

## Working and caring – COVID-19

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**If you are juggling caring with paid work then you are not alone – 1 in 7 people in any UK workplace is a carer, and we know that managing that balancing act can have an impact on your wellbeing if you are not supported.**

COVID-19 has turned the way we work – and the way we care – upside down, so what does that mean when it comes to keeping the plates in the air, and who can help and how?

Katherine Wilson, employment expert at Carers UK and Head of our Employers for Carers service, talks here about working and caring in lockdown and what employers, managers and carers themselves can do to help.

There are many different situations carers have found themselves in since lockdown began. You could be self-isolating with the person you care for who could be a partner, a parent with a serious health condition or a disabled child.

Many day services have closed, care packages have been cut and the care staff who might normally provide support at home perhaps cannot get Personal Protective Equipment – and you don't want to put your loved one(s) at risk.

Some of you will still be caring at a distance for a parent or another relative but without being able to visit – because of the rules around social distancing and for fear of inadvertently passing on the infection.

Many of you will now be working from home, some of you while also managing home schooling.

You may still be going to work outside your home, if you are a key worker or your job can't be done remotely, while still managing care at home or at a distance, often without the services you would normally rely on.

Or you may be supporting a loved one who is shielding and you have given up work – temporarily or permanently – to care for them 24-7.

Whichever situation you are in, you may feel that although you're struggling to juggle work and care, you can't have the conversation with your employer about what might help.

## **Here are some tips to help:**

### **1/ Take a deep breath and start that conversation**

Think about the right person to have it with – whether this is someone in HR, or your direct line manager.

- Be as open as you can about your situation and the support you need. You may be thinking that the flexibility you need just isn't possible – but don't assume it can't be done.
- Many employers are throwing the traditional rule book out of the window during the COVID-19 crisis, and doing whatever it takes to keep their staff well and working.
- In a survey of employers talking about support for working carers one said, "There is no expectation through the pandemic to work and care on the same basis as pre-pandemic. No conversation or request is off the table." So ask the question!

## **2/ If you are anxious about starting the conversation, think about what you are going to say in advance to help you prepare:**

- Think about what options would really help you – both for managing your work, but also any external support that would help your caring situation.
- Making notes to help you order your thoughts and focus on your goals in advance of your meeting may be helpful.
- Be flexible if everything you want isn't possible and ask for more time to consider your options if needed.
- Talk to colleagues in your team about how you can manage the impact of any changes together – for example by covering different times of the day.

## **3/ Look after yourself physically and emotionally**

Find out what wellbeing support is available from your employer and externally. Many employers offer their staff help from an employee assistance programme, which might offer counselling or information about caring.

Others have wellbeing programmes that can be accessed virtually. Look at the wellbeing section on the Carers UK COVID-19 pages [coronavirus-mental-wellbeing](#) or go to [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) to find out what wellbeing advice the NHS gives.

### **To build physical and emotional resilience:**

- **Eat and drink well** – it is tempting just to have 'food on the go' when you are juggling lots of things. Plan ahead and cook in batches so that you have meals ready for several days.
- **Be active every day** – you may not think you can fit in any kind of activity around caring and work, but do stretches while you're watching the news, walk briskly up and down the stairs when you have five minutes, or just make sure you stand up from your desk and walk around the room or the garden every hour.

- **Try to manage your time to fit in just one 'me' activity** – read a book, listen to music or to an audio book, or just sit in the garden or in a local park.
- **Get enough sleep** – use strategies for sleeping well, like turning off your laptop early, having an aromatherapy bath, some chamomile tea or a milky drink.
- **Combat anxiety levels** by setting a strict time limit on how much you read about COVID-19 on social media and in the news. Only follow the advice of trusted sources such as the gov.uk and NHS websites, and look out for their daily updates. Your employer will have regular staff updates too.
- **Understand that relationships can get fraught in lockdown**, whatever your situation – don't feel guilty if you feel frustrated or angry, but accept that caring can be challenging as well as rewarding and be kind to yourself.
- **Find out what wellbeing and practical support your employer offers**, and whether they signpost to online tools and apps to support health and wellbeing.
- **Get emotional support from family and friends**, even if it is just an online chat. It can help to talk so keep talking to friends or colleagues or use Carers UK's online forum.
- **De-stress!** Find techniques that can help, such as mindfulness, or just relaxing in a bath.

#### **4/ Finally, if you have had to give up work temporarily...**

Keep in touch with your employer and/or line manager to let them know how you are doing and to understand what the situation is in your workplace. If you have had to give up work altogether, think about what you might want to do on the other side of lockdown, even if you don't want to or can't return to work immediately. (See more tips on next page.)

- Whether you're thinking of working, or volunteering as a stepping stone back to work, a good start is to consider what you want to do and to find out what support there is for you to get there. Carers UK's help and advice on getting back into employment (<https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/work-and-career/getting-back-into-employment>) includes information and tips on identifying your skills and interests and training courses which you may find useful.
- We've recently launched Learning for Living, an e-learning programme to help carers identify the unique skills set they've gained from their experience of caring. Once recognised, these transferable skills can add real value to the workplace or local community. The free course features a range of modules covering everything from communicating well to effective goal setting. See [www.learning4living.org](http://www.learning4living.org)
- In the meantime make sure you have all the information you need on benefits and financial support for caring: <https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/financial-support/help-with-benefits>

▶▶ **Note:** For more information and guidance relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, see our online [coronavirus pages](#) or contact our Helpline Team by emailing [advice@carersuk.org](mailto:advice@carersuk.org) if you have any questions or concerns about working and caring.



This information is designed to provide helpful guidance. It is not an authoritative statement of the law. We work to ensure that our information is accurate and up to date, but this guidance is subject to change over time. We would recommend contacting the Carers UK Helpline or visiting our website for the latest information.

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Registered office: 20 Great Dover Street, London SE1 4LX

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