



COMING HOME GUIDE

Working and caring: your rights and practical help

A family guide

For England, with Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

Version 1 • October 2026. Next review: April 2027

About this guide

This guide is correct at October 2026, version 1. We've written it in good faith as general guidance to help carers and families. It isn't legal, financial or medical advice. Rules and rates change, so before you act, please make sure you have the latest version of this guide and look at the official sources: GOV.UK, Social Security Scotland, nidirect and your local council. To the extent the law allows, we can't accept liability for any errors or omissions, or for decisions made on the strength of this guide. In a medical emergency call 999. For urgent advice, contact NHS 111.

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How to use this guide

Version 1. October 2026. Next review: April 2027. Information read on 4 October 2026. We review this guide every April, and straight away if the law or the official guidance changes in any nation.

Who this guide is for: anyone with a job who also looks after a parent, grandparent, partner, child or friend. It explains your rights at work as they stand on 4 October 2026, which changes start on a later date or are only planned, how to talk to your employer, how earnings affect Carer's Allowance, and where to get help if you go part time, stop work or want to go back. It covers England, Wales and Scotland, which share the same employment law, with Northern Ireland in section 10.

How to use it: section 1 is a one-page summary. Sections 2 to 6 cover your rights and what to do if something goes wrong. Sections 7 to 9 cover money, cutting your hours and going back to work. Section 11 lists each change and the date it applies from. Every fact has a source and a date, and the full list is in "Sources" at the back.

Guidance, not advice. This guide explains the rules in plain words. It can't take everything into account, and your contract may give you more. For advice on your situation, contact Acas (or the Labour Relations Agency in Northern Ireland), Carers UK or Citizens Advice (section 13).

If you're worried about their health, contact their GP or NHS 111. In an emergency call 999.

01

Your rights at a glance

These rights are for employees. If you're a worker, an agency worker or self-employed, some of them may not apply, so ask Acas.

Right	What it gives you	In force in England, Wales and Scotland
Carer's leave	Up to one week of unpaid leave every 12 months to give or arrange care	Since 6 April 2024, from your first day
Time off for dependants	Reasonable unpaid time off to deal with an emergency	Since 1999, from your first day
Flexible working	The right to ask for a change to your hours, times or place of work	From your first day since 6 April 2024
Protection from discrimination by association	You mustn't be put at a disadvantage because of a disabled or older person you care for	Since 2010

The sources are in sections 2 to 5. Section 11 lists changes that start later or are only planned.

02

Carer's leave



Carer's leave is a legal right for employees in England, Wales and Scotland. The Carer's Leave Act 2023 added it to the Employment Rights Act 1996, and the Carer's Leave Regulations 2024 brought it in from 6 April 2024

(legislation.gov.uk, [Employment Rights Act 1996, section 80J](#); [The Carer's Leave Regulations 2024](#)).

Who you can take it for. GOV.UK says the person needs long-term care because of an illness or injury likely to need care for more than 3 months, a disability under the Equality Act 2010, or old age. Acas says they can be your husband, wife, civil partner or partner, your child or your parent. They can also be someone who lives with you (not a tenant or lodger) or someone who relies on you for care, such as an older neighbour ([GOV.UK, Unpaid carer's leave, updated 9 Apr 2024](#); [Acas, Carer's leave, updated 5 Apr 2024](#)). So a grandchild who lives with their grandad can take it, and so can someone he relies on.

How much. Up to one week every 12 months, from your first day in the job. A week means your usual working week, so if you work 3 days a week you can take 3 days. You can take half days, full days or a whole week. It's one week in total, even if you care for more than one person (Acas, Carer's leave).

Notice. For half a day or a day, give at least 3 days' notice. For longer, give notice of at least twice the length of the leave, so 4 days' notice for 2 days off. You don't have to ask in writing, and you don't have to give evidence of the care needed ([GOV.UK, Unpaid carer's leave](#)).

