

Everyone Managing... Carers

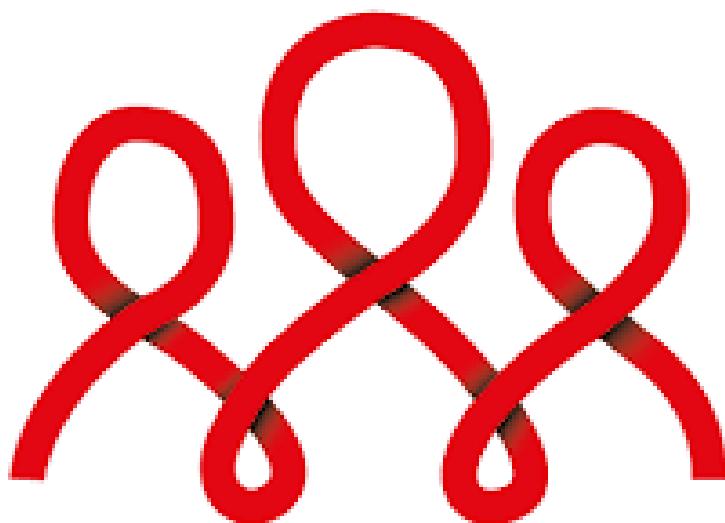
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A Brief Guide for Managers



1. Introduction

It is estimated that one in 8 of the UK workforce is a carer. An ageing population, smaller families and changing family structures means that many people are likely to have at least one period of caring for someone who has a long-term illness or is disabled or frail, often while the carer is employed. Caring in this way is unpredictable. It can happen unexpectedly and may be hard to juggle with work. It is physically and emotionally demanding and the carer may feel that they have two full-time jobs, one paid and the other neither paid nor chosen.

Many employees at Network Rail will find themselves in this situation and it is important to understand what help and support is available, whether their caring responsibilities are well established and long-standing or short-term and temporary.

The impact of caring on people's ability to work is an increasingly serious issue for employers. The number of carers in the UK is forecast to increase from 6.5 million to 9 million by 2030. People typically become carers around the peak of their career, having developed skills and experience that may be in short supply. Without the right support, the challenges of combining caring with work can quickly become too difficult to manage.

Caring can take many forms and the responsibilities can often place an additional strain on individuals. In some cases the strain and feelings of isolation may affect their performance at work and potentially affect both their physical and mental wellbeing. This in turn could negatively impact on safety. Caring may hinder career development, because taking up training opportunities or changing jobs may be difficult. In all circumstances Network Rail wants to provide support to carers.

2. What is a Carer?

A carer is someone who looks after a spouse, partner, child, parent or other family member who cannot manage without that help because they are disabled or have a long-term medical condition. Carers may not live with the person for whom they care and may share the care with other family members, friends or neighbours. In some instances this definition can be widened to include those who look after non-family members that reasonably rely on the carer for assistance.

The use of the term 'carer' in this briefing means someone who is an employee of Network Rail, whether or not the employee would use the term of themselves.

Many of the same principles would apply to an employee who needs to care for someone for a short time, eg a week or two when their family member has a short-term medical need. Support and flexibility from managers in such circumstances will bring many of the same benefits as does support for long-term carers.

The Equality Act (2010) protects carers as they are ‘associated with’ someone who is elderly or disabled. The law requires that employees are not discriminated against on the grounds of their caring responsibilities and this is reflected in Network Rail’s diversity and inclusion policy.

3. What carers need

3.1 Support, compassion and understanding

Line managers should attempt to offer support to carers such as:

- Moral support in what can often be a difficult, tiring and emotionally draining long-term commitment;
- A climate in which the carer can feel that it is normal to discuss caring issues;
- Acceptance that caring is something that may happen to anyone at some point in their lives;
- A flexible approach to those who need to deal with occasional emergencies or short-notice changes in arrangements.

3.2 Flexible working

All employees have the right to request [flexible working](#), for any reason. Carers may find it useful to consider options such as:

- Part-time working,
- Altered start and/or finish times,
- A change of shift pattern,
- Term-time only working,
- Compressed hours (ie, longer hours on fewer days per week),
- Working from home or from another Network Rail location.

Network Rail’s flexible working policy contains more details including, how to apply and how an application should be handled. Applicants should specify that the reason for the request is their caring responsibilities, and this should be taken into account when discussing and deciding on arrangements.

Flexible working is sometimes seen as only happening in offices; however frontline employees are equally entitled to request it. There are examples of flexible

arrangements being very successful for shift workers, where managers and staff are willing to make such arrangements work.

