unionlearn
with the TUC

Supporting learners at mid-life

A signposting guide to

Helping carers

Contents

1 Introduction

2 Support for carers – how can you help?

4 What is signposting?

7 Tips for supporting people in the workplace

8 Where to find expert help

11 Make your own local signposting directory

13 TUC and unionlearn resources

Introduction

The strength of trade unions is the connection they have with the workplace. They represent members collectively and deal with employers, chiefly on work-related problems. These can also be individual issues caused by work, or made worse by it. Examples of these are stress due to workload or aches and pains caused by work tasks.

Sometimes members come to reps with more personal problems. For example, falling into debt can put pressure on pay, while developing an illness or suddenly having to care for a dependant can conflict with standard working hours.

Often these personal problems can be resolved or at least alleviated by having good agreements with employers over issues such as sickness absence, dependant leave and access to an Employee Assistance programme.

Occasionally, however, a member may need help with issues where no support is available through the employer and the union cannot directly help them. These are the cases that this guide is intended to help you with.

For members in mid-life, unions can offer a chance to have a conversation about development in the workplace in the context of the whole of a person's life. People don't get enough opportunities to talk about themselves in a positive way or to discuss making a change or take up new opportunities. Having a mid-life development review can have a considerable impact on people's lives: it gives people space to think, take stock and locate specialist help.

As a union rep your experience and training will have already equipped you with a lot of the skills needed to conduct a review like this. You are not expected to be an expert in every issue but you can provide additional help and support by signposting your colleagues to professional services and sources of useful information, both on- and offline. You can encourage people to explain key personal issues and to work out what questions they need to ask, and of whom.

The mini-guide series

This is one of four unionlearn mini-guides to support learners at mid-life. They cover health and well-being in general, mental health in particular, pensions and financial advice, and how to balance work with family and dependant care.

This signposting mini-guide is designed to help reps support people in the workplace who have caring responsibilities. It will help you to provide accurate information and advice to people in your workplace.

Support for carers – how can you help?

This mini-guide is about helping members who have caring responsibilities. In 2014 there were 6.5 million carers in the UK, including young people, and this number continues to rise. It is very likely that many people in your workplace are carers.

The Carers Trust provides this definition of 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. Anyone can become a carer; carers come from all walks of life, all cultures and can be of any age. Many feel they are doing what anyone else would in the same situation; looking after their mother, son, or best friend and just getting on with it."

Caring as an issue in a mid-life review

As part of a mid-life review you may be asked questions about support for carers. Here are some examples.

I never thought of myself as a carer – I just look after my dad who has heart trouble. Would I be able to get some help if I called myself a carer?

If I am caring for someone, do I have any right to time off from work?

I am only able to work part-time because of my caring responsibilities. Can I get any financial help?

My mother has dementia. She lives with me but I don't think I will be able to cope for much longer. How can I find out about care homes?

I know that carers can ask for flexible working arrangements – what does this mean?

I get no support as a carer. I feel very lonely and can't get out to see friends any more. Is there anyone I can talk to?

What is signposting?

Signposting means pointing the way to useful information. You can signpost to:

- your union and employer
- websites and web chat
- telephone helplines
- social media contacts and Apps
- face-to-face services including support groups
- learning opportunities.

Knowing when to signpost

Learning reps do a fantastic job in the workplace but it is important that you know your limits. Don't assume you are an expert on personal problems. Sometimes another workplace representative, such as a steward, equality or safety rep, or a branch officer, will be able to help you but often you will need to point members to different advice-givers. You should be able to signpost members to trained and qualified specialists who can help on key topics and have access to the most up-to-date information.

"I looked after my mum for a year or two until she died five years ago – I have lots of experience, and know what helped me. Why should I not give advice myself?"

Know your limits – signpost to the experts!

By finding out who these specialists are and by providing links to their services you can help workers plan their conversations with experts, to decide on priority issues, to decide what questions to ask and to identify areas where more help may be needed.

Do:

- listen and ask questions
- explore issues and help members to prioritise these
- build confidence and increase motivation
- identify learning needs
- set up learning opportunities
- help to make an action plan to solve the issue
- help to find information on websites
- signpost to experts
- discuss and make some notes about what to tell the experts and what questions to ask
- provide continuing support
- help the member explain the issue to their employer.

Don't:

- tell people what you would do if you were in their place; focus on the person you are listening to – it is all about them!
- promise anything about support that may be available or say that everything will be fine
- provide personal counselling, coaching, mentoring or careers advice unless you are trained
- give information or advice about complex topics such as finance or health – these need a personalised expert approach.

If you are helping someone, remember:

- It is not about you, but about them.
- You should always signpost on issues to do with personal finance or health problems.
- Every case is about the individual and their own circumstances – each person needs personalised assessment and advice.
- The law changes frequently.
- Individual entitlement is complicated and changes frequently.
- Union reps can help with negotiations about flexible working arrangements and about introducing policies and workplace strategies for working carers.

