

Distance Caring Toolkit

About distance caring

Distance caring refers to supporting/caring unpaid for an ill, frail or disabled relative, partner or friend who does not live with you, i.e. who may be living in another part of the town, region, country or the world. With our ageing population and workforce – and increasing mobility through employment – distance caring is a huge and growing issue that affects millions of families. However, it remains an issue which is largely hidden in the workplace as people caring at a distance are less likely to recognise themselves as carers.

The first ever research survey (June 2011) into the impacts on employers and employees of managing caring at a distance, published by Employers for Carers (EfC) and Carers UK, in association with leading global investment bank, Nomura, reveals:

- The cumulative impact of distance caring on employees' mental and emotional health – tiredness, anxiety and stress were mentioned by over three quarters of employees in the survey.
- The pressures on the 'sandwich generation' – 60% of employees needing support were combining care for an older relative with other responsibilities including looking after their own children.
- The importance of being signposted to external sources of support – this was the top priority for both employers and employees.
- The 'reality' gap in many workplaces between policy and practice. While three quarters of employees had informed their employer about their caring responsibilities, only one in five felt they received adequate support and less than one in five employers provided training and support for managers.

About this Toolkit

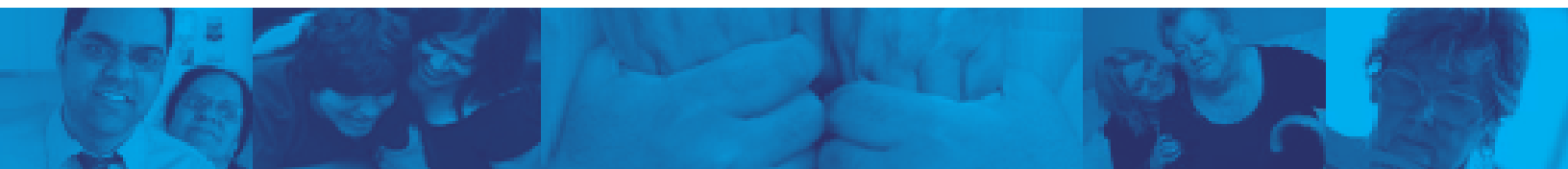
This short and simple Employers' Toolkit has been produced by EfC to help you:

- Recognise the contribution made by distance carers in your workplace and the challenges they face.
- Reach out to hidden distance carers in your workforce who might not recognise that they are caring.
- Let all carers, including distance carers, know about the support and services that they can access.

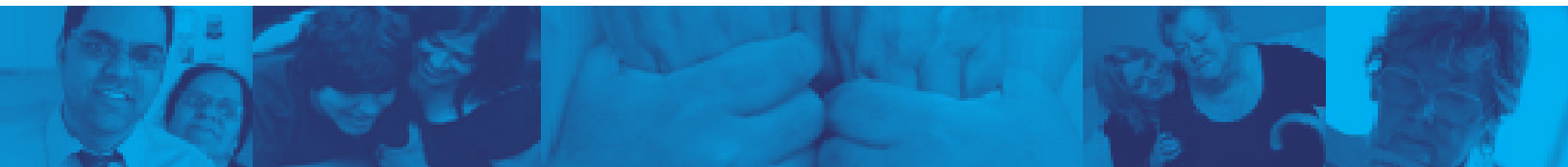
What can employers do? Ten top tips

Here are a few things you can do to ensure that you include the perspective of distance caring when identifying and supporting carers in your workplace:

- 1 **Identifying carers:** Think about the language you use when seeking to identify carers in your workforce so that you do not exclude distance carers. For example, using words such as 'looking after' and 'supporting' - as well as 'caring' - in staff surveys is more likely to resonate with distance carers. Mention distance caring explicitly when talking about caring, whether you are referring to workplace or external support on the staff intranet or in advice and information material.



- 2 **Asking carers about their support needs:** When carers have identified themselves, bear in mind that many of them may be distance carers when you are asking them what support they need. For example you could ask whether the person they are supporting lives with them or at a distance (and, in conversation with them, whether this in another part of the town, country or the world). This will help to gauge what challenges employees may be facing in combining work and caring and in accessing information about services for the person they are looking after.
- 3 **Raising awareness in the workplace:** Include a reference to distance caring in any talks on caring or related issues which you may be holding in the workplace, whether part of an existing event (e.g. a work life balance, diversity or health and well being event) or a specific session on caring.
- 4 **Making information accessible online:** Consider how you can make information about workplace support more easily accessible online to employees, including from work, home or elsewhere. This will be particularly helpful for distance carers who may need to access this information from home or from the home of the person they are looking after, as well as from the workplace.
- 5 **Signposting carers to external support:** Think about how you can signpost carers to sources of external support, e.g. to specific health condition charities such as the Alzheimer's Society or organisations which can provide general advice to carers such as Carers UK. Again, it is helpful for distance carers if this signposting information is accessible online, either from work or elsewhere.
- 6 **Offering in-house support for carers:** If you do not already provide this, look at offering in-house support for carers to help them both to build resilience/manage stress and to identify other sources of support. These might be short training courses for carers or you could include an element on caring in existing courses on stress management, health and well being etc. Again, these will be particularly helpful for distance carers. EfC can also provide in house courses of this type.
- 7 **Promoting existing employee support schemes (and caring issues within these):** Ensure that caring issues, including the perspective of distance caring, are covered in any existing support for employees which you may provide through Employee Assistance Programmes, welfare services or occupational health services. Evidence suggests that EAPs and other support services are often underused so ensure that such schemes are promoted actively within the workplace, including their relevance to employees who may have new or urgent caring responsibilities.
- 8 **Establishing an online workplace carers network or support group:** If you do not already have a workplace carers network or support group, consider establishing one. Evidence suggests that these provide members with invaluable peer to peer support and distance carers will particularly benefit from online networks. Several EfC members have networks and EfC can also help advise here.
- 9 **Providing in-house training and support for line managers:** This is critical in raising awareness of caring in the workplace, including the business case for supporting carers, and promoting culture change. It might consist of separate training sessions or you could include a module on caring in existing line manager training. EfC can also provide in house courses or modules of this type with practical case study examples. Line manager training will be particularly important for meeting distance carers' needs as these are likely to be significant in any workplace but largely hidden.
- 10 **Using Carers Week to raise awareness:** Carers Week is a major national awareness raising event which takes place each June to highlight why supporting carers is crucial, how carers miss out on things we all take for granted and what needs to be changed. Carers Week provides an ideal opportunity to highlight caring issues, including distance caring in your workplace. For example you