Can my employer say no? Your employer can't refuse. They can ask you to take it at another time if your absence would cause serious disruption. They must agree a new date within one month of the date you asked for, and explain in writing why, within 7 days of your request and before the leave was due to start (Acas, Carer's leave).

Pay and protection. Carer's leave is unpaid by law, though your employer may choose to pay it, so read your contract or staff handbook. You keep your other rights, such as holiday building up, and you can go back to the same job. Acas says it's against the law to dismiss you or put you at a disadvantage because of carer's leave (Acas, Carer's leave; Carer's Leave Regulations 2024, regulations 9 to 12).

03

Time off in an emergency

Separate from carer's leave, every employee can take a reasonable amount of time off to deal with an emergency involving a dependant, from the first day of work ([legislation.gov.uk](https://legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/18/schedule/1/section/57A), Employment Rights Act 1996, section 57A).

Acas gives examples: someone who depends on you falls ill or is hurt, care arrangements break down unexpectedly, or a dependant dies. The law doesn't set an amount of time or a number of occasions. It says "reasonable". Your employer doesn't have to pay you ([Acas, Time off for dependants, updated 13 Mar 2025](#); [GOV.UK, Time off for family and dependants, updated 5 Sep 2016](#)).

What to do. Tell your employer as soon as you can, why you need the time and how long you expect to be off. If you can, tell them before your shift starts. Acas suggests saying that the time off is covered by your statutory right to time off for dependants ([Acas, Time off for dependants](#)).

What it's for. It's for the emergency itself and for making arrangements, not for care you knew about in advance. For a planned hospital appointment, carer's leave, holiday or an agreed swap may fit better ([GOV.UK, Time off for family and dependants](#)).

04

Flexible working



What's in force now. Every employee in England, Wales and Scotland can make a statutory request for flexible working from their first day in a job. The 26-week wait was removed on 6 April 2024 ([legislation.gov.uk](https://legislation.gov.uk/uk/2023/11/1), [Flexible Working \(Amendment\) Regulations 2023](#)). You can make two requests in any 12 months, and your employer must give a decision within 2 months, unless you both agree longer ([legislation.gov.uk](https://legislation.gov.uk/uk/1996/18/1), [Employment Rights Act 1996, section 80F](#); [GOV.UK, Flexible working](https://gov.uk/flexible-working)).

Flexible working can mean part-time hours, compressed hours, flexitime, staggered start and finish times, job sharing, or working from home or hybrid working ([Acas, Statutory flexible working requests, updated 14 Jan 2026](#)).

