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HOW YOU DO IT  
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## SUPPORTING WORKING CARERS

With over 5 million carers in the UK juggling their work and caring responsibilities, it is heartening that many more employers are recognising that support for the carers in their organisation is important. Yet, compared to programmes for working parents, specific support for working carers is still very much in its infancy.

How Do You Do It have been running coaching programmes and workshops for working carers since 2018 and we have heard similar accounts from all our participants about their concerns, constraints and what would help them balance their caring responsibilities with their careers. This short guide for employers outlines some of the typical challenges working carers face and some tips for how to best support them.

### CHALLENGES UNIQUE TO WORKING CARERS

**ISOLATION** - Becoming a carer is not a celebrated or planned life event. This can make it hard for carers to talk openly about their responsibilities or even know how or when to bring the topic into workplace conversations. Conversely, colleagues often shy away from asking about a carer's situation for fear of causing upset.

**UNPREDICTABILITY** – caring responsibilities often do not stay static and the demands on the carer can vary over time. This makes it hard for working carers to plan long term. Many carers have feelings of guilt about letting their team down when their plans change suddenly or worry about others' perceptions of their commitment.

**EVERY CARING SITUATION IS UNIQUE** - the type of caring responsibilities someone has, the impact caring has on their life and the range of other support they can access will vary enormously for each carer. This can compound feelings of isolation as carers feel no one understands their particular situation. It also makes it harder for organisations to neatly package support for carers within a single programme when everyone's situation is different.

## AREAS OF CONCERN FOR CARERS

These are some of the themes and concerns we hear from working carers in our workshops and programmes about the daily struggles they find at work, along with some of the longer-term challenges being a carer can bring.

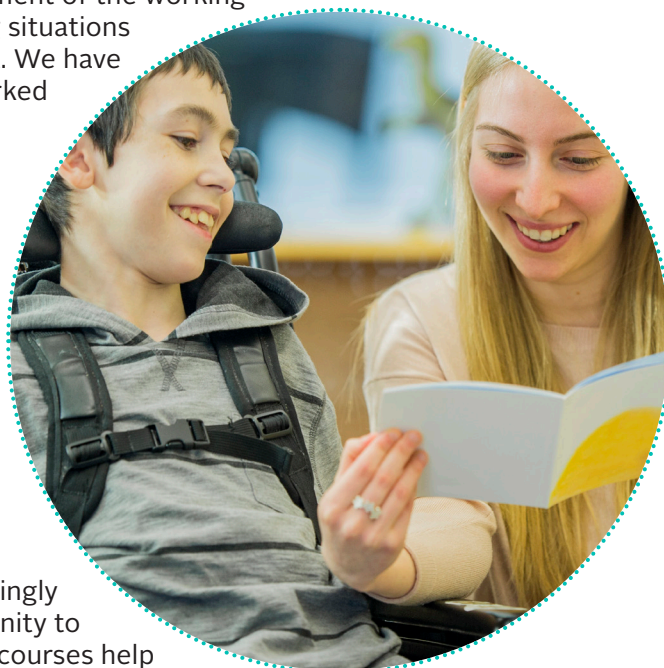
Area of concern	Examples
Career development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Constantly facing a tension between the desire for career progression and feeling unable to commit the time and energy to achieving it.</li><li>▪ Feeling their career has stalled because of caring responsibilities, leading to feelings of demotivation and the under-utilisation of skilled employees.</li><li>▪ A lack of ability to plan long term with any degree of certainty makes it hard to commit to promotion tracks and courses.</li></ul>
Time management and flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Struggling to find the time and energy to prioritise wellbeing or time for self, leading to exhaustion.</li><li>▪ Reducing hours or needing to leave to attend appointments related to caring responsibilities further compounding feelings that career progression is beyond reach.</li><li>▪ Managing the continuous unpredictability of caring and the need for flexibility which exacerbates feelings of guilt about letting the team down.</li><li>▪ Confusion about how the new hybrid arrangements in many companies work in practice leading to uncertainty about what permission carers feel they have in relation to flexibility.</li></ul>
Managing perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Worrying that others in the team view them as unreliable or uncommitted because there are times they are not available.</li><li>▪ Having to explain their situation repeatedly to justify their unpredictability, which adds stress to the already stressful situation a carer is juggling.</li></ul>

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For employers managing the welfare and career development of the working carers in their organisation, the myriad of different caring situations can make it difficult to know how best to provide support. We have identified some of the things that the carers we have worked with have found most meaningful.

**Carers' networks** – informal groups supported by the organisation to meet virtually or face to face and share common challenges and solutions. The ability to meet others facing similar situations on a regular basis reduces isolation and helps carers share tips and strategies for making things easier. Carers' groups also create an identifiable group for HR and other teams internally to engage with to further understanding and support across the organisation.

**Workshops or coaching** - we have worked with groups of carers in single workshop sessions and longer-term programmes and the feedback is always overwhelmingly positive. Often the first time carers have had the opportunity to talk openly with colleagues facing similar challenges, the courses help create internal support networks and provide carers with practical tools and tips for managing their career and caring responsibilities. Tackling challenges common to carers such as boundary setting, making time for self, managing career, and thinking patterns, our programmes, based on first-hand experience are tailored to the specific needs of working carers.



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**Coaching for managers** - support from a manager is vital for reducing or removing some of the feelings of isolation, guilt, and career stagnation that carers often have. Yet, if they are unfamiliar with caring responsibilities, managers may shy away from directly asking carers what help they need or simply not have the tools or experience to know how to manage members of their team with more complexity in their home situation. Our workshop for managers of carers has two objectives: helping managers to understand the concerns of carers in their team and how best to support them, plus creating a forum for best practice sharing across different parts of an organisation.

**Carers' flag or passport on HR record** – we have seen several organisations implement variations on this idea. When a person becomes a carer they add the details to their HR record, along with any specific additional support they need in terms of flexibility, reduced hours, or any other considerations. The passport serves two purposes:

1. To ensure HR have visibility about the careers of carers in their organisation to help support equitable career progression and fair treatment
2. To stop carers from having to explain their circumstances multiple times or come to new agreements when they have a new manager or if they change role

**Carers' leave** – a small but increasing number of organisations are introducing formal paid leave for carers. This recognises the extraordinary demands that caring brings and helps carers keep holiday time to focus on maintaining their own wellbeing. By allowing carers to access a distinct period of leave it also removes the feeling of having to ask for a favour when they need time off.

With an ageing population the number of working carers is only likely to increase further. Combined with competition for talent in many sectors, the need for employers to find ways to retain, develop and ensure carers can reach their potential at work grows.



If you would like to find out more about How Do You Do Its' programmes and workshops for carers and how we may be able to help your organisation, please get in touch.

