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equality



# Sample Carers Policy and Guidance



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## 1. Introduction

(Employer's name) recognises that our staff is the organisation's most valuable asset and understands that staff have a life outside of work including responsibility for looking after children and/or other caring responsibilities and that they may need support to combine work with care.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Outline the support (employer's name) will offer to our staff that have caring responsibilities.
- Offer guidance in order for them to balance their working and caring commitments effectively.
- Aid recruitment and retention of employees with caring responsibilities.
- To provide support to managers so that they can effectively support their staff.

## 2. Definition of Carers

For the purposes of this policy, a carer is defined as: someone who is responsible for the care and support of disabled, elderly or sick partners, relatives, children, or friends who are unable to care for themselves.

The organisation acknowledges that carers undertake a wide range of duties including but not limited to:

- Help with personal care
- Help with mobility
- Managing medication
- Practical household tasks
- Emotional support
- Attending hospital appointments
- Liaising with Social Care Teams
- Help with financial matters or paperwork.

Employees to whom the organisation offers support in line with this policy may not recognise themselves as carers, for example employees who support a dependant who does not live with them.

The organisation recognises its duty not to treat those with caring responsibilities less favourably than other staff. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 protects a person who experiences discrimination on the grounds of their association with someone who has a disability. For example, it would be unlawful to refuse someone a career development opportunity due to concerns that they would give insufficient attention to work because of their caring responsibilities. The Act, other pieces of legislation and best practice also allow for reasonable adjustments for carers and reasonable paid and unpaid time off work for unplanned caring duties.

## 3. Identification and Disclosure

Employees are not required to disclose to their line manager that they are caring for someone, but are encouraged to do so. This will help the organisation to provide appropriate support to the employee. Line managers should encourage employees to discuss their caring responsibilities with them and should assure employees that their need for support and confidentiality will be respected.

Employees who do not wish to disclose their caring responsibilities to their line manager are encouraged to approach the Human Resources Section/Welfare/Local Trade Union Representative.

Where a line manager knows that an employee in their team has caring responsibilities, the line manager should inform the employee about the support that the organisation offer carers and encourage them to access the support offered.

### Examples of systems of identification

One example of a more formalised system of identification is having a **'Carers Register'**. Employees who have identified themselves as carers are listed on this register, enabling access to carers leave and other benefits.

Similarly, operating a voluntary **'Carers Passport'** scheme where employees hold a record detailing their individual needs and working arrangements.

These arrangements have the advantage of providing automatic entitlement to carer's supports and stay with the employee if their role changes, if they move departments, or if their line manager changes. Systems such as these do however need to incorporate flexibility, to reflect individual changing situations and monitored to ensure that information is accurate and kept up to date.

## 4. Time off to Care for Dependants

The organisation recognises that employees with caring responsibilities cannot always plan ahead for time off. Accidents and some illnesses occur without warning, and care arrangements can break down unexpectedly. The ability to take leave in an emergency is important for carers, who may be called on at short notice.

This section of the policy should include the range of support provided to carers within an organisation and the procedures for accessing this provision. It is important for a Carer's policy to specifically include 'Carers Leave' which immediately allows carers to identify the support they can access. Carers leave is specifically for carers to use to cover (planned and/or unplanned periods of care such as pre-arranged hospital appointments or unforeseen periods of difficulty. There should be provision for paid and unpaid time off. **While there is a statutory right for unpaid time off for emergencies it is NIPSA's position that employers should be providing a period of paid time off in such circumstances.**

Other policies such as flexible working arrangements, job-sharing, part-time working, career breaks, compassionate leave, etc should also be clearly specified in the scope of the policy. Having to 'dig through' a range of policies to find where caring responsibilities might or might not be mentioned can be time consuming and demoralising. A brief description may suffice with reference to where a carer can obtain further information – see example below. The key point is to ensure that carers can easily see reference to where their situation fits and how to access the support provided in these policies. Sometimes they are included within 'Work-life balance' policies, 'Family and caring' policies or more general HR policies.

## For example the policy could state:

Job Sharing	One full-time post is split between two employees who work the hours between them with the salary and appropriate terms and conditions shared on a pro-rata basis. The arrangements normally involves an equal split of the duties of the post.
Flexible Working Hours Scheme	The Flexible Working Hours Scheme enables employees to arrange their working hours within a broad time span. Certain hours are designated "core hours" when attendance is necessary and outwith these hours there is flexibility to organise attendance.
Reduced Hours	Employees are contracted to work less hours than the standard full-time working week.
Compressed Hours	Full-time working hours are worked over fewer days (which are specific) with set start/finish times.
Others that could be included:	Annualised hours, home working, term-time working, staggered hours, part-time working, shift working etc.

For further information please refer to the Organisation's Work/Life Balance Policy / Flexible Working Policy / Staff Handbook (as appropriate).

The arrangements on offer should cover a number of circumstances e.g. occasions where there is a sudden increase in the level of care required, or where a worker becomes a carer with no advance notice. Some situations to consider:

**New care:** An employee who has just become a carer will need time and flexibility to set up the caring arrangements.

**Short term care:** A worker with temporary or provisional care responsibilities will need to take time off at certain intervals, and this could be accommodated through changed work patterns or flexible leave arrangements.

**Long term care:** An increase in caring responsibilities will mean a change in personal circumstances and a requirement for more flexibility or a change to work patterns.

**Immediate or emergency care:** Such circumstances require immediate support at short notice to cover a short period of time and will need employers and co-workers to demonstrate understanding and co-operation.

## 5. Practical Support

Employees with caring responsibilities, together with their line manager, should consider what other practical support would help to combine work and caring duties. Such support will include:

- Providing a car parking space (where possible) in order to allow a carer to save valuable time when arriving in the morning or having to leave at short notice to attend to the needs of the dependant.
- The use of their mobile phone or telephone access for emergency calls or to be contactable in the event of a crisis or emergency.
- Health and wellbeing support initiatives.
- Providing information about external sources of support such as CarersNI, helplines etc - it can also be as simple as displaying leaflets/posters in prominent areas.

## 6. Line Managers

Line managers play a key role in supporting employees. Each carer's situation requires a different response; therefore line managers should take into account the whole range of organisational support and existing policies available when putting support in place for carers.

Employees need to be confident that they will not be treated less favourably if they take up the organisation's support. Line managers should create a workplace culture that is supportive of carers by encouraging employees to make use of the support and existing policies offered to carers and encouraging discussion around carers' issues.

## 7. Communication, Awareness Raising and Training

The organisation is committed to raising awareness of the role and demands of carers in the workplace through the implementation of an Employee Carer Support Network, awareness raising publications and training.

This policy will be communicated to all staff via one or all of the following methods:

- Staff induction
- Payslip messages
- Organisation intranet
- Staff notice boards
- HR bulletins

Training will be provided to line managers to understand the challenges faced by carers, to raise awareness of the range of policies and support in place and to ensure carers are treated fairly and consistently across all departments/sections.

## 8. Equality Impact

The Section 75 Equality Duty was introduced by the Northern Ireland Act 1998, requiring the organisation, in the exercise of its functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not, by
  - Removing or minimising disadvantage;
  - Meeting the needs of particular groups that are different from the needs of others.

- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The Section 75 Equality Duty covers the following protected characteristics: religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, political opinion, race, marital status, age, gender, disability and dependants.

This policy has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment. A copy of the information is available from (insert relevant section).

## **9. Trade Unions**

The Trade Unions have been consulted regarding this policy in line with the recognised arrangements for such matters.

## **10. Monitoring and Review**

This policy will be reviewed in line with the recognised arrangements and monitored to ensure its continuing effectiveness.