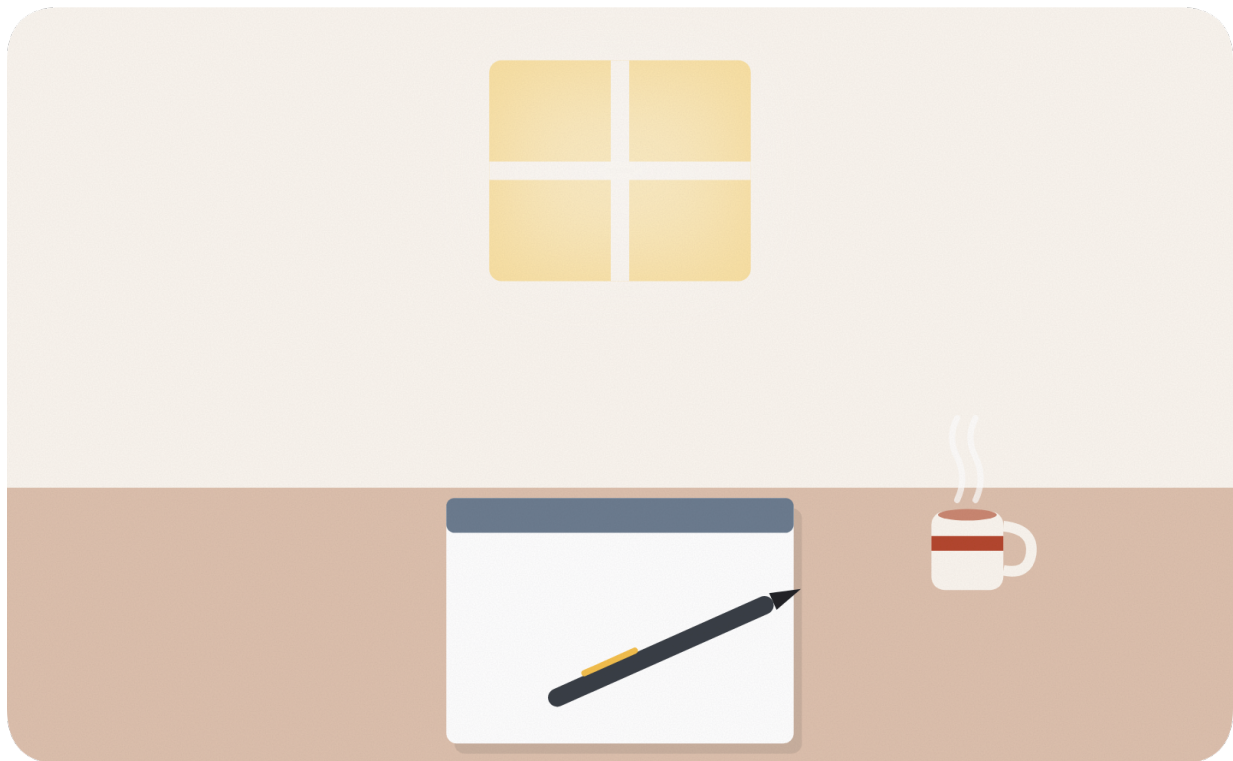
How to ask. GOV.UK says your request should be in writing and include:

- the date
- a statement that it's a statutory request
- the change you'd like and when you'd like it to start
- whether you've made a request before, and when

Your employer must talk to you before saying no, and can refuse only for one of 8 business reasons set out in law, such as extra costs or not being able to meet customer demand ([GOV.UK, Flexible working](https://gov.uk/flexible-working)). Acas has a free request letter template on its flexible working pages ([Acas, Flexible working](#)).

What's planned, not yet law. The Employment Rights Act 2025 will add a test that a refusal must be reasonable, and the employer will have to explain why. That part wasn't in force for requests on 4 October 2026. The government's

timeline lists the flexible working changes for 2027 (legislation.gov.uk, [Employment Rights Act 2025, section 9](#); [GOV.UK, Plan to Make Work Pay and Employment Rights Act: timeline update](#), updated 25 Sep 2026). Until then, the rules above apply.



05

Telling your employer



You don't have to tell your employer that you're a carer. Many carers find it helps, because it opens up carer's leave, flexible working and any carers' policy your employer has.

Before you talk:

- Read your contract and staff handbook for carers' leave, compassionate leave or special leave. Some employers pay it.
- Think about what would help most: a set day at home, a later start, a phone you can answer, or a few hours of flexibility.
- Ask if there's a carers' network, an employee assistance line or an HR contact.

Your protection. Under the Equality Act 2010, it's unlawful to put you at a disadvantage because of your link with someone who is disabled or older. Acas calls this "discrimination by association" ([legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/10/section/13), [Equality Act 2010, section 13](#); [Acas, Direct discrimination](#), updated 26 Aug 2026). The Act also covers unwanted conduct related to disability or age, such as jokes about the person you care for ([legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/10/section/26), [Equality Act 2010, section 26](#)). Since 1 January 2024, a rule that puts you at the same disadvantage as disabled or older people can also be unlawful, unless the employer can justify it ([legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/10/section/19A), [Equality Act 2010, section 19A](#)). From 30 October 2026, employers must take all reasonable steps against harassment at work, or they can be held responsible for it ([Acas, How and when discrimination can happen](#), updated 26 Aug 2026).

