

# Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Services

## Carers

Advice for employees



Coventry City Council

[www.coventry.gov.uk/ohsw](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/ohsw)

## Who is affected?

In the working population there will be many employees who, in addition to holding down a job, will also be providing care for a family member who is mentally or physically ill.

There are many different areas where care is needed, for instance, an elderly parent or a child with a physical or mental health condition. This caring role can not only impact on employment but also other life choices and can affect the family as a whole.

Both mental and physical illness can bring with it the need for a lot of care. Supporting someone who has had a stroke for instance can be life changing for the sufferer as well as the relatives.

Caring for someone close to you can be rewarding because you are able to improve their quality of life, however, the downside is that the carer can be forgotten about in the process, not least by themselves.

## Problems which may arise for the carer

- Feelings of isolation, because friends and other interests may have been put aside
- Sometimes friends are unable to deal with your new situation and walk away. Inevitably this results in the carer having very low morale
- There is a feeling of living in a 'bubble' as the carer's life gets narrower
- Changes may occur in the relationship between the carer and the person they are caring for. The dynamics of that relationship will be different because of the elements of dependency
- There could be feelings of resentment from both parties. In the day to day role of caring, it is understandable that the illness becomes the focus, so that the relationship itself can become secondary
- In terms of the individual personality of the carer and the person they are caring for, feelings could get suppressed as the ups and downs of the illness and life takes its toll

Some carers, in addition to their work commitments, may be balancing the needs of their family as well as a caring role, which could lead to burn-out, where they end up both physically, emotionally and mentally exhausted.

## Looking after the carer

Recognising the need to look after themselves is the most important step for a carer, because we all need to have balance and something to look forward to in order to thrive.

Removing obstacles to this is important as in reality if the carer becomes ill this can impact significantly on the person needing care.

An open dialogue with the person you are caring for, stating what you are able to do and what you are not, helps to deal with unrealistic expectations and stops the building up of resentment which, after all, is a very common emotion.

In previous generations families remained in the same area, but now because of many factors such as job opportunities, families can be dispersed, and this can mean a heavier burden of caring for some people.

Even for families who still live in the same area, there may be unequal sharing of responsibility. This can be due to circumstances or family members not 'pulling their weight'. If the latter is the case then a family meeting to discuss fairer arrangements is needed.

Support groups can be helpful because of the sharing of experiences, and it also helps to break down those feelings of isolation.

Individual counselling provides a confidential place where a carer can freely express emotions, get some support and discuss practical coping strategies.

Access any professional help which is available to you and be candid with those professionals about the limitations of what care you can give to your relative or partner.

## Legal

Carers (Recognition of Services) Act 1995.

The Work and Families Act 2006 gives carers the right to request flexible arrangements in their working patterns, but this is subject to the needs of the service and the employer.

Carers also have certain rights under The Mental Health Act 1983 and some amendments which are now implemented in The Mental Health Act 2007. [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk)

## Useful contact numbers:

### Coventry Carers Centre

024 7663 3788

### MIND (leading mental health charity)

024 7655 2847

### Carers UK

08088 087777

### Age Concern

024 7623 1999

## Further information:

Occupational Health, Safety & Wellbeing Service  
Thomas Yeoman House, Canal Basin, Coventry CV1 4LY

**Tel:** 024 7683 3285

**Website:** [www.coventry.gov.uk/ohsw](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/ohsw)

**email:** [ohsw@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:ohsw@coventry.gov.uk)