

*It can be difficult to know how to best respond when an employee discloses their caregiver status. Here are suggestions to make the conversation a little easier.*

## Who Is a Caregiver?

A caregiver is someone who assists a family member or friend living with challenges resulting from a disability, illness, or aging.

Although many people think of caring for elderly parents, there are many other types of situations where individuals provide care. The care recipient can be a relative, friend, or even neighbor. A caregiver could be providing care to:

- A family member with a brain injury, mental illness or addiction.
- A spouse with heart disease, arthritis, cancer, MS, ALS, Parkinson's or dementia.
- A child with high needs or a disability.

## Reasons Why an Employee May Disclose Their Caregiving Status

Most caregivers will have already thought about the balance between a desire to keep their personal life private and the possibility of negative repercussions for not disclosing. There are multiple reasons why an employee may choose to disclose that they are a caregiver, two key reasons for disclosure include:

- There has been a sudden change in the care recipients needs that demand more of their time, and therefore may have the potential to affect their work.
- The employee may foresee their caregiver role impacting their future attendance or performance at work.
- They may already not be managing well and caregiving is already starting to impact their work.

## How You Can Best Respond

- Employed caregivers in your workforce may be afraid to disclose their situation to you, so view this meeting as a positive sign. It is important that you signal that you are open to these kind of discussions.
- When an employee discloses their caregiver status it is essential that you first listen thoughtfully and normalize their feelings. Often times, caregiving employees will express frustration, sadness and fear - all of which are common emotions for caregivers.

- Once they have finished disclosing to you, ask if they have given thought to what they would like from you. This may come in the form of a specific request or a broader request for flexibility or general support.
- It may be beneficial to refer your employee to community resources. You can find some suggestions on where to start on the Work and Care website at [www.workandcare.ca](http://www.workandcare.ca)
- When concluding the meeting, remember to affirm to your caregiving employee that it is positive that they spoke to you about their situation, especially if they disclosed to you early on.
- If you discover that caregiving is an issue affecting multiple employees, you may want to consider presentations for all your employees and/or training for supervisors and HR personnel. You can learn more about presentations and training on our “Creating Caregiver-Friendly Workplaces” brochure or online at [www.workandcare.ca](http://www.workandcare.ca)

## Reasons Why an Employee May Disclose Their Caregiving Status

In Alberta, employees who are caregivers to family members are protected by the Alberta Human Rights Act. Section 7 of the Alberta Human Rights Act prohibits discrimination due to family status. Family status protection includes those who are obligated to care for disabled, severely ill or elderly family members. This means that employers have the legal obligation to accommodate their employees if at all possible.

Your employees have responsibilities as well. Employees must demonstrate that they have done due diligence to self-accommodate their situation (e.g. asked other family members for help). An employee must also demonstrate an obligation to care for the family member in question. You can find out more about your legal obligations on the Canadian Human Rights Commission’s site at [www.chrc-ccdp.ca](http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca)

*To learn why it makes good business sense to support your caregiving employees, view sample policies, download toolkits and guides, and access up to date referral guides, visit: [www.workandcare.ca](http://www.workandcare.ca)*

### Part of the Work + Care Project

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