Tips for supporting people in the workplace

Carers UK have produced a helpful list of ten steps to getting support. These appear on the Employers for Carers website www.employersforcarers.org with many other resources. These tips would provide a good basis for an initial discussion and an action plan as part of a midlife review if caring is a key issue. Most of the ten tips are about getting support from a range of professionals.

The tips include:

- Recognise that you are a carer so that you can get support.
- Include family and friends.
- Tell your GP.
- Inform social services.
- Let people at work know.
- Claim your entitlements.
- Find your nearest carers group or centre.
- Look after yourself.
- Think about the future.

Where to find expert help

Before you start, check if your union can help, and if anyone has any experience in negotiating flexible arrangements and other support for working carers.

Useful organisations (in alphabetical order)

Age UK

Has a simple free guide, including information about financial support www.ageuk.org.uk Search for "help for carers". You can call the Age UK Advice Line on 0800 169 2081 or make an email enquiry – click on "contact us". There are also local branches of Age UK.

Alzheimer's Society

Their Talking Point app is available from www.alzheimers.org.uk

Carers Trust

www.carers.org and look at the section on carers and employment. You can join an online forum to chat to other carers. You can also find local services using an interactive map www.carers.org/carers-services/find-your-local-service

Carers UK

www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice You can join in the online forum or call their listening service on 0808 808 7777. You can also make email enquiries. Use the search page to find local face-to-face services. Carer's UK also have an app called Jointly, available from www.jointlyapp.com/#welcome or from app stores.

Citizens Advice

www.citizensadvice.org.uk You can get free impartial confidential advice from your local CAB, either face-to-face or by telephone on the Adviceline 03444 111 444. Visit the CA's website for details of how to get advice by email, how to join in web chat, and to search for your nearest local service.

Connecting care

http://connectingcare.org.uk reviews a range of apps for carers

Employers for Carers

Produces a wide range of resources for organisations and for managers and employees including practical guides, policy information, latest facts and figures, research, model policies and toolkits. As a rep, you can find useful information to help you to make a case for support for employees in your workplace. Visit their website www.employersforcarers.org

gov.uk

Has advice for carers and a free guide to health and well-being www.gov.uk/government/policies/helping-carers-to-stay-healthy

Mind

Has a free guide and helpful advice on caring for people with mental health difficulties or dementia www.mind.org.uk. You can call the Mind Infoline on 0300 123 3393. A range of languages are available. There are also local branches of Mind, some of which provide face-to-face services.

Money Advice Service

www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk offers advice about finance for carers. You can also call their helpline 0300 500 5000 (not free unless your telephone package includes 0300 numbers). They have a web chat service if you scroll down the page and click on "Launch chat".

NHS Carers Direct

has a helpline adviser in confidence on 0300 123 1053 if you would like help with finding local support. A range of languages is available. From the same web page you can make an email enquiry or join in web chat with an adviser. The NHS also publishes a free online guide to caring and working www.nhs.uk/CarersDirect/

UK Online Centres

Further online resources are listed here www.ukonlinecentres.com/specialist-networks/carers-network/resources

Make your own local signposting directory

You may find there are face-to-face services available locally, and there will be local and regional telephone helplines. These will vary depending on the area you live in so you will need to do some research in order to signpost effectively. If you have time to visit or telephone any of them to find out what is available, you will get a feel for how user-friendly they are.

On these empty pages you can add your own list of services you have found locally, for example:

- your union
- Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB)
- public library
- Carers Trust
- local council carers' support team
- NHS Trust
- Age UK
- Mind

For each you can note:

Organisation

What they provide

Local office address and directions

Telephone

Email

Website

Contact name

Organisation

What they provide

Local office address and directions

Telephone

Email

Website

Contact name

Organisation

What they provide

Local office address and directions

Telephone

Email

Website

Contact name

Organisation

What they provide

Local office address and directions

Telephone

Email

Website

Contact name

TUC and unionlearn resources

Other signposting guides in this series:

- Mental health
- Health and well-being
- Financial planning and pensions

Unionlearn

www.unionlearn.org.uk

Union learning Climbing Frame website and learning themes

www.climbingframe.unionlearn.org.uk/Home

TUC Education

Cancer in the Workplace course www.unionlearn.org.uk/courses

TUC eNotes

Supporting Mid-Life Development
www.tuceducation.org.uk

TUC

Time Off and Flexible Working for Carers – Know Your Rights leaflet.
www.tuc.org.uk/publications

TUC Worksmart website has information on flexible working
https://worksmart.org.uk

unionlearn
with the TUC

All unionlearn publications may be made available for dyslexic or visually impaired readers, on request, in an agreed electronic format or in accessible formats such as Braille, audiotape and large print, at no extra cost.

Published by

unionlearn
Congress House
London WC1B 3LS

020 7079 6920
www.unionlearn.org.uk
www.facebook.com/tucunionlearn
Twitter: @unionlearn

March 2016

Cover photograph: © shutterstock.com
Design: wave.coop
Print: manorgroupuk.com