could introduce, or raise the profile of, a workplace Carers Champion. Employers organise activities or events during the week in all sorts of ways, ranging from big to small. More information is available in the run up to Carers Week at www.carersweek.org and advice is also available from EfC

Case study examples

Below are a few case study examples of employer support for carers which are accessible and beneficial to distance carers. EfC is seeking other examples of support for distance carers so if you have any from your workplace – or from elsewhere – please let us know and we will add them to this Toolkit.

BT case study

BT has longstanding experience of using workplace technology to enable employees to combine work and care. This includes technology not only to enable home and remote working but also to enable carers to access information and advice about workplace and external support. BT's employee Carers Network facilitates the exchange of advice and learning through a SharePoint networking site on line, and by using BT Meet Me, BT's conferencing service. Using virtual tools cuts down on travel which reduces costs but more importantly allows carers to participate without adding lengthy travel to their already busy agendas. BT also provides 'knowledge calls' on issues such as coping with dementia where employees can ring in for a question and answer session with experts and other carers.

London Fire Brigade

London Fire Brigade (LFB) is piloting a service - in conjunction with EfC and Carers UK and with support from the NESTA AgeUnlimited programme - to develop an employee carers' network and online resource. As a frontline response service, and one where many employees are engaged in highly stressful work situations, LFB faces particular challenges in identifying and supporting carers among its workforce. Employees are being involved directly with developing the carers' network which will look to offer a range of interventions from peer to peer support through to brokering access to support within the workplace and, critically, signposting to external sources of information and support. LFB has also produced a leaflet aimed at carers which was circulated at its annual 'LFB Healthy' roadshows (spring 2011) for employees at which a range of occupational health services were present. The aim of the leaflet was to help raise awareness of caring and encourage employees to identify themselves as carers and come forward for support.

Matched leave examples

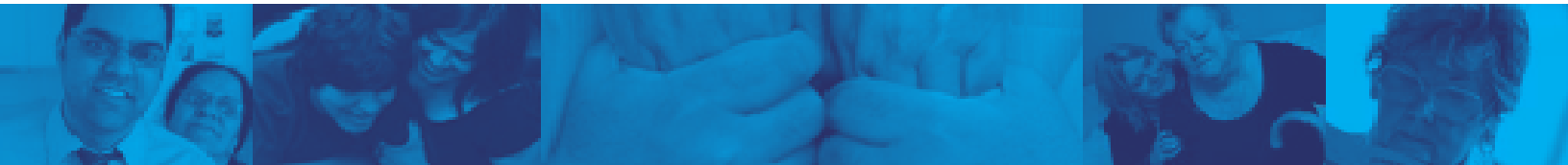
Hospital discharge (comment from a distance carer)

"I can arrange to have time off for hospital appointments. And if I have to take a longer period of time, for example, when Mum is discharged from hospital, I take half the time as annual leave, and the company matches it by giving me paid carers' leave for the rest. This means I don't have to use all my annual leave to care."

Leave for arranging a care package (scenario)

Sue works in a call centre and cares for her father who has dementia and lives in a town 50 miles away. Sue is spending an increasing amount of time managing her dad's care from a distance, and is also using annual leave to make regular visits. She now also has to respond to emergency calls when her father places himself in unsafe situations. Sue needs some time off to arrange a care package for her father but has run out of annual leave. She is considering ringing in sick but is worried about the impact on her colleagues who will have to cover her work.

Sue explains the situation to her manager who offers her a period of paid carers leave. In order to ensure that Sue can still visit her dad they work out a system of matched leave – giving an amount of paid leave to Sue equal to the annual leave she takes - to ensure that she has annual leave available to get real time off.



They involve the whole team and develop a 'buddy' system, enabling colleagues to optimise their own individual opportunities for flexible working in order to cover shifts and minimise potential resentment.

Next steps ...

As the next phase of our work on distance caring, we will be looking in more detail next year (2012) at:

- the **role of technology** in supporting distance carers; and
- practical support issues for employees who are **caring across the globe**, i.e. for employees who are working outside the UK but caring for someone who lives here; or for employees who are working in the UK but caring for someone who lives in another part of the world.

Key issues in terms of supporting employees who are working outside the UK include, for example:

- ensuring that caring issues are factored into employers' mobility plans; and
- looking at how flexibilities or other benefits for carer employees which may be available in the employer's UK workplace can also be made available for its employees working overseas.

Please contact us at EfC if you have any questions about the above, or if you have any information or concerns to share about supporting distance carers.

What further help can I get to identify and support distance carers in my workplace?

Further help is available from Employers for Carers 020 7378 4956 employers@carersuk.org
www.employersforcarers.org