

Problems at Work

There are some common problems that can happen anytime, at work or at home, that may affect your ability to do your job. This may be due to the job itself, your relationship with your colleagues, or it may be that your personal circumstances are making it difficult for you to carry out your duties.

Discrimination, health problems and caring responsibilities can all affect your working life. Read on for more about issues that can happen and support available.

Bullying

Bullying at work is when someone tries to intimidate another worker, often in front of colleagues. It's usually, though not always, done to someone in a less senior position. It's similar to harassment, which is where someone's behaviour is offensive, for example, making sexual comments, or abusing someone's race, religion or sexual orientation.

Bullying includes abuse, physical or verbal violence, humiliation and undermining someone's confidence. You are probably being bullied if, for example, you're:

- constantly picked on
- humiliated in front of colleagues
- regularly unfairly treated
- physically or verbally abused
- blamed for problems caused by others
- always given too much to do, so that you regularly fail in your work
- regularly threatened with the sack
- unfairly passed over for promotion or denied training opportunities

If you think you're being bullied, it's best to talk it over with someone, because what seems like bullying might not be. For example, you might have more work to do because of a change in the way your organisation is run. If you find it difficult to cope, talk to your manager or supervisor, who might be as concerned as you are. Sometimes all it takes is a change in the way you work to give you time to adjust.

Employers have a 'duty of care' to their employees and this includes dealing with bullying at work. There are measures you can take if you're being bullied. Speak to someone about how you might deal with the problem informally. This might be via an employee representative like a trade union official, someone in the company's human resources department, or your manager or supervisor.

If you can't solve the problem informally, you should make a formal complaint. To do this you must follow your employer's grievance procedure, or if one doesn't exist you can use the statutory grievance procedure. See our section on [grievance procedures](#).

Caring responsibilities

A carer looks after someone who couldn't manage without your support. This could be a spouse, civil partner, child, parent, or a person who lives in the same household, looking after someone is unpredictable, and care arrangements can be complex, you should talk to your employer about your concerns, needs and commitments.

Employers can help carers in a variety of ways. They could allow you to work your contracted hours over less days known as compressed hours, have adaptable flexi-leave and emergency leave, have a carers passport or other scheme so managers know your carer needs, or help signpost to carer support.

Under the [Carers leave act 2023](#) employees have a right to a week's unpaid leave to support a person who relies on their care (known as a 'dependent').

- carers leave is flexible and you don't have to take it all in one go. You must take a minimum of half a working day at a time.
- you are required to give notice to your employer, your notice doesn't have to be in writing.
- notice must be twice the length of time off being asked for or three days in advance – whichever is the longest notice time.
- your carers leave cant be denied but it can be delayed if your employer's business will be 'unduly disrupted'.
- if your employer delays your leave they must explain this this to you with reasons in writing within 7 days.
- You must be allowed to take your leave no more than a month after it has been delayed.

There are other leave arrangements that your employer might be able to offer such as compassionate leave, borrowing or buying leave, or taking a career break.

[Carers Centre Newcastle](#) supports carers in Newcastle. They offer one-to-one carers support, information, carers groups, activities, events, and one-to-one sessions with expert helpers, including counsellors, welfare rights advisers and relaxation therapists. Use Carers Centre Newcastle when you need a listening ear, have questions but don't know who to ask, or to find out what support is available for carers in Newcastle and from whom.

[Carers Emergency Contact Scheme](#) is for adults, caring for adults. It's a free service, so the person you care for can be looked after if you have a personal crisis such as, an illness, accident or emergency. Your plan is kept safe and available in an emergency.

Read more on InformationNOW about: [Looking after someone](#), and [Carers Allowance](#).

Disabilities

If you are disabled or become disabled during your working life, your employer should not put pressure on you to resign. Dismissing someone simply because they become disabled is likely to be direct discrimination, which is unlawful. Your employer should consider whether there are changes that they could make at work to enable you to carry out your job. These are known as 'reasonable adjustments'. Reasonable adjustments may include things like:

- A phased return to work – perhaps working flexible hours or working part-time
- Time off for medical treatment or counselling
- Allocating some tasks to another employee that can no longer be done easily by you
- Providing practical aids and technical equipment for you

Businesses and organisations vary in structure and size, so what may be 'reasonable' for one may not be so for another. Depending on your disability, a return to the same role may not be appropriate.

An employer may be able to dismiss you if your disability means that it is impossible for you to carry out the main parts of your job, even if all reasonable adjustments were put in place, which may include considering whether you could carry out another suitable job.

