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Parents/Carers of Disabled Children & those with complex needs

Police *Family Support* Guidance

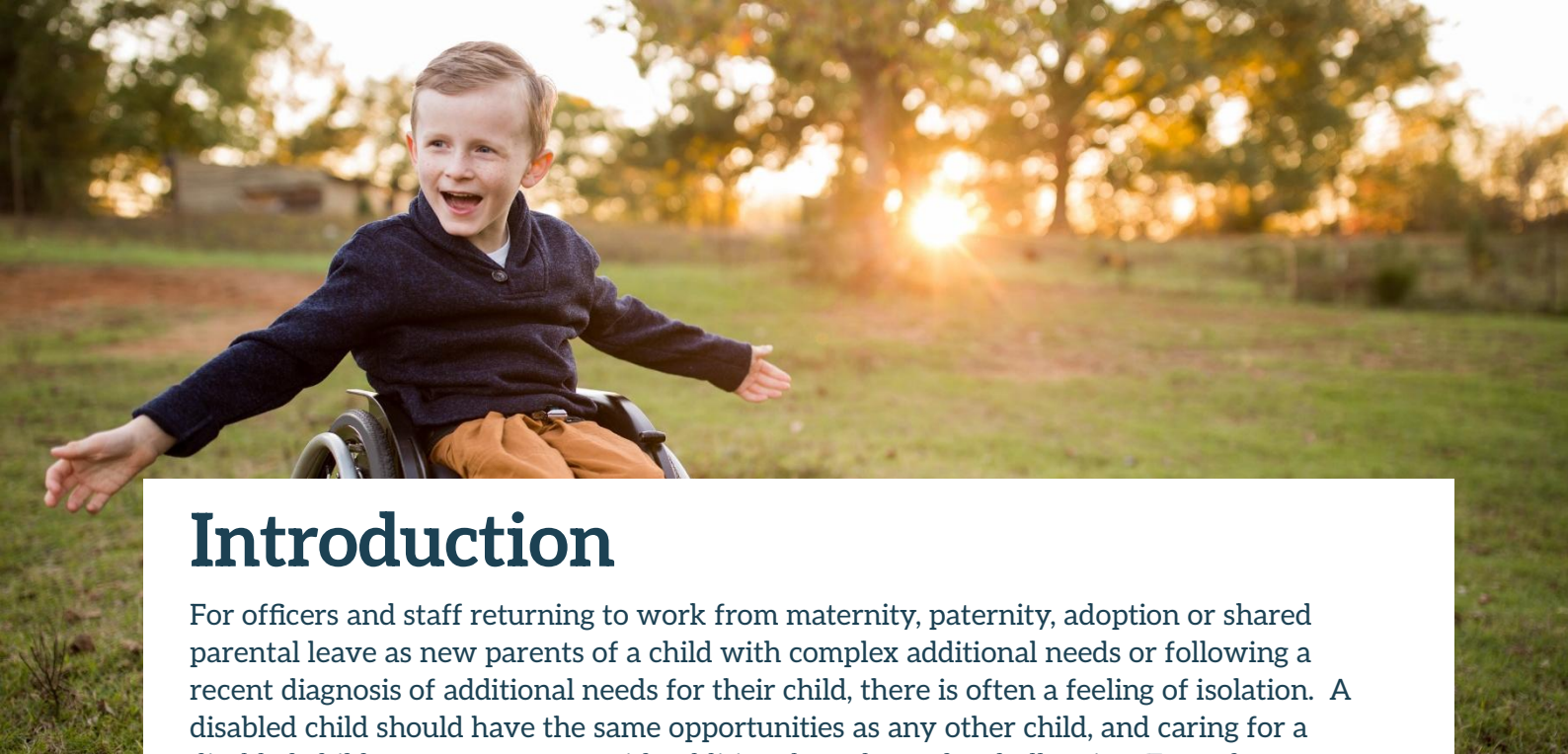


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Introduction

For officers and staff returning to work from maternity, paternity, adoption or shared parental leave as new parents of a child with complex additional needs or following a recent diagnosis of additional needs for their child, there is often a feeling of isolation. A disabled child should have the same opportunities as any other child, and caring for a disabled child or young person with additional needs can be challenging. Even the most experienced parents and carers need someone to turn to for help and advice.

