

CAAT's Carer's, Compassionate Bereavement and Parental Leave Policy

May 2014

CAAT recognises that the financial, physical and emotional impact of coping with the death of a loved one, or having to care for a loved one who is unable to look after themselves, can be huge, and those having to do this while juggling work responsibilities can be under even more stress. This policy lays out CAAT's guidelines with the aim of helping to relieve some of this stress and enable both employer and employee to be clear about where they stand regarding support and time off work.

Carer's Policy

Statutory rights

Employed carers have the right not to be discriminated against due to their caring responsibilities and to have a reasonable amount of unpaid time off work to deal with particular situations affecting their dependants.

A 'carer' is someone who provides a substantial amount of unpaid care on a regular basis for another individual. A 'dependant' is defined as a spouse, partner, child, parent or grandparent of the employee, or someone who depends on them for care. Examples of care might be practical (such as help with the shopping and cleaning), physical (such as help with moving and handling) or mental and emotional (such as supporting someone to manage anxiety).

CAAT is keen for its carer's policy to follow best practice so it can support its employees with caring responsibilities as best it can. CAAT wants to help staff balance their working and caring commitments, not feel added stress and to continue to be effective in their job.

When informed that an employee is a carer CAAT will offer support by:

- arranging an initial chat with the employee so they can explain their situation and what assistance they think would help
- giving sympathetic consideration to all leave and work related requests made by the employee
- making arrangements for the employee to stay in touch with work during any medium to long periods of leave and share some of their workload between the rest of staff
- discussing flexible working, time off for emergencies, paid / unpaid leave options and reduced working hours options
- discussing special leave options, if necessary – such as compassionate bereavement leave and parental leave
- meeting regularly with the employee so arrangements can adapt as situations change

Initial chat

The Office Co-ordinator (or in their absence another member of staff) should meet with an employee with a caring responsibility as soon as possible to understand the situation, explain CAAT's carer's policy answering any questions they may have about it, and discuss ways CAAT could help relieve some of the stress in balancing their work with their caring commitments.

Arrangements for carer's leave

The Office Co-ordinator (or in their absence another member of staff) should co-ordinate a meeting between the employee and other staff whose work is relatively closely connected in order to come up with a plan on how workload will be co-ordinated and shared between all while the employee is on carer's leave.

If they are likely to be off work for a medium to long period (i.e. longer than two weeks) then a discussion should take place regarding carrying out the sharing workload plan and how the employee will communicate with CAAT while they are off.

Flexible working

CAAT employees can work flexitime in agreement with other staff members. Details of the conditions of flexible working are explained in the employee's contract. Employees can also request to work from home where this is possible in their role. All requests for a change of working hours and conditions must be made by the employee to the rest of staff as early as possible.

Time off for emergencies

CAAT employees can take paid time off for caring emergencies. This is likely to be for short-term unforeseen caring situations. A guide listing examples of what is considered emergency time off for dependants can be found at the bottom of this document.

Planned paid and unpaid carer's leave

CAAT wants to be as supportive as possible to employees needing to take time off to care for a loved one. CAAT believes it's in the best interest of everyone if employees are able to take a reasonable amount of paid time off when having to deal with their caring responsibilities. The amount of time CAAT is able to offer employees is up to four weeks paid carer's leave per year on full pay. In exceptional circumstances additional paid time off can be negotiated with staff and CAAT's Steering Committee Staff Support panel. Carer's leave can be taken in one block or spread out over a number of weeks.

If after the agreed paid carer's leave has been taken the employee needs to take further time off due to their caring responsibilities this can be either unpaid or on reduced hours. CAAT can offer up to six months unpaid carer's leave or negotiate for the employee to work fewer hours per week for a six month period, with extension subject to agreement. When the employee is ready to return to work, or resume their normal hours, they must give CAAT at least two weeks notice. Initial planned paid carer's leave must be agreed with the rest of staff. Any extended paid, unpaid and reduced hours carer's leave must be discussed and agreed with the rest of staff and CAAT's Steering Committee Staff Support panel.

