

## EDI Support during our working life

During our working lives, we often have to face difficult challenges. Sometimes we struggle to know what to do. These pages provide support around three key areas both for individuals but also for those seeking to support colleagues: bereavement, caring and chronic illness. We are hoping to follow on with guidance on the Menopause and Infertility. Colleagues have also suggested support for colleagues who have encountered harassments, homophobia/transphobia, and other forms of discrimination. This is not an exhaustive list, and the EDI Committee looks forward to recommendations in the future, so please do get in touch.

These crib notes supplement university guidance and have where necessary linked into them. They are not comprehensive and merely serve to offer some guidance so that mentors can provide support for their mentees. Some colleagues will not need them because they are very experienced. The intention is for them to be readily available so that colleagues can refer to them when they need them.

### Bereavement

There are many ways of dealing with bereavement but for most people there will be an impact on their capacity to cope with their day jobs. Many of us are not confident about what to say to a colleague who is bereaved. This is normal, we are not experts on bereavement or counsellors. However, we must try and avoid creating uncomfortable silences around bereavement.

**The department aims to provide a supportive environment for colleagues to express As a their grief and to provide flexible support during the grieving process. If a colleague is bereaved, firstly, let them know how sorry you are and ask them how you can support them.** Check in on them regularly after the bereavement to see whether they need any additional support. Remember that bereavement also involves practical and administrative aspects that colleagues will have to cope with, such as funeral arrangements, probate, registration of deaths, etc. Colleagues may also be worried and anxious about how to cope with these often complex and complicated processes.

For colleagues who are bereaved, the university provides [compassionate leave](#) for immediate family members who are defined as defined as 'the employee's spouse, civil partner, partner (including same-sex couples), parent, child, sibling or grandparent. A dependant could include the employee's spouse, partner (including same-sex couples), civil partner, child or parent, or any person who lives at the same house as the employee (other than as a lodger, tenant, boarder or employee), or who would reasonably and normally rely on the employee for assistance or arrangements for care in the event of serious illness or injury.'

**We recognise that people from different backgrounds and cultures may have different definitions of immediate family members and while the department may not be able to provide compassionate leave, we would still like to support colleagues who are bereaved.**

### In the short term

1. Remember that people react to grief differently and different people may need different amounts of time to grieve. Some people may for instance want to work as normal, conduct a piece of research as a form of displacement activity and that is okay. What is important to note is that there is departmental and university support available to them once they are ready to engage with the grieving process.
2. Please contact either the HR Liaison, the Director of Staff Development, HOD or Director of Administration if you are bereaved so that the department can arrange some support for you. Feel free to ask a colleague to help you do this if you don't feel able to do so.

3. The [GOV.UK website](#) lists some of the official steps that you may need to take if you are dealing with a bereavement in the UK.
4. Colleagues who are dealing with a bereavement overseas may be impacted differently as they may lack a support network of family and friends. Colleagues from abroad are also entitled to take [compassionate leave](#) too if this is helpful, even if they are not flying out for the funeral.
5. Remember that there are several options around reasonable adjustments such as postponing classes, arranging cover, granting extensions on assessment periods, flipping classes online etc.

#### In the long term

1. Remember that there is no set period on grieving and that it is okay if this process goes on for some time. The university offers [staff counselling services](#) which may be helpful.
2. Outside the university, there is various support on grief and bereavement which may be helpful:
  - a. The NHS has a [website](#) which gives practical advice on the stages of grief and the process of bereavement as well as support within the NHS.
  - b. [Cruse Bereavement Support to learn more about the grieving process](#). They also offer local one to one support and group sessions on grieving.
  - c. [AtaLoss](#) for free live chat with a bereavement counsellor

### **Caring Support**

The Family Resources Survey estimated that in 2020/2021, around 6 percent of the UK population were providing informal care. They are different kinds of caring that colleagues may be engaged with.

#### **Caring for children**

Many colleagues have to care for children. While this can be a joyful and enriching experience, caring for children especially those who are younger comes with many challenges. These vary from the difficulties of physical care especially in the early years, an increased lack of mobility which is especially damaging to networking and fieldwork for early career scholars, emotional costs due to the guilt of being absent for many school activities as well as the difficulties in separating their work and family spheres due to the greater availability of flexible working. Many of these challenges were amplified due to the [COVID-19 crisis](#).

#### **Caring for children with additional needs**

Colleagues who have children (or other dependants) with additional needs have additional challenges. These include children with disabilities and special educational needs (SEN). These challenges compound the existing challenges of parenting outlined above. Many parents of children with additional needs will be struggling with managing complex educational and healthcare needs and liaising with schools and healthcare professionals and will find traditional childcare unsuitable, inappropriate or non-existent.

#### **Caring for older people**

Caring for older parents and other relatives can be a challenge. The emotional aspect of caring for someone who once cared for you is often underestimated. This is coupled with the complexity of arranging or determining the form of care necessary, the kind of social care needed especially given

that many older people have varying health complications, the varied quality of adult social care and how to finance it.

### **Caring for partners**

Colleagues may be caring for partners who are disabled or ill and this may compound existing challenges, including childcare and managing the household.

### **Caring for family across international borders**

Some of our colleagues are caring for close family members who live overseas while living in the UK. This category of caring is often overlooked when caring needs are being discussed but it presents its own unique challenges. Many colleagues may have to navigate care at a distance, often in different time zones, anxiety about being unable to check in on their loved ones in person, and often with a huge emotional burden about being so far away from home. It is important that colleagues who are undertaking this kind of care recognise it as a form of care.

