Carer's Allowance if your net earnings are £95.00 or less. Some costs associated with caring can be deducted from your earnings and taken into account if you are claiming Carer's Allowance. Other income related benefits are affected if you work, such as Council Tax Benefit, Housing Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit and Income Support.

The Citizens Advice Bureau is able to offer 'better off' benefit checks to see if you are receiving all the benefits that you are entitled to and how your income will be affected if you change how many hours you work.

This Factsheet is a general guide and not a full statement or interpretation of the law. There are several organisations, which provide more detailed guidance on work and caring. Carers UK, The Princess Royal Trust for Carers and Contact a Family all provide useful factsheets on combining work and caring. Their contact details are provided in Factsheet 14. The organisations listed below also give further information and support.

ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service)

Brandon House

180 Borough High Street

London SE1 1LW

Tel: 08457 474747

Offers a free confidential service on employment issues

Working Families: Waving not drowning

1-3 Berry Street

London EC1V 0AA

Tel: 020 7253 7243

[www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk)

Provides information on combining work with caring for a disabled child