

### Guidance note on support for carers of adults

BBSRC provides a range of measures to support carers in the workplace. These include, paid and unpaid dependant leave and a number of flexible working options. This guidance note provides general advice about putting these measures into practice and the issues that HR managers, Occupational Health staff, line managers and colleagues alike should consider in providing the support needed for carers of adults.

Overall, an organisational culture that is supportive is more important and useful to carers than formal initiatives and policies:

- BBSRC aims to engender a culture which demonstrates that there is an awareness of carers and the difficulties they often face.
- Consequently, employees (carers) will be more likely to seek help rather than hide their problems, which ultimately can have a positive impact on the individual, team performance and output.
- An open-door policy ensures carers know they can talk about problems before they escalate and often resolve them quickly.

Managers who recognise the need to provide additional support often find that:

- The individual is usually more able to cope with their dual carer and work roles.
- Co-operation between colleagues helps foster team work.
- Employee morale is enhanced.
- Post bereavement recovery time may be quicker – in such circumstances, consider a phased return to work or short-term flexibility to work arrangements to assist the employees return.
- It reinforces the caring values of the organisation and the perception of being an employer and organisation of choice.

Someone to talk to – carers often say that supportive colleagues (particularly those who have had similar experiences) and a sympathetic line manager have helped them overcome their difficulties. Examples of other sources of help include:

- HR or occupational health.
- Trades union representatives.
- External organisations via help lines or websites, such as:
  - <http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/SocialCare/Carers/index.htm>
  - <http://www.carers.org/>

Setting up an internal carers network can, for example, provide support to both carers and managers with advice on flexible working and other practical solutions or merely a forum in which to share like concerns and difficulties.

If not already in place, the provision of a carers counselling service can be included as part of an employee assistance programme.

Small changes can help – major changes cannot always be accommodated but often carers only require a small degree of flexibility to help them overcome short-term difficulties.

Examples include:

- Telephone access at work at all times to receive calls from home and vice versa.
- Easy car parking, close to the place of work in case of emergency.
- Flexible break times.

Special leave for carers is set out in Appendix A8.8 of the Employment Code. Whilst BBSRC already operates paid and unpaid dependant leave arrangements, line managers are encouraged to be as flexible and accommodating as possible, taking in to account the specific circumstances involved on a case by case basis.

Annual Leave carry over – dependent upon individual circumstances and ensuring that the full amount of statutory leave has been taken, give favourable consideration to carers carrying over more than 9 days annual leave into the next leave year or anticipating more than 7 days annual leave.

Consider allowing the carer to work flexible working hours on a short-term basis if such an arrangement is not generally available to all employees.

Flexible working – give every request for flexible working a fair hearing (see Section A3 Part 2 of the Employment Code) and include other team members to find out their views and gain support for the arrangement, having first consulted the carer to ensure that they are content for their particular circumstances to be shared with colleagues. Team members are more likely to support colleagues if they understand the problems, and know that they too might be supported if the same carer issues faced them:

- Managers do not have to agree to a carer's choice of flexible working and if this is the case try to consider other options bearing in mind that the carer may only require a short-term solution.
- Once a flexible working arrangement is in place, set realistic objectives and performance goals that have clear outcomes.
- Have a contingency plan – discuss and plan as a team what back-up might be needed in case of emergency (e.g. periods when caring may become more acute and present the carer with further difficulties) or if the carer's responsibilities change.
- Hold regular reviews to ensure the flexible arrangements are still working for the carer and their colleagues – when commencing the arrangement it is a good idea to build in review dates to ensure everything is running smoothly or whether further changes are required. This refers to how the arrangement is managed in practice bearing in mind that changes to working arrangements are usually contractual and permanent.
- Maintain communication – often employees who are carers feel it is inappropriate to bring their personal lives to work and do not want to be seen to be complaining. However, an open approach by managers demonstrates commitment to carers and engenders two-way communication, which allows difficulties to be addressed before they turn into problems.