



Carer friendly workplaces

Work life balance fact sheet 10

What are carer friendly workplaces?

Many employees, both female and male, have caring responsibilities. The *Carers Recognition Act 2004* defines a carer as someone who provides informal or unpaid care and support on a regular basis to a family member or another person who has a disability, a chronic or mental illness, or who is frail.

Employees are generally able to provide care outside of normal working hours but may at times have to provide additional support during work time. Carer friendly workplaces have provisions in place to enable these employees to meet both their caring and work commitments.

Benefits of carer friendly workplaces

Carer friendly workplaces make good business sense because they help to:

- attract and retain employees;
- reduce sick leave and absenteeism;
- increase staff morale, commitment and productivity; and
- promote a positive public image.

How to make workplaces carer friendly

There are a number of policies and practices that can be put in place to help employees balance their work and family responsibilities. Some of these are described below.

Flexible work

Flexible rosters, variable start/finish times and flexible leave options enable employees to adjust their working hours and times so that they can meet caring responsibilities.

Part-time work and job sharing

Some carers may prefer to work part-time, by either reducing the hours worked per day or working fewer days per week/fortnight. Where a job needs to be done on a full-time basis, it can be shared by 2 part-timers.

Home based work

Working from home can be arranged on a short-term basis to enable an employee to care for a sick family member, or on a long-term basis to meet regular caring responsibilities.

Relocation

An employer with several outlets or offices may consider relocating an employee with caring responsibilities to a workplace closer to the dependent.

Telephone access

Provide access to a work telephone for family members to ring an employee in emergencies, and employees to check on family members or organise appointments. This reduces stress and anxiety, increases work concentration and enables an employee to remain at work.

Care subsidies

Employers could consider subsidising any additional care costs incurred by an employee in meeting unexpected work requirements, e.g. working additional hours to meet a deadline or workload peak.

Scheduling training courses and meetings

Wherever possible, avoid scheduling training courses and meetings to start early or finish late, or during school holidays. For live-in training courses, make arrangements for employees with caring responsibilities can go home if necessary.

Legal responsibilities of employers

Both State and Federal legislation provide minimum conditions for paid carer's leave. Individual awards and agreements may provide additional entitlements.

Under the Western Australian *Equal Employment Opportunity Act 1984* it is unlawful to discriminate against a person because of their caring responsibilities or family status.

Checklist for creating a carer friendly workplace

- Identify any carer friendly entitlements provided under the relevant legislation, award or agreement.
- Ask employees about the types of initiatives that will help them balance work and carer responsibilities.
- Seek ideas from other organisations that have implemented carer friendly initiatives.
- Develop clear policies for each initiative to be implemented. Consult employees throughout this process.
- Consider any occupational safety and health issues that may arise.
- Publicise carer friendly initiatives with current and new employees on a regular basis.
- Systematically review and assess policies with employees.

Where to go for more information

Further information about work life balance strategies is available from the Department of Commerce work life website www.worklife.wa.gov.au