In the period that passes between an expectant parent taking leave from the workforce and returning sometime later, they may have received news that has brought additional complexities and challenges to their role as a parent in caring for their child. This can often bring more questions than answers.

Returning new parents, now caring for a disabled child or a child with additional complex needs, may have had a very different experience during those first months than other new parents. Further, those parents who have children diagnosed at a later age will be dealing with questions and worries they have relating to continued care for their child and how that will be supported by their employer.

The State of Caring Survey (2024)

Carers UK ran a national survey in 2024 which found:

- 61% of unpaid carers are worried about living costs with over 35% of unpaid carers not feeling confident they will be able to manage, financially, over the next 12 months.
- 22% of respondents stated they had to use their bank overdraft because of their caring responsibilities.
- 68% of carers have cut back on hobbies and leisure activities with 60% reducing the time spent seeing family and friends.

These statistics show that there is a growing concern that carers are vulnerable to financial debt and isolation due to their caring responsibilities. It is good practice for employers to engage with those with caring responsibilities to ensure that, where possible, any issues and concerns are highlighted at the earliest opportunity so that line managers can work with the individual to offer support where possible.

Being a Carer to a child with a disability and/or complex needs can bring many challenges

1. **Childcare:** The high cost of childcare and the impact it has on families' finances and ability to work.
2. **Parental leave:** This is not paid leave and can cause further worry or anxiety for those with financial commitments, particularly those on a low income.
3. **Flexible working:** Whilst a right for all officers and staff to request, this can still be refused for operational or statutory reasons and may cause a barrier for parent carers looking to balance work and caring responsibilities.
4. **Control over working patterns:** How much control working parents have over their work schedules/patterns and how this affects their ability to care for their children with complex additional needs.
5. **Feeling of isolation** from friends, family and peers.

To better support parents in their return to work, a check list of support to assist with any adjustments that the parent may need should be available. This checklist may differ between Forces but could include the diagnosis the child if parents feel comfortable to share this level of information and signposting to support agencies for the Parent/Carer to access. Any sharing of medical information must be with adequate consent and in accordance with data protection principles. There should be no expectation that an officer must disclose sensitive personal information/share with others, unless they wish to do so.

A relevant Workplace Passport can advise a line manager of the signposting and necessary adjustments for officers and staff returning from maternity, paternity/maternity support, adoption or shared parental leave who are caring for a child with complex additional needs. These can be completed once and then updated as required, reducing the stress on individual parents to continually repeat information with differing line managers or supervisors should they change. The suggested passport should include an option to consent to sharing information with management, or if they wish to obtain consent at each stage.

Disabled children can have sleep problems for a range of physical reasons, such as muscle spasms or breathing difficulties, depending on their particular health problem. If the child is having difficulty in sleeping then the parent will, undoubtedly, be facing the same issue and that should also be taken into account.

Children with some learning disabilities may find it hard to understand why and when they need to sleep. For those officers and staff working shift patterns this can be a particular challenge. Incurring extreme levels of sleep deprivation can lead to other

potential health issues and should be regarded as a key risk factor for those officers and staff.



Return to work – What a line manager can look out for

It is vital to support the wellbeing of the person returning to work. Following a child being diagnosed with a disability or complex need, the parent can often feel that their parenting experience will not be what they had expected/hoped for. As parents adapt to the change this support, from a line manager, needs to continue and be responsive to the circumstances as they develop and change.

The person returning to work may want to keep the matter confidential for fear of being treated differently or they may be willing to share information with colleagues. Line managers have a responsibility to support and respect either decision. Returning colleagues should not be disadvantaged because of their caring responsibilities. Line managers must avoid making assumptions about what an officer can or cannot undertake based on their caring responsibilities. Any such assumption may give rise to unlawful discrimination. The line manager should consider all options of support for the member of staff, and this may include (but is not limited to) internal / external counselling, referrals to relevant staff networks/groups or the Force Chaplaincy Service.

Carers will often find that so much of their day-to-day life is now outside of their control and may therefore find it hard to adjust if there are last minute changes to their shift patterns.

If the parent's sleep is constantly interrupted, they can ask for a carer's assessment from social services. They may be able to provide short breaks from caring so that they can get some undisturbed sleep/respice. To access the necessary support via Social Services the parent must contact their GP who will, in turn, refer them to a Support Worker. Where an officer is treated less favourably because of their relationship with a disabled child, this may amount to direct discrimination by association. This protection applies even though the officer themselves may not be disabled.