3.3 Informal flexibility

In addition to the set policy on flexible working, line managers also have discretion to grant informal requests for work to be carried out more flexibly than normal. Carers may need different levels of support at different times. Examples of best practice in allowing and encouraging informal flexibility include:

- Employees varying their normal hours or place of work on an irregular basis, eg to take part of a day off to attend an appointment with the person they care for and make up the time by working at home later;
- Flexibility with short periods of annual leave, eg spreading half a day's leave over two occasions on which the carer needs to leave an hour or two early to attend an appointment with the person they care for (if the carer prefers to take leave rather than make up time later);
- Employees spending some of their working time away from their normal workstation when experiencing heightened levels of stress;
- Allowing carers to keep in regular contact with the person they care for by telephone or email, without requiring permission on each occasion;
- Allowing carers to exchange telephone calls or emails with professionals (eg medical or social care staff) without requiring permission on each occasion;
- Encouraging rostered employees to arrange shift swaps for occasions when they need time to care for a dependent – this is covered by the national rostering principles (clause 3.6 of June 2003 edition).

Such requests should always be given sympathetic consideration and only refused if they are truly incompatible with the needs of the business.

3.4 Special leave

All Network Rail employees may request [special leave](#) in accordance with the special leave policy. In particular, it may be useful to consider taking 'time off to care for dependents' if a carer needs to take time off to handle an emergency involving a dependent. This could cover a range of circumstances such as:

- Handling a breakdown in normal care arrangements,
- Making appropriate arrangements when a dependent is ill or injured,
- Dealing with an incident involving a child during school hours,
- Dealing with the death of a dependent.

Normally only a day's paid leave is available for an emergency, though a further day (or longer in exceptional circumstances) may be possible on an unpaid basis. This leave is available on an ad-hoc basis as circumstances may dictate, with no limit set in the policy for how frequently it may be taken.

The special leave policy also includes arrangements for leave to cover exceptional domestic circumstances (eg a fire at home or other urgent family crisis) and funerals of near relatives, as well other kinds of leave (eg for jury service).

3.5 Parental leave

All parents of children under 18 may take unpaid [parental leave](#) in accordance with the family friendly policy. This must be planned in advance so is not appropriate in emergencies. A total of 18 weeks is available for each child, which may be shared between both parents. Up to 4 weeks may be taken in any one calendar year, and if your child is disabled it may be taken one day at a time or in longer periods.

3.6 Career breaks

Network Rail employees with at least 2 years' continuous service may request a [career break](#) of 3 to 6 months' duration. In some circumstances, this may be a viable alternative for a carer who is considering leaving work to focus on caring. There is a clear business benefit in avoiding either recruitment costs or a long-term vacancy if there is a realistic prospect of the carer being able to return to work after the break.

3.7 Asking for support

If a carer feels they need support from the business, the first step is to talk to their line manager and/or HR business partner about what would help. These conversations should be kept completely confidential, unless the carer agrees that it would be helpful to discuss the matter more widely, for example to let others in their team know the reason why they are changing their hours. If the carer is unsure what support might help, contacting Myriad (see section 4.6 below) for a conversation may be helpful.

Whatever is being requested, the more notice the employee is able to give, the easier it will be for the manager to find the right solution to meet everyone's needs. If the specific situation is not covered by existing Network Rail policies, a conversation with an HR business partner may help find the best way forward.

There are processes for applying for a formal flexible working arrangement or special leave, described in the policies mentioned above. They may involve the application being discussed with other managers. The carer should explain why they are making the request so that their application can be treated sympathetically. They should also let their manager know if their need is urgent. For example, it may be possible to speed up the process for agreeing a flexible working arrangement, particularly if the applicant is willing to waive the notice of meetings specified in the policy.

HR will arrange to make any agreed changes to contracts or terms of employment if needed, and this will be confirmed to the employee in writing.

3.8 Other support

Carers should be encouraged to make contact with [Myriad](#), the Network Rail carers' employee network. The network offers an opportunity to share issues that affect carers directly and to gain support from others in similar situations, as well as potentially being able to influence Network Rail's policies on matters that may affect carers. There are local networks in various parts of the country.

All Network Rail employees are able to access our [employee assistance programme](#) provided by Validium. Information, advice and counselling are available to employees, their partners and dependants, free of charge, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The advice available includes legal matters (eg lasting power of attorney) and financial advice.

Through our membership of the Employers for Carers (EfC) and our relationship with Carers UK, Network Rail employees can gain access to the [EfC website](#). To access the resources on the website, click 'Register' and use Network Rail's unique registration code #EFC1377 (case sensitive). The information available covers such matters as:

- Your rights at work as a carer,
- Tips for people who are new to caring,
- Financial help,
- Help with caring,
- How to find help,
- Help with fuel costs,
- Help with health,
- Practical help to make life easier (eg gadgets, equipment and services such as meals on wheels),
- Direct payments,

- Protecting your pension,
- Making decisions on someone's behalf,
- Returning to work after taking time off to care,
- Getting help when caring ends.