### **Support for colleagues with caring needs**

We currently recognise the impact of caring when we are timetabling and ask colleagues to indicate if they would like classes organised in certain ways to accommodate caring needs. While we can't guarantee that all requests will be met due to other pressures, we try our best to ensure that all colleagues are treated fairly during this process.

The department recognises the intersectional impact of several kinds of caring i.e., caring for children and elderly parents at the same time. Colleagues should remember caring is a form of labour and that they need to take care of themselves. Colleagues can also seek [counselling](#) from university services if they are struggling to deal with the impacts of caring responsibilities.

Parents and carers of children have access to a range of support from the University that mentors can signpost to in the '[Family friendly Policy Hub](#)'. This includes policies on maternity, paternity, shared parental and adoption leave, flexible working and time off for dependants. Carers of children with additional needs have further support for carers (see below).

The university has introduced [paid carer's leave](#) to help people who struggle to balance their working responsibilities with caring commitments by offering them further flexibility to provide care and continue to work. This amounts to 5 days a year but can be taken in hourly chunks. Mentors should advise mentees with caring responsibilities to fill in a [Carers Passport](#) which is a tool that helps employees who are carers have a meaningful conversation with their line manager about their caring responsibilities and put in place flexibilities that enable them to keep carrying out their jobs.

The University has [staff networks](#) which can provide peer support for carers, notably the Carers Staff Network and a Support Group for Parents/ Carers of Neurodivergent Young People. The latter group schedules in-person meetings on campus every month and a Teams channel. If you want to know more about university support, please do contact the HR liaison officer.

### **Further resources**

The NHS has a [practical guide to healthy caring](#) which is essential reading for all carers.

The [NHS also has guidance support for caring for children with complex needs](#). This is a broad category of children who may have an illness, disability or sensory impairment that results in them needing a lot of additional support on a daily basis.

[Mothering in the Ivy Tower](#) is a classic paper that explores the difficulties of parenting by academic mothers.

Atul Gawande's book, [Being Mortal, Medicine and what matters in the End](#) is a really interesting book on caring at the end of life.

[AgeUK](#) is an excellent resource for thinking about adult social care as well as giving [practical advice](#) on the impact and support for carers.

[My people don't do that: Caring for Aging Parents and being South Asian](#) is an interesting blog post about the impact of care in different cultural traditions.

[Caring for an Elderly Parent from Abroad](#) is a helpful resource for those people who may be caring for those overseas from the UK.

Baldassar L., Merla L., *Transnational families, migration and the circulation of care: Understanding mobility and absence in family life*. Routledge; 2014. [[Google Scholar](#)] is an important book on transnational care relationships.

### **Colleagues with chronic illnesses**

A long-term health condition is [defined by the UK's NHS](#) as 'a health condition that cannot at present be cured but can be controlled by medication and therapies'. The UK government estimates that over 15 million people live with chronic health conditions in the UK. There is [research](#) that shows that academics are more likely to under-report chronic illness due to the performance-driven environment of universities. Chronic illnesses can include mental as well as physical conditions. Many chronic illnesses are classed as disabilities and the University has a duty to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate colleagues' needs.

Colleagues may be concerned about the impact of chronic illness on their productivity, or because chronic illnesses are impacting on other areas of their health such as their mental health. Some colleagues may be struggling to receive a diagnosis due to long waiting times in the NHS, those who have a diagnosis may be struggling to process this and may have anxiety about how this will affect their work and/or finances.

We would like to normalise conversations around chronic illness, ableism in academia so please do reach out to the Director of Staff Development for support. We have committed to support for disability and provided training on hidden disabilities which are available on our EDI pages. While there is no obligation for colleagues to disclose chronic illnesses, it is important to remind colleagues that WLS aims to provide a supportive environment for people to talk about chronic health conditions and disabilities. The University's Social Inclusion Group has [resources on disability](#) and there is also a University [Disabled Staff Network](#).

For some colleagues, small practical changes may make a significant ability on their ability to work more effectively and to manage their condition more effectively. For instance, some colleagues may benefit from IT-related interventions which may not necessarily need a reasonable adjustment policy. Currently, our IT policy enables us to support colleagues who may need reasonable IT adaptations to do their jobs so please ask them to contact either the Director of Staff Development or the HOD who will be able to facilitate this.

Please remember that there is a legal obligation on employers to make reasonable adjustments to make sure that workers with chronic health conditions are not substantially disadvantaged when doing their jobs. Any chronic illness or disability may necessitate some reasonable adjustments being made so that they can do their job. The University recognises this duty and colleagues can apply for [My](#)

[Adjustment Passport](#) in order to enable the HOD of school make work place adjustments in order to support them with their roles.

The University is also part of the [Sunflower Hidden Disabilities](#) scheme which is a discreet way for individuals to make their invisible disability visible.

### **Further resources**

The [NHS](#) has a webpage on reasonable adjustments for workers with disabilities or health conditions.

[CIFSAUK](#) provides one to one and group support for people who live with chronic illnesses.

The Higher Education Policy Institute HEPI has a [particular perspective of the concerns of early career academics who may be experiencing chronic illness](#).

While there is a lot of advice on mental wellbeing for students, this [resource from MIND](#) specifically addresses staff needs.

This resource has some guidance for colleagues struggling with [chronic fatigue](#).

If colleagues are in constant pain, the website [flippingpain](#) has a lot of resources in managing and advocacy.

[Voices of academia](#) also has some excellent blog posts on living with chronic illness.