You may also find it useful to read our sections on: [Flexible working](#), and [Disability rights](#).

Disciplinary and grievance procedures

A grievance procedure lets you make complaints to, or raise problems with, your employer. Disciplinary procedures can be used by employers to tell employees that their performance or conduct isn't up to the expected standard and to encourage improvement.

Grievances

Problems you might want to raise with your employer could include:

- Your terms of employment
- Pay and working conditions
- Disagreements with co-workers
- Discrimination
- Not getting your statutory employment rights

A grievance procedure is one of the ways to resolve a problem at work. However, you might try talking with your employer informally before using the formal grievance procedure, to see if that helps. Your employer may have their own procedure. If so, you should follow this if you can. Check your contract of employment or company handbook for more details. See the [Citizens Advice Work Section](#) for detailed information about dealing with grievances at work.

Disciplinary Action

A disciplinary procedure is sometimes the best way for your employer to tell you when something is wrong. It allows them to explain clearly what improvement is needed and should give you an opportunity to put your side of the situation. Your employer must put their disciplinary procedure in

writing, and make it easily available to you (for example, by giving details in the staff handbook). It should include the rules, what performance and behaviour might lead to disciplinary action, and what action your employer might take. See [Citizens Advice Work Section](#) for detailed information about dealing with disciplinary action at work.

See [Where to get advice](#) for organisations that can offer help and advice if you are dealing with a grievance or disciplinary procedure at work.

Discrimination

Discrimination happens when an employer treats one employee less favourably than others. There are specific laws against some types of discrimination (called 'unlawful discrimination'). If your employer treats you less favourably for an unlawful reason, you may be able to take action. There are laws against discrimination for many reasons including:

- Age
- Gender
- Disability
- Race
- Religion or beliefs

Types of Discrimination

Legislation protects employees from discrimination of different types.

- **Direct discrimination** – happens when an employer treats an employee less favourably because of, for example, their gender or age.
- **Indirect discrimination** – is when a condition that disadvantages one group of people more than another is applied to a job. For example, saying that applicants for a job must be clean-shaven puts members of some religious groups at a disadvantage. However, the law does allow employers to discriminate indirectly if they can show a good reason for having the condition. For example, the condition that applicants must be clean-shaven might be justified if the job involved handling food and it could be shown that having a beard or moustache was a genuine hygiene risk.
- **Harassment** – means offensive or intimidating behaviour – sexist language or racial abuse, for example, which aims to humiliate, undermine or injure its target.
- **Victimisation** – means treating somebody less favourably than others because they tried to make a discrimination complaint.

You will find more detailed information about discrimination in our sections on: [Age discrimination](#), [Racial discrimination](#), and [Disability rights](#).

There are several organisations that can help you if you are experiencing discrimination at work. Please see the related organisations on the right hand side of the page.

Health Problems

As you get older, you may find that health problems or disability begin to affect your ability to work in the same way. It may be that your job is causing you health problems, either physically or mentally. It is always a good idea to speak to your employer about this, as they may be able to make adjustments to your job to make things easier for you.

Employers have responsibilities towards their employees and this includes managing both planned and unplanned sick leave, and helping their staff plan a return to work. If you take time off, try to keep in touch with your employer during the time you are away from work. If you are an employee and unable to work because you're ill, you may be able to get Statutory Sick Pay (SSP). Some employers have their own sick pay scheme instead. If you're still unable to work after 28 weeks, you can apply for [**Employment and Support Allowance**](#).

The 'fit note' was introduced in place of the doctor's sick note in 2010. With your employer's and GPs support, the note will help you return to work sooner by providing more information about the effects of your illness or injury. For further information visit [**www.gov.uk**](http://www.gov.uk)

[**Fit for Work**](#) can give you advice on all work related health matters. They provide a telephone and online advice service and can refer you to occupational therapists.

If you're ill or disabled because of an accident at work or a work related activity, you may be able to claim Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit. [**Industrial injuries disablement benefit**](#).

Where to get advice

There are local organisations that can help you if you are having problems at work.

[**Citizens Advice Newcastle \(CAN\)**](#) can give you free, confidential, impartial and independent advice and information on a wide range of subjects including employment problems.