Needs Assessment	VS	Carer's Assessment
A process used by social services to decide if your child and your family require extra help to meet your needs based on local eligibility criteria		A chance to tell social services about your own needs as a parent – the things that could make it easier for you to look after your child
Eligible children should get a plan from the local authority that sets out who is going to do what, where and when to help your child		It must consider your physical, emotional and mental health, social and economic wellbeing, employment, relationships, housing and more
Possible services include home help, short breaks, recreational equipment, leisure and education facilities, travel, adaptations, and more		Eligible carers should get a care plan setting out services (arranged by the council or via direct payments), planned outcomes and review dates
Services for disabled children are available under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 and under the Children Act 1989		Parent carers in the UK have strengthened rights to ask for an assessment of their needs at any time under the Children and Families Act 2014

contact For families with disabled children

contact.org.uk/social-care

Flexible Working Patterns

The right to request flexible working applies equally to everyone, irrespective of whether the individual has children and/or caring responsibilities. However, when balancing operational needs of the Force and the needs of an individual who applies for flexible working, particular weight should be given to the needs of someone caring for a disabled child or adult. Failure to do so could result in indirect sex discrimination.

More information on discrimination can be found at an external source [HERE](#).

Please note NPCC guidance on flexible working will be published which will assist with more information.

Continuity and consistency are key to being a primary carer and any short-term notifications of change in duties, without prior notice, can impact on caring responsibilities. It becomes very important to have direct and open communication between the carer and their line manager to ensure their needs are considered and accommodated as far as is reasonable and practicable alongside the needs of the business.

Some carers will find that their personal support network is quite small. This often means that the carer and their potential partner are the only people who can ensure that the complex needs or behaviour of their child/children are dealt with appropriately. Line managers need to be aware of this as comments such as “can you get someone to babysit” or “surely your family can help with that” can be incredibly insensitive and lead to a further sense of isolation.



Inclusive terminology and conversational terms

Parents or Guardians who have returned to work with a child who has been diagnosed as disabled or having complex additional needs will be incredibly conscious of the language used around them. This should not be dismissed, and it is important to understand that some terms may potentially trigger negative emotions from that member of staff.

For example, stating “this weather is crazy” may not appear as insulting or offending but for someone returning to work who is having to navigate their child’s neuro diverse difference the term “crazy” may be taken as a negative description. Similarly, the use of the term “brainstorming” can be offensive to some who are now living with a diagnosis of epilepsy.

Those working with carers are encouraged to listen to their colleagues and be aware of any conversational language that may be upsetting. Having direct and open conversations with them can assist to improve understanding and awareness. There is no standardised list of terminology that is acceptable/not acceptable as language evolves. Should a supervisor have the time they are encouraged to read about the diagnosis that the carers child has and note any general direction that is given around language.

What are the ‘best practice’ recommendations?