For all medium to long-term carer's leave (i.e. longer than two weeks) a plan should be put in place beforehand detailing how the rest of staff are going to share the workload, or for longer periods perhaps bring in a temporary replacement member of staff. The plan also needs to consider how any events connected to their workarea, due to take place while the employee is absent, are going to be dealt with.

Employees can take up to six months unpaid or reduced hours carer's leave every four years of employment with CAAT, starting when the first day of unpaid leave is taken. So an employee doesn't have to have been in employment with CAAT for four years to take the leave, but couldn't take further unpaid or reduced hours leave for another four years (unless agreed by staff and CAAT's Steering Committee Staff Support panel). Unpaid or reduced hours carer's leave cannot be accrued over the years by employees.

Meeting regularly

As time passes situations change, so the Office Co-ordinator (or in their absence another member of staff) will need to meet with the employee in order to remain up to date with their caring responsibilities and understand when they might need to take time off. How often these meetings take place is up to the people involved.

Examples of when short-term emergency time off can be taken:

- to provide assistance if a dependant suddenly has to go to hospital, falls ill, gives birth, is injured or assaulted
- to arrange care for a dependant who is ill or injured
- to deal with unexpected disruption of care arrangements for a dependant
- to deal with an incident involving an employee's child during school time

Examples of when carer's leave can be taken:

- to provide assistance during pre-planned events, such as medical appointments
- to care for a dependant while they are ill or injured

Compassionate bereavement leave policy

Similar to CAAT's carer's policy, CAAT is keen to be as supportive as possible to employees having to deal with the death of a loved one. This could be the death of a dependant or of someone the employee had a very close relationship with.

CAAT employees can take up to two weeks off work for compassionate bereavement leave on full pay, then up to a further two weeks off on half pay if they wish to. Should they feel they need to take longer then the employee can take additional time off work as either unpaid leave or on reduced hours. The length of this additional time off is dependant on the situation and must be discussed and agreed with the rest of staff and CAAT's Steering Committee Staff Support panel. However, it should be noted that CAAT will always give sympathetic consideration to all leave and work related requests made by employees.

For medium to long-term compassionate bereavement leave (i.e. longer than two weeks) a plan should be put in place by staff detailing how the workload is going to be shared, or for longer periods perhaps bring in a temporary replacement member of staff. The plan also needs to consider how any events connected to their workarea, due to take place while the employee is absent, are going to be dealt with.

Parental leave policy

Parental leave is time parents are entitled to take off work to look after their child's welfare. It is different to carer's leave. The statutory entitlement for parental leave (2014) is 18 weeks unpaid for each child up to their 5th birthday, which CAAT fully supports.

Should a CAAT employee need to take time off work to care for a child because they are ill, injured or involved in an incident then CAAT's carer's policy detailed above should be followed.

Examples of the types of factors staff and CAAT's Steering Committee Staff Support panel will consider when discussing and agreeing to any carer's or compassionate bereavement leave or reduced hours request:

- the personal relationship between the employee and the loved one
- the geographic location of the loved one
- the level of care the loved one needs (in the case of carer's leave)
- the extent to which another person is available to assist with caring for the dependant (in the case of carer's leave)
- the level of complication in dealing with a loved ones affairs (in the case of compassionate bereavement leave)

Employees should inform the Office Co-ordinator (or in their absence another member of staff) as soon as they know they can't come to work, giving the reason and details of how long they are likely to be off.

If an employee decides not to return to their post at CAAT following their period of paid and unpaid carer's or compassionate bereavement leave, they should inform the Office Co-ordinator (or in their absence another member of staff) as soon as they can. The usual contracted terms of notice would apply.

CAAT will not discriminate against any employee on grounds listed in its equal opportunities statement, which includes due to a person's caring responsibilities, or having to take leave for any reason mentioned in this policy. If an employee feels they are being discriminated against they should refer to CAAT's staff grievance policy.