[**North East Law Centre**](#) give free legal advice on a range of issues including employment law and discrimination

[**Northumbria University Student Law Office**](#) is a legal advice centre, where law students deal with cases under the supervision of qualified lawyers. They can offer free independent, confidential advice and representation in many areas of law, including employment. Please note that the Student Law Office can only take on cases during the academic year, which is from October to May. Outside of these times, the students are away and they have limited cover. Also, they can't guarantee to be able to take on all cases.

[**Newcastle & Gateshead Centre Against Unemployment – TUC**](#) are a trade union based centre. Volunteers provides advice on a wide range of subjects including welfare rights (tribunal representation), employment, industrial benefits (redundancy counselling service) and asylum rights advice.

[**USDAW**](#) is one of Britain's largest trade unions and recruit, organise and represent workers in the retail, distributive, manufacturing and service sectors, securing the best possible terms and conditions and providing support and protection at work.

[**UNISON**](#) is a trade union for people working in public service. They offer representation and support for you in the work place.

ACAS North East aims to improve organisations and working life through better employment relations. They provide up-to-date information, independent advice, high quality training, and work with employers and employees to solve problems and improve performance. They also offer an online helpline with 24 hour free advice and guidance on rights at work and employment law

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is not acceptable. It can involve: unwanted sexual comments, gestures, attention, comments about your appearance. It can be carried out by a stranger, by a work colleague, or by someone you know. It can be both in person and online.

Victim Support offers support to people who have been sexually harassed.

Rights of women give free legal advice and information to women on legal issues including: sexual violence, the criminal justice process and sexual harassment at work. They have 4 free telephone helplines.

SafeToSay provides information, resources and training on sexual harassment and how to deal with it.

Read more about your **[Personal Safety and support available on InformationNOW](#)**

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Useful Organisations

Newcastle Carers

Email: info@newcastlecarers.org.uk

Website: www.newcastlecarers.org.uk

Telephone: 0191 275 5060

Address: 135-139 Shields Road, NE6 1DN

Citizens Advice Newcastle (CAN)

Email: citycab@newcastlecab.org.uk

Website: <http://citizensadvice-newcastle.org.uk>

Telephone: 0808 278 7823

Address: 4th Floor, City Library, NE1 8AX

ACAS North East

Website: www.acas.org.uk

Telephone: 0808 278 7823

Address: Acas - Newcastle City Council, NE1 8QH

Northumbria University Student Law Office

Email: la.studentlawoffice@northumbria.ac.uk

Website: <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/academic-departments/northumbria-law-school/study/student-law-office/>

Telephone: 0191 227 3909

Address: Northumbria University, NE1 8ST

Civil Legal Advice

Website: <https://www.gov.uk/civil-legal-advice>

Telephone: 0191 227 3909

Citizens Advice

Website: www.adviceguide.org.uk

Telephone: 0808 223 1133

Address: Citizens Advice, EC1A 4HD

GOV.UK

Website: www.gov.uk

Telephone: 0808 223 1133

Tyne & Wear Centre Against Unemployment

Email: enquiries.twcau@gmail.com

Telephone: 0191 4772262

Address: 11 Interchange Centre, NE8 1BH

Unison

Website: <https://www.unison.org.uk/>

Telephone: 0800 0 857 857

Usdaw

Email: Newcastle@usdaw.org.uk

Website: <https://www.usdaw.org.uk/>

Telephone: 0191 296 5333

Address: 2 Hedley Court, , NE29 7ST

Safe To Say

Website: <https://www.safetosay.wales/>

Telephone: 0191 296 5333

Rights of women

Email: info@row.org.uk

Website: <https://rightsofwomen.org.uk/>

Telephone: 020 7251 6577

Address: 52-54 Featherstone Street, EC1Y 8RT

Carers Emergency Contact Scheme Newcastle

Email: Carerscard_Northeast@redcross.org.uk

Telephone: 0191 273 7961

Address: British Red Cross, NE4 8SR

North East Law Centre

Email: reception@nelawcentre.co.uk

Website: www.nelawcentre.co.uk

Telephone: 0191 230 4777

Address: 2nd Floor, 10 - 13 Saville Row, NE1 8JE

Victim Support

Website: victimsupport.org.uk

Telephone: 0808 16 89 111

Related Articles

[Jobseeker's Allowance \(JSA\)](#)

[Age discrimination](#)

[Disability Rights](#)

[Racial Discrimination](#)

[Where to get legal advice](#)

[Looking for a job or work](#)

[Redundancy](#)

[Flexible working](#)

[Starting your own business or self employment](#)

[Employment and Support Allowance \(ESA\)](#)

[Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit](#)