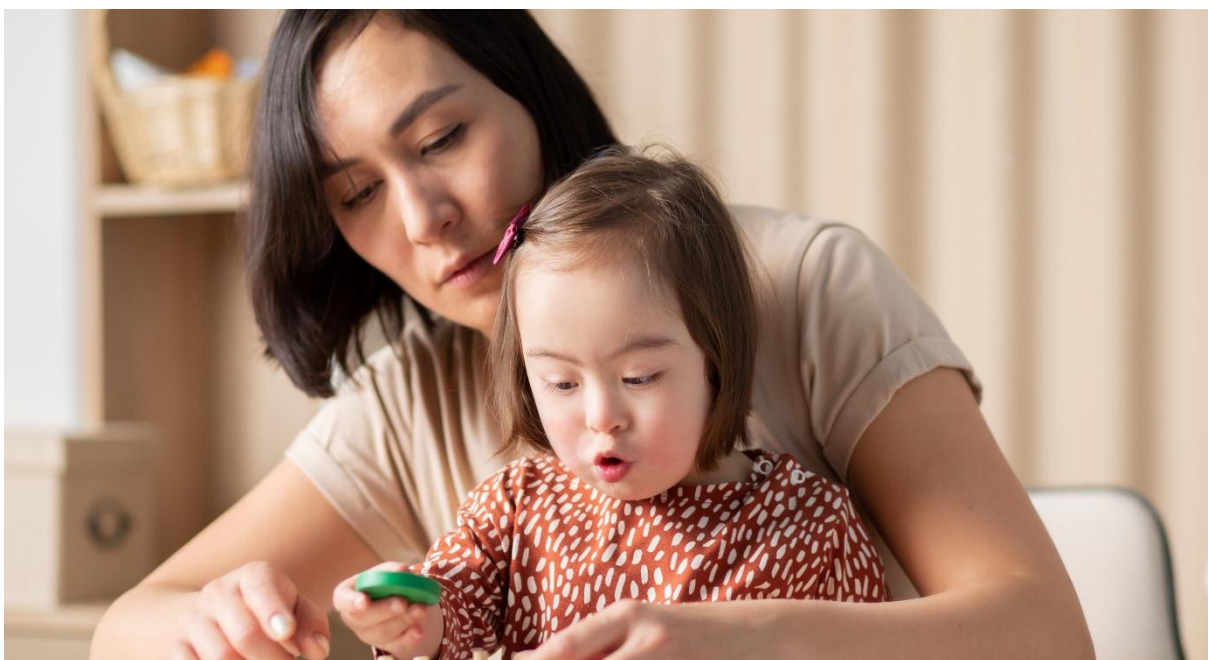
Forces should encourage the creation of a Carers Support Group (CSG) where members can act as a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) in supporting parents and giving advice/direction to line managers. A working CSG can seek to empower parents and carers to share information and support one another, reminding staff they are “not alone”, they are “supported” and to ensure they are not reaching crisis point in a workplace or family environment. The CSG should look to have a strategic lead who is able to review issues that arise with staff who identify as carers and find the best possible result for all parties.

The CSG are strongly encouraged to use peer support in helping new carers find others, in Force, who have similar responsibilities and who may be able to give guidance and both practical and emotional support.

Each Force should aspire to support paid carers leave of, at least, three days per year to ensure that carers can manage appointments for the person they care for without the worry of a financial burden. Legislation now enables a week of unpaid carers leave for a dependent (as defined within legislation) from day one of employment. The “week” is defined as the length of time the carer usually works over a seven-day period.

With the agreement and support of the carer, line managers are advised to sit down with them as soon as possible to discuss the creation and completion of a Workplace Passport. Where created, with the individual’s continued support, this should be reviewed at least every three months in the first two years as so much can change in a short period.

Where such structures are not in place, there is an increased risk that issues will escalate and potentially result in formal complaints or legal proceedings. This document provides guidance and highlights areas of potential legal risk. It does not create legal rights in itself.



However, Forces should be aware that failure to properly consider the issues identified may give rise to claims under the Equality Act 2010 or other legal frameworks.

Signposting for Carers

Parents / Carers may be directed to “The Local Offer” (England), “Additional Learning Needs” (Wales) or “Additional Support Learning” (Scotland). This is a comprehensive guide by the Local Authority which lists services that are available for children and young people in their area with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

It covers a broad range of services including education, health, social care, training, travel, and services to support children and young people from age 0-25.

Carers can search for “Local Offer SEND” to find their local services. These can help support with topics such as:

- How to request an assessment for an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)
- The special educational, health and social care provision for children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities
- Leisure activities and support groups
- Childcare
- Arrangements for travel

Further Support

The local council can provide help if the Officer/Member of Staff has a disabled child, including:

- short break services
- holiday play schemes
- care at home
- aids and adaptations
- financial help, for example money towards travel costs for hospital visits

The local council has a duty to provide these services under the Children Act 1989. Some are free of charge - the council might ask the person to contribute towards others.

If you think an Officer/Member of staff may have a child who qualifies, ask them to contact the social services team at their local council.

A social worker will then talk to them about the needs of the family, including:

- health

- social care
- education

This is called a 'needs assessment' - the social worker will give advice on what to do next.

They can also ask the council about local support groups for carers and families with disabled children.

Index of Support

Blue Badge - This may be awarded if the child is over two years old and has a permanent disability that makes walking difficult or dangerous.

Direct Payments - Are monetary payments made to either the parent or the young person who has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). These payments can be used for personal care, overnight care or accessing leisure facilities.

Disability Grants - This website has a comprehensive self-search directory that is organised into themed sections such as grants for children, families, equipment or holiday grants.

Disabled Facilities Grant - DFGs can be used to pay for work that is needed to help a disabled person live more independently or comfortably in their own home. This is very important if a child may need hoisting or specialist equipment is to be planned as part of any home renovation.