

Factsheet - Carers and Employment

Carers can face difficult choices about balancing work and caring and finding support services to help stay in work. Today there are increasing numbers of people in the workplace with caring responsibilities. In recognition of this changing and diverse workforce, the government is actively encouraging employers to allow flexible working patterns. Useful government information on this employment legislation can be found on the www.dti.gov.uk and www.direct.gov.uk websites. *Your local Carers Centre* can print this out for you if you do not have internet access.

Telling your employer

It is important to tell your employer about your caring commitments. Caring can often be unpredictable and care arrangements complex. If you want to work, it is often in your employer's best interests to consider making reasonable changes to your work pattern so that you can continue caring too. Keeping the communication lines open between you and your manager is vital if you are to manage work and give your employer notice in time to make arrangements when you are away. You could also speak to your colleagues, human resources manager or staff association to see if there is existing support available at your workplace.

Parental Leave

There is a statutory right to take unpaid leave for your child if you meet certain conditions. You must have legal parental responsibility for the child, be an employee with a contract of employment (agency workers are not eligible), and have worked for the same employer or a year. This entitles you to:

- ▶ 13 weeks off work for each child up to their 5th birthday.
- ▶ 18 weeks off for each disabled child up to the child's 18th birthday.
(a disabled child is defined as one receiving disability living allowance)

Where possible employers and employees should negotiate parental leave at the workplace. If this can't be done then the fallback scheme operates. For this, leave should be taken in one week blocks, with a maximum of 4 weeks leave for any one child in a year. Statutory parental leave is unpaid, but if you are on a low income you may be entitled to Income Support. If you don't qualify for parental leave you could still ask your manager whether you can take annual leave, unpaid time off or consider flexible working options.

Flexible working for parents and carers

Parents of children aged under 6 and parents of disabled children under 18, who have worked continuously as an employee for 26 weeks have had the right for some time to apply to work flexibly for a need related to the care of the child. Since April 2007, under the Work and Families Act 2006, the same rights have

been extended to carers. For this legislation a carer is defined as someone caring for an adult who:

- o Is married to, or the partner or civil partner of, the employee
- o Is a near relative of the employee (parent, parent-in-law, adult child, sibling, sibling in-law, uncle, aunt, grandparent or step relative)
- o Falls into neither category, but lives at the same address as the employee

How do I apply?

You must apply in writing, explaining your caring responsibilities and the change you would like to make to your working arrangements. You should also consider the effect this might have on your employer's business and how this might be accommodated. The application must not be a repeat of one made in the previous 12 months and your employer must be given a reasonable time to consider and implement it. Employers have a duty to take requests seriously. Although they can 'no' to your request, they will need to demonstrate clearly why this is so. More information can be found in the ACAS leaflet 'The Right to apply for Flexible working' which can be downloaded from www.acas.org.uk

Flexible working arrangements:

You could discuss the following options with your manager:

- ▶ Part/time, flexi/time, jobsharing or home working
- ▶ Annualised or term-time hours
- ▶ Flexible holidays to tie in with alternative care arrangements
- ▶ Compressed hours, staggered hours or shift work

Time off in Emergencies and special leave arrangements:

If you have worked for your employer for at least a year you can have a 'reasonable' amount of time off to cover an emergency to do with the person you care for. You may also be offered: ▶ Carer's leave ▶ Compassionate leave ▶ Borrowing/buying leave ▶ Career breaks

Useful contacts and websites giving further information:

ACAS (Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service) www.acas.org.uk

Advisory booklets Changing patterns of work, Flexible working and other booklets

Carers UK www.carersuk.org

Latest on legislation or tel: 020 7490 8818.

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Helps people resolve their money, legal and other problems with a network of offices throughout the country.

Working Families www.workingfamilies.org.uk

or tel: 020 7253 7243 *Waving not drowning* network also supports 2000 families who are combining work and caring for disabled children

Useful local contacts

For a wide range of information on work and employment

Oxford Employment Service 01865 791606 email oes@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Nextstep 0800 1954 700 www.nextstepmkob.org.uk

Right Employment (advice and support about employment for people with learning difficulties and disabilities) 0845 050 7666
rightemployment@tiscali.co.uk

For Citizens Advice Bureaux in Oxfordshire which may be able to advise on problems and issues at work 0870 220068

For information about living and working in Oxfordshire with useful links and phone numbers

Cherwell District Council 01295 252535 www.cherwell-dc.gov.uk

Oxford City Council 01865 249811 www.oxford.gov.uk

South Oxfordshire District Council 01491 823000 www.southoxon.gov.uk

Oxfordshire County Council 01865 792422 www.oxfordshire.gov.uk

For practical, reliable and up to date information about a wide range of issues including employment rights of European, Asian and African languages the following sites produce fact sheets which can be downloaded
www.adviceguide.org.uk www.multikulti.org.uk

For more information: see Carers in Oxfordshire website
www.oxoncarers.org.uk