The duty to make reasonable adjustments is for disabled employees, not for carers. So for changes to your hours, use a flexible working request.

Keep a note of each conversation in the table in section 12.

06

If something goes wrong at work

1. **Talk to your manager or HR first.** Say what happened and what you'd like to change.
2. **Raise a formal grievance** in writing if talking doesn't settle it. Your employer's grievance policy says how.
3. **Call Acas** for advice on 0300 123 1100 (section 13).
4. **Know your time limit.** Before most employment tribunal claims, you must contact Acas for early conciliation. For problems on or after 1 October 2026, you have 6 months minus 1 day for most claims. For problems before that date, it's usually 3 months minus 1 day. Raising a grievance doesn't pause the clock ([Acas, Employment tribunal time limits, updated 1 Oct 2026](#); [Acas, Early conciliation](#)).

07

Carer's Allowance and your earnings

You can work and get Carer's Allowance if you care for at least 35 hours a week and your earnings are £204 a week or less after tax, National Insurance and expenses. Expenses can include half of your pension contributions and some care costs while you work ([GOV.UK, Carer's Allowance: eligibility](#)). The same limit applies to Carer Support Payment in Scotland and to Carer's Allowance in Northern Ireland.

If your pay goes up, even for a pay rise or extra shifts, tell the Carer's Allowance Unit. Our Carer's Allowance guide explains how earnings are counted and averaged ([Coming Home, Carer's Allowance](#)).

If you care for 20 hours a week or more and don't get Carer's Allowance, Carer's Credit can protect your National Insurance record and your future State Pension ([GOV.UK, Carer's Credit, updated 14 Oct 2024](#)).



08

Cutting your hours or stopping work

Before you cut your hours or leave, it's worth trying these first:

- **Ask for flexible working** (section 4), or a trial period of a new pattern.
- **Ask about unpaid leave or a career break.** Some employers offer them.
- **Ask for a carer's assessment** from the council where the person you care for lives. It can look at whether you want to keep working, and at help that would let you (see our [carer's assessment guide](#)).
- **Ask an adviser how your benefits would change.** Going part time can change Carer's Allowance, Universal Credit and your pension. Citizens Advice or the Carers UK Helpline can help.
- **Think about your pension.** Cutting hours may cut what you and your employer pay in.

If you do leave, ask your employer to confirm in writing that you left because of caring, in case you go back later.

09

Going back to work



When caring changes, or when you feel ready, help is there.

- **In England**, a DWP careers adviser through the Jobs and Careers Service can help, on 0800 072 0288, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm ([National Careers Service, Help and support](#)).
- **At a Jobcentre** (a Jobs and Benefits office in Northern Ireland), a work coach can talk about jobs, training and how work would affect your benefits ([GOV.UK, Contact Jobcentre Plus, updated 10 Dec 2024](#)).
- **In Northern Ireland**, nidirect suggests telling the employment adviser that you're caring or have stopped caring, so they can help you back in and talk about training ([nidirect, Carers returning to work](#)).
- **When you apply for jobs**, ask about the employer's carers' policy and flexible working. Under the law in section 4, you can make a request from your first day.

Caring builds real skills: planning, staying calm, dealing with services. It's fine to say so in an interview.

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Northern Ireland

Employment law in Northern Ireland is separate. On 4 October 2026:

- **Time off for dependants** is a legal right from the first day, whatever your length of service ([nidirect](#), [Time off for dependants \(compassionate leave\)](#); [legislation.gov.uk](#), [Employment Rights \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1996](#), article 85A).
- **Flexible working**: you need 26 weeks' continuous service when you apply, and you can make one request in any 12 months ([nidirect](#), [Flexible working and work-life balance](#)).
- **Carer's leave isn't law in Northern Ireland**. Some employers offer it, paid or unpaid ([nidirect](#), [Caring for someone while working](#)). The Department for the Economy has proposed a right to one week of unpaid carer's leave in a new Employment Rights Bill. It wasn't law on 4 October 2026 ([Department for the Economy](#), [Oral statement: Good Jobs Employment Rights Bill](#), 28 Apr 2025).
- **Advice**: the Labour Relations Agency on 03300 555 300 ([Labour Relations Agency](#), [Contact](#)).

