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**WORKING CARERS SUPPORT**

**Guidance for working carers and line managers**



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**Introduction**

This guidance is intended to help managers to support employees who are working carers. It is also intended to provide information to our people who are working carers. It will support managers to signpost staff towards help (both from within the organisation and outside of the organisation) and will help working carers to understand the type of support they can expect from their line manager and from the organisation.

[This guidance is a supplement to PP09, Leave Policy.]

**What is a carer?**

A carer is anyone who cares, unpaid, for a friend or family member who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support. ([www.carers.org](http://www.carers.org)).

Very few people expect to become a carer, and often the situation arises quickly and without warning.

For many people, these caring responsibilities are in addition to normal day to day life, including coming to work, and as a compassionate employer it is important that we recognise the additional challenges that our people might face in dealing with this, especially in the early days. A flexible approach may be needed to ensure that our people feel valued and supported, enabling them to make appropriate arrangements for longer term care.

N.B. For guidance on maternity, adoption and maternity support (paternity) leave provisions, managers and staff should refer to the New Parent Policy PP24 available on Pandora [here](http://pandora/docs/policies/DOCUMENTS%20POLICIES/Forms/Human%20Resources%20Policies.aspx).

**What help is available from the organisation?**

The type of support that an employee may need, will depend very much on their individual circumstances. We’ve offered some guidance below, but if there is anything which falls outside of these examples, please speak to your HR Advisor for some specific advice.

It’s important to remember that this is not a ‘one size fits all’ solution, and managers should feel confident to flex their approach in how they support the individuals within their teams.

**Short term problem – unexpected and short notice leave**

Sometimes a short term emergency problem will arise. When that happens it can be stressful for the individual, and so managers should take a sympathetic and helpful approach to reduce the impact on our employee.

**Employee**

* Contact line manager asap;
* Stay in contact with line manager to let them know about any developments;
* Let your line manager know when you think you will be back at work.

**Manager**

* Agree paid or unpaid leave (see PP09 section 6.3, usually paid leave is agreed)
* Offer support to individual
* Stay in contact with the individual and agree when they will return to work

**Timescale**

A reasonable amount of time off - **normally a day or two** but this will depend on individual circumstances.

This leave should not exceed 5 days (total) in any period of 12 months.

**In some circumstances agreed periods of working from home or flexibility around working hours or pattern may be appropriate.**

**Some examples of short term, unexpected, short notice leave might be:**

**•** Aclose relative/child or dependant/partner being admitted to hospital

• Extreme domestic circumstances e.g. fire, flood

• Sudden illness of dependant requiring care from the member of staff

• Urgent child care/elderly/dependent care where arrangements fall through at short notice etc.

These are just examples – remember there might be other circumstances which require an employee to take emergency short term leave. The key for line managers is to be flexible and adopt an understanding, compassionate approach.

**Medium term problem – longer term carers leave**

Sometimes, usually infrequently, there may be times when the problem cannot be resolved within a day or two. In those instances, which are usually exceptional, the employee may need a greater degree of flexibility and a longer time away from work.

Again, this is likely to be a very stressful time for the individual, requiring a sympathetic and understanding approach from the line manager.

**Employee**

* Agree how often you will communicate with the individual;
* Offer support to the individual – direct them to sources of help (see below);
* Agree when the individual will return to work.

**Employee**

* Contact line manager ASAP;
* Stay in contact with line manager and agree how often you will communicate with them to let them know about any developments;
* Let your line manager know when you think you will be back at work.

**Timescale**

Usually no longer than 6 weeks.

There may be circumstances where the relevant Director may grant additional leave, ***paid or unpaid***.

Agree how this additional leave will be taken (e.g. in a single block, or in shorter blocks over a period of time).

This should be formally agreed by the relevant director and recorded on a special leave form (Appendix 1)

**In some circumstances agreed periods of working from home or flexibility around working hours or pattern may be appropriate.**

**Longer term problem**

Sometimes, the caring responsibilities of our employees might mean that they are unable to continue to work in the same way. This might mean that they are unable to work as many hours as they previously have, they are unable to work on certain days, or they can only work at certain times of the day.

In these circumstances it may be necessary to make adjustments to the job role of the individual. If the business requirements allow, it may be agreeable to both the individual and the line manager to make a permanent change to hours, or to the working pattern for example.

If appropriate, home working may be considered as a permanent option. Please refer to the Home Working Policy, PP53, available on Pandora [here](http://pandora/docs/policies/DOCUMENTS%20POLICIES/Forms/Human%20Resources%20Policies.aspx) for more detailed guidance.

Line managers and individuals may find it useful to read PP18, Flexible Working Policy when considering any changes to working hours or patterns. This is available on Pandora [here](http://pandora/docs/policies/DOCUMENTS%20POLICIES/Forms/Human%20Resources%20Policies.aspx).

Line managers should consider any requests to make a change to an individual’s working arrangements sympathetically, whilst also acknowledging that the needs of the business must take priority.