The [Carers UK](#) website contains further help and advice, and the [Carers Trust](#) website has links to local carers' groups throughout the UK.

Most carers will be entitled to a carers' assessment from their local council – the council website should provide contact details, normally through adult social care. Carers are also advised to inform their GP that they are a carer, in order to access support in managing their own health.

Carers may also wish to explore the help available from the [Transport Benevolent Fund](#) or the [Railway Benefit Fund](#) if they are experiencing financial hardship. These are independent charities with their own criteria for what help they can give and to whom.

4. Starting the conversation

This section is intended to support line managers in holding conversations with their staff who are carers, whether or not this is associated with a formal application for flexible working, special leave or other forms of assistance.

4.1 Background

Line managers have a vitally important role to play in supporting the health and wellbeing of their team members. Nevertheless, sometimes, talking about other people's wellbeing can be a daunting challenge. What is important to bear in mind is that you really do not need to be an expert to talk to someone about such issues. Often, the most powerful thing you can ask is just 'how are you?' or 'how can I help you?'

If you are concerned about an individual, or an individual has approached you, ask them if they would like to arrange an opportunity to talk in private and when would suit them best. Once you have a meeting planned, make sure you're prepared. If you already know the issue your employee wants to discuss, do some research to understand the basics, but do not feel that you are expected to be an expert in the field. It will also be useful to have an understanding of what Network Rail can offer the employee, so you can advise them when you meet with them on how you and the company may be able to help.

Individuals will vary in how much they want to share. Some may wish to keep the conversation strictly to how their caring responsibilities interact with their work. Others may wish to pour everything out, and it can become quite an emotional conversation. Remember that you do not have to come up with a solution; often simply listening and allowing the carer to 'vent' is all that is required.

Focus on the employee and the contributions they have made, as it may be important to remind them that they are a valued part of the team and so they know you are there for support if needed. Finally, consider what kinds of questions you may want to ask the employee – open questions will encourage an employee to discuss more and request support. However, always remember that you are not there to be a counsellor or to probe into an employee's personal life, and also remember that they may refuse the support you offer and this is absolutely their decision.

4.2 Starting conversations

When leading a sensitive conversation, try to create an atmosphere in which the person feels safe and comfortable, and let them know that what you discuss with respect to health is confidential. This may help them feel more open to talking to you.

There are many ways you can start a conversation and you may want to change your tactics depending on who you are talking to. Some people prefer to get straight on to the topic at hand, whereas others may prefer to discuss everyday things before moving on to more sensitive areas. It is therefore important to know the employee you are talking to, so you can gauge what approach they will need.

When starting a conversation, it is important to remember it is about the employee; do not jump to conclusions about what they are going through and try not to draw on your own experience too much. You may feel that you can relate to their situation, but your perspectives may be very different. Ask them how they are feeling and what they would like to discuss. This provides them and you with a safety net by getting them to discuss what they are comfortable sharing with you.

4.3 Conversation tips

Every conversation will be different. However there a few points to keep in mind when leading any sensitive conversation:

- Do ask open questions,
- Do talk but listen too,

- Do remind them you are there for support,
- Do provide information about the employee assistance programme,
- Do set a time to meet again,
- Do not think you know everything,
- Do not try to provide a diagnosis,
- Do not offer a pep talk.

4.4 Follow-up

Your involvement does not end with this meeting. You may have signposted the employee on to further support which is great; however it does not mean you should stop asking how things are. Agree to meet again in a few weeks to see whether things have changed and to show the employee you still care.

Finally, do not forget these meetings should be kept confidential and information should not be shared with anyone unless agreed with the employee. So keep any notes you made in a secure place to maintain your employee's confidentiality.

4.5 Recording conversations: carers' passport

A good way of recording the conversation, and making it easy to share with others if necessary, is via the Carers' Passport shown in the appendix below (adapted from a template produced by [Business in the Community](#) and BT). Its use is optional but can be very helpful. The form should be completed by the carer and their line manager, and reviewed annually or more often if anything changes.

There is the option of having the form counter-signed by the Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) team in HR, to note the support being put in place for the carer.

If the carer changes line manager for any reason, the form can be shown to their new line manager to show the support currently in place and give a point from which to start a new conversation.

4.6 Further advice

Employers for Carers have a [handbook for managers](#) with more information and advice on how to support carers. You can also talk to your HR Business Partner or contact [Myriad](#) discuss any issues relating to the carers you manage. Finally you may wish to contact diversityandinclusion@networkrail.co.uk for advice or feedback on this guide, which was written in partnership with Myriad.