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Changes and when they apply

Read on 4 October 2026. Each change applies from the date shown.

Change	When it applies
Carer's leave (England, Wales and Scotland)	From 6 April 2024. Unpaid. The government said in October 2024 it would review carer's leave and look at paid leave. No change had been announced by 4 October 2026
Flexible working from day one (England, Wales and Scotland)	From 6 April 2024
Employment tribunal time limit of 6 months minus 1 day for most claims	For problems on or after 1 October 2026. For breach of contract claims in Scotland, from 9 November 2026
Employers must take all reasonable steps against harassment	From 30 October 2026
Unfair dismissal qualifying period of 6 months	For dismissals on or after 1 January 2027

Change	When it applies
Flexible working refusals must be reasonable	Planned for 2027. No start date had been set by 4 October 2026
Carer's leave in Northern Ireland	Proposed. Not law on 4 October 2026, and not yet in a Bill before the Assembly

Sources: GOV.UK, Plan to Make Work Pay and Employment Rights Act: timeline update; Acas, Employment tribunal time limits; Acas, How and when discrimination can happen; [GOV.UK, Next steps to make work pay \(Oct 2024\)](#); Department for the Economy oral statement. We'll update this guide when any of these change.

12

Notes for talking to work

Write these in as you go.

Date	Who I spoke to	What I asked for	What we agreed	Next step

Our guides to [caring from a distance](#), [sharing the caring](#) and [looking after yourself](#) may help too.

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How Coming Home can help



Coming Home: Family Care is an iPhone app for families looking after someone. It's coming soon. It helps you organise. It isn't medical, legal or financial advice.

The care circle brings the family, friends and neighbours who help into one place, with shared tasks and a calendar, so cover for a shift or an appointment is easier to sort.

The family care diary keeps dates and notes in one place, which helps when you're talking to your employer about time off.

To hear when Coming Home is ready, join the waitlist:

www.cominghomecare.app/?ref=guide-working-and-caring

Built by people who know home care.

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Who to call



- **Acas helpline** (England, Wales and Scotland): 0300 123 1100, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm (**Acas, Get advice**).
- **Labour Relations Agency** (Northern Ireland): 03300 555 300 (**Labour Relations Agency, Contact**).
- **Carers UK Helpline**: 0808 808 7777, for carers in all four nations (**Carers UK, Helpline and other support**).
- **Age UK Advice Line**: 0800 678 1602 (**Age UK, Advice Line**).
- **Independent Age Helpline**: 0800 319 6789 (**Independent Age, Contact the Helpline**).
- **Citizens Advice**: www.citizensadvice.org.uk/

If you're worried about their health, contact their GP or NHS 111. In an emergency call 999.

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Sources

All read on 4 October 2026 unless another date is given. Dates in brackets are the page's own published, updated or reviewed date.

Law (legislation.gov.uk, revised versions up to date to at least 30 September 2026)

- legislation.gov.uk, Employment Rights Act 1996, section 57A (time off for dependants): www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/18/section/57A
- legislation.gov.uk, Employment Rights Act 1996, section 80F (flexible working): www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/18/section/80F
- legislation.gov.uk, Employment Rights Act 1996, section 80J (carer's leave, inserted 4 Dec 2023 by the Carer's Leave Act 2023): www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/18/section/80J
- legislation.gov.uk, The Carer's Leave Regulations 2024 (SI 2024/251), regulations 4 to 12: www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2024/251/contents
- legislation.gov.uk, The Flexible Working (Amendment) Regulations 2023 (SI 2023/1328, in force 6 Apr 2024): www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2023/1328/made
- legislation.gov.uk, Employment Rights Act 2025, section 9 (not yet in force for requests): www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2025/36/section/9
- legislation.gov.uk, Equality Act 2010, section 13: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/13
- legislation.gov.uk, Equality Act 2010, section 19A (inserted from 1 Jan 2024): www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/19A