There may be times when the business is unable to accommodate a change in working hours or a new working pattern. In that instance, there may be opportunities to change roles within the Trust, and in those circumstances line managers, with the assistance of HR colleagues will endeavour to support them with this.

**What practical support can we offer?**

* Telephone calls – we understand the difficulty that some carers face in needing to be available to support their cared-for loved one, therefore carers should be allowed to have their personal phones close by and take calls if needed at work in connection with their role as a carer. If possible, a private space should be identified to enable the carer to make and take private calls.
* Car Parking – staff can apply for a car parking permit by completing the application form [here](http://staffzone.xghnt.nhs.uk/car-parking/index.php). We understand that carers may need to have a parking permit which allows them to park near their place of work in case of emergencies, so in the permit application, it helps to give as much detail as possible about the caring responsibilities of the carer. Line managers are asked to support these applications.
* Try and arrange predictable, regular work patterns so that the employee is able to plan for caring needs well in advance – including training events and meetings.

**Carer Passport**

The Carer Passport provides carers, and their line managers, with information about how the individual's responsibilities impact their work. It includes any solutions agreed between the carer and their line manager.

The passport should be completed in part by the individual initially, then discussed and agreed with the line manager. Click [here](http://staffzone.xghnt.nhs.uk/health-and-well-being/carers.php) to visit the Carers page on the Staff Zone ,where you will see a link to this passport.

* The Carer Passport includes information about the available and agreed support, which the organisation has agreed to provide.
* The Carer Passport stays with the employee so if they are transferred within department or across the workplace it is available to any new line manager.
* The Carer Passport must be kept confidential once completed.
* The Carer Passport should be reviewed regularly, at least each time circumstances change or on an annual basis.
* The Carer Passport saves both the employer and employee time by not having to repeat information.

**What other support measures are in place?**

Whatever the caring responsibilities of our people, we want them to feel valued by the organisation. Someone who is a carer can still make a valuable contribution to the Trust, and if we can support them to have a good work/life balance, they will feel more able to bring their ‘whole self’ to work, be more engaged in their role, and ultimately contribute towards making the experience of our patients an excellent one.

With that in mind, there are a number of support agencies both inside and outside of the organisation who can offer practical and emotional support to working carers.

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| **Organisation/ support measure** | **What do they do** | **Contact information** |
| Working Carers and Employers  | A dedicated website for working carers and Employers. | <http://www.workingcarersandemployers.co.uk/>  |
| Gateshead Carers Association  | Responsible for delivering services and support to adult carers aged 18 years and over. Their team of Carer Support Workers are there to listen and help make life easier for adult carers in Gateshead. | <https://www.gatesheadcarers.com/> Tel: 0191 4900121Email: enquiries@gatesheadcarers.com  |
| Carers Trust Tyne and Wear | Responsible for delivering services and support to Young Carers aged up to 18 years. They provide a range of services that address the issues that are important to young carers, including breaks, social opportunities, emotional support and programmes to promote health and wellbeing. | <https://www.carerstrusttw.org.uk/Pages/Category/young-carer-service> Tel: 01207 549780 Email: info@carerstrusttw.org.uk  |
| Gateshead Council  | Carers support and information | <https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/article/3637/Carers>  |
| SALS | Our Staff Advice and Liaison Service (SALS) aims to bring together all of the support services which are available to staff | <http://staffzone.xghnt.nhs.uk/SALS/index.php>  |
| Occupational Health  | Access to counselling is available through Occupational Health, either by a self-referral or a referral from a manager. | <http://staffzone.xghnt.nhs.uk/ddi/departments/occupational-health/services/counselling.php>  |

**And finally…**

We hope that you have found this guidance useful. Whilst we cannot cover every single circumstance in one document, it is useful to remember that although each case will be different, our response should be consistent; we should approach each individual case with compassion and understanding, reflecting the values and ICORE behaviours of Gateshead.

If, after reading this guidance you would like some further help, please contact your HR Advisor directly, or by emailing ghnt.hr.advisoryteam@nhs.net

**Appendix 1**

**Application for Special Leave**

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| **Notes:** **1 This form should be completed for any Special Leave request excluding Maternity Leave and Study Leave, and retained by the Line Manager.** **2 Under the Trust procedures the authorisation of Leave rests with Line Managers.** **3 Applications for parental leave should be forwarded to the HR Department for processing.****4 Applications for unpaid leave of absence should be forwarded by the Line Manager to Payroll to ensure any deductions from wages are processed in a timely manner.** |
| **APPLICATION FOR LEAVE**Full Name (Surname First)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (Dr/Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms) Home Address:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Dept/Area:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Employee No: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Post:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date of Appointment: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Period Of Special Leave Requested (Inclusive Dates to be Stated): From: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ To: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Number of Days Leave: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Reasons For Leave: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_****AUTHORISATION OF LEAVE**Authorised by Line ManagerLeave approved\* \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (Paid/Unpaid\*)/ Leave rejected\* \* Delete as appropriateComments: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Designation \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |

**Signs of stress within a team**

Poor performance

Increased workplace disputes

Increased grievances and complaints

Increased sickness absence

Increased staff turnover