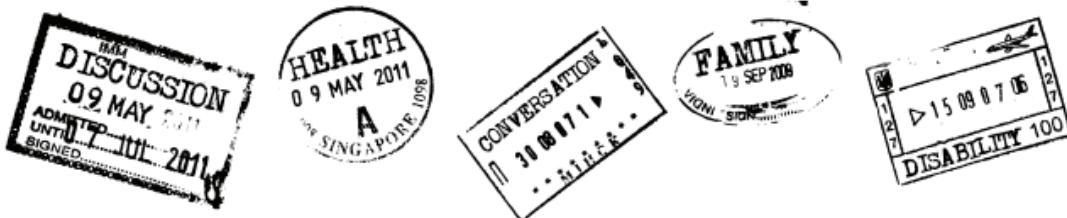
Appendix: Carers' Passport



Employee Passport

Caring responsibilities

An Employee Passport is designed to support discussions around removing any barriers and maximising the potential of each employee in the workplace. Everyone involved in the conversation should approach it with an open mind and willingness to consider all possible options that will ultimately deliver a happy compromise on how business and individual needs can and will be met.



This Passport can be completed by any employee who has **caring responsibilities** they believe could have an impact on their work at present, or at some time in the future.

To get started, have a meeting with your line manager and/or HR representative, record what happens and the things you agree in this document.

Who owns this document:

(Employee's name)

Who was involved in the conversation:

(List all people)

Date of meeting:

This document should be kept confidential once completed.

An initiative of

**BUSINESS
IN THE
COMMUNITY**

Preparation guide

Caring responsibilities

- What are your current caring responsibilities?
- How do your caring responsibilities impact on your work?
- How does work impact on your caring responsibilities?
- How may your caring responsibilities impact on your work in the future?

How can we help?

- Is any support currently in place?
- What additional support might be helpful?
- How can we best ensure your needs and the needs of your team can be met?

Flexible working

- Are you aware of Network Rail's current policies and flexible working options?
- Are you aware of your right to request flexible working?
- Are there other flexible working options you think we should consider?

Additional questions

- Note any additional questions or other areas to consider

Record of Discussion

Caring responsibilities

Caring
responsibilities

- Discussion notes

How can we
help?

- Discussion notes

Discussion notes continued...

- Discussion notes

Flexible working

- Discussion notes

Additional information

**Please keep this conversation alive and review this document regularly –
at least annually and each time circumstances change**

Many thanks to BT Group Ltd for sharing their Employee Passports as the basis for this template.

Record of Discussion

Caring responsibilities

- Record actions and agreements: What? By whom? By when?

Summary of
actions and
agreements

I consent to my Line Manager* / HR* (*delete as appropriate) keeping a copy of this record.

Signed (employee): _____ Date: _____

Signed (line manager): _____ Date: _____

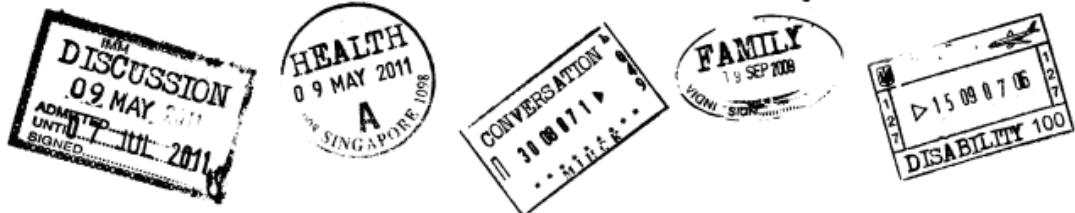
Signed (D&I team*): _____
* Optional – D&I team to note the support in place for the employee

Date last reviewed: _____

Date of next review: _____
(An earlier review should be undertaken if the situation changes)

Resources

Caring responsibilities



Internal Resources

Various Network Rail policies and support mechanisms may be helpful to carers, including

- [Flexible working](#)
- [Special leave](#)
- [Parental leave](#)
- [Career breaks](#)

For more information on how these policies can be used to support carers, and general advice on managing someone with caring responsibilities outside work, please see the *Everyone* guide [Everyone Managing... Carers](#).

Other support may be accessed via

- [Employee assistance programme \(Validium\)](#)
- [Myriad: employee network for carers](#)

External Resources

There are many organisations that offer help and advice to carers. Below is a small selection, but a web search may point you to many more. Don't forget to look for local services in your area too.

Employers for Carers – practical advice and support for employers seeking to develop carer-friendly policies and practices and retain skilled workers. To access resources, click 'Register' and use Network Rail's unique registration code #EFC1377 (case sensitive).
<http://www.employersforcarers.org/>

Carers UK: resources on work and career
<http://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/work-and-career>

Direct Gov carers' page
<https://www.gov.uk/browse/disabilities/carers>

NHS carers' guide
<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/Pages/what-is-social-care.aspx>