- legislation.gov.uk, Equality Act 2010, section 26:
www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/26
- legislation.gov.uk, Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, article 85A: www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1996/1919/article/85A

GOV.UK

- GOV.UK, Unpaid carer's leave (updated 9 Apr 2024):
www.gov.uk/carers-leave
- GOV.UK, Time off for family and dependants (updated 5 Sep 2016):
www.gov.uk/time-off-for-dependants
- GOV.UK, Flexible working (updated 18 Dec 2018; pages read 4 Oct 2026 describe the day-one right): www.gov.uk/flexible-working
- GOV.UK, Plan to Make Work Pay and Employment Rights Act: timeline update (updated 25 Sep 2026): www.gov.uk/government/publications/implementing-the-plan-to-make-work-pay-and-employment-rights-act/plan-to-make-work-pay-and-employment-rights-act-timeline-update
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- GOV.UK, Carer's Allowance: eligibility:
www.gov.uk/carers-allowance/eligibility
- GOV.UK, Carer's Credit (updated 14 Oct 2024): www.gov.uk/carers-credit
- GOV.UK, Contact Jobcentre Plus (updated 10 Dec 2024):
www.gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus
- National Careers Service, Help and support:
nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/contact-us

Acas

- Acas, Carer's leave (updated 5 Apr 2024): www.acas.org.uk/carers-leave
- Acas, Time off for dependants (updated 13 Mar 2025):
www.acas.org.uk/time-off-for-dependants
- Acas, Flexible working: www.acas.org.uk/flexible-working
- Acas, Statutory flexible working requests (updated 14 Jan 2026):
www.acas.org.uk/statutory-flexible-working-requests

- Acas, Direct discrimination (updated 26 Aug 2026):
www.acas.org.uk/discrimination-and-the-law/direct-discrimination
- Acas, How and when discrimination can happen (updated 26 Aug 2026):
www.acas.org.uk/discrimination-and-the-law/how-and-when-discrimination-can-happen
- Acas, Employment tribunal time limits (updated 1 Oct 2026):
www.acas.org.uk/employment-tribunal-time-limits
- Acas, Early conciliation: www.acas.org.uk/early-conciliation
- Acas, Get advice: www.acas.org.uk/contact/get-advice

Northern Ireland

- nidirect, Time off for dependants (compassionate leave):
www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/time-dependants-compassionate-leave
- nidirect, Flexible working and work-life balance:
www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/flexible-working-and-work-life-balance
- nidirect, Caring for someone while working:
www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/caring-someone-while-working
- nidirect, Carers returning to work:
www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/carers-returning-work
- Department for the Economy, Oral statement: Good Jobs Employment Rights Bill (28 Apr 2025): www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/oral-statement-good-jobs-employment-rights-bill-28-april-2025
- Labour Relations Agency, Contact: www.lra.org.uk/contact

Helplines

- Carers UK, Helpline and other support:
www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/helpline-and-other-support/
- Age UK, Advice Line: www.ageuk.org.uk/services/age-uk-advice-line/
- Independent Age, Contact the Helpline:
www.independentage.org/get-advice/helpline

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Changelog

Version	Date	What changed	Why
1	October 2026	First published	Information read on 4 October 2026

The next review is due in April 2027, or straight away if the law or guidance changes, including when a start date is set for the flexible working changes, or when carer's leave changes in any nation. The latest version is always at www.cominghomecare.app/guides/working-and-caring



Coming Home

Less to hold in your head.

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