

Problems at Work

There are some common problems that can happen, at work or at home, that makes it difficult for you to carry out your duties. This may be because of your job, your relationship with your colleagues, or it may be your personal circumstances.

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 you trust. Talk about what's happening and how you feel. This can help to put the situation in perspective. For example, has there been a change to the way your organisation is run? Has your workload increased? If this doesn't help, talk to your manager or supervisor. They may be able to help to deal with any problems informally.

Your employer has a 'duty of care' to look after their employees. This includes dealing with bullying at work. If the problem doesn't improve, you can speak to your Human Resources (HR) department. If you are a member of a Trade Union, you can contact them for help.

If you can't solve the problem informally, you can make a formal complaint. To do this you must follow your employer's grievance procedure. You can use statutory grievance procedure, if your employer doesn't have a procedure in place. Read more below on grievance procedures.

Caring responsibilities

If you look after someone who couldn't manage without your support and don't get paid for this, you are a carer. The person you care for may be older, disabled, have mental ill health or drug/alcohol problems.

This could be a spouse, civil partner, child, parent, friend, neighbour or a person who lives in the same house as you. Looking after someone is unpredictable. Care arrangements can be complicated. Talk to your employer about your caring role. Make them aware of your caring commitments, so they can understand your situation better.

Employers can help and support carers in their workforce (who work for them). Your employer may have a policy which explains the type of support you can ask for. For example, your employer could allow you to work your contracted hours over less days. This is known as compressed hours. They may allow you to take time off if you need it in an emergency. They may have a flexi-leave system in place, so you can work shorter or longer days when you need to. They may have a way of sharing information with managers so they understand your needs. They may also signpost you to carer support such as [Newcastle Carers](#).

Read more on InformationNOW about [Top tips for supporting carers in the workplace](#)

Carers Leave

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

- Carers leave is flexible. 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 must give notice to your employer before the start of your leave. This doesn't have to be in writing.
- You do not have to give your employer evidence of your dependants care needs
- Notice must be twice the length of time off being asked for or three days in advance – whichever is the longest.
- Carers leave can't be refused but it can be delayed if your absence would cause serious disruption to your employer
- If your employer delays your leave they must explain this to you, in writing within 7 days of your request or before the leave starts, whichever is the earlier.
- 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.

To find out if you can take these types of leave you should check

- With your employer
- What's written in your contract
- What your organisations policy says, if there is one

Grievance procedures

A grievance procedure is one of the formal ways to resolve problems at work. You can try to resolve the problems informally first by talking to your employer. A grievance procedure lets you make complaints to, or raise problems with, your employer. For example, problems could include:

- your terms of employment
- pay and working conditions
- disagreements with co-workers
- discrimination
- not getting your statutory employment rights

Your employer may have their own grievance procedure. If so, you should follow this if you can. Check your contract of employment or company policies for more details. [Citizens Advice has more information about Work and employment.](#)

Disciplinary procedures

Disciplinary procedures can be used by employers to tell employees that their performance or conduct isn't up to the expected standard. This can be used to help you to improve your performance at work.

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 or policy in writing, and make it easily available to you. It should explain: the performance or behaviour that will lead to disciplinary action and what action your employer might take.

[Citizens Advice has more information about Work and employment.](#)

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 at work is when an employer treats one employee less favourably than others. [The Equality Act \(2010\)](#) protects your rights as . This includes your employment, education, and your access to goods, services and facilities. It is unlawful for you to be discriminated against because you have of a personal characteristic such as your:

- [Age](#)
- Gender
- [Disability](#)

- [Race](#)
- Religion or beliefs

There are 4 types of discrimination

- **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.

Help and advice is available if you feel that you have been discriminated at work.

Disabilities

If you are disabled or become disabled during your working life, your employer should consider if there are changes that they could make at work to enable you to carry out your job. These are known as reasonable adjustments. The type of adjustment that is possible for your organisation to make will depend on the type of service you work for. The adjustments available will also depend on what kind of change you need. They may include things like:

- a phased return to work, such as working flexible or part time hours
- time off for medical treatment or counselling
- giving some work tasks to another employee if they can no longer be done easily by you
- providing practical aids, equipment or an assistant for you
- offering you a different role in the organisation that is more suited to you

In some situations it may not be possible to continue in your role at work. 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. 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.

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

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.

[**The Equality Advisory and Support Service \(EASS\)**](#) can support you if you think you may have experienced discrimination. They have a free telephone helpline where they give information and advice on discrimination and human rights issues. They can help to explain the Equality Act and how this applies to you. They can give you information and advice to help you understand how the issue could be resolved informally. They will work with you to decide the best course of action to take to resolve your issue. They do not provide legal 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

[Read more on where to get legal advice on InformationNOW](#)

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 223 1133

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

ACAS North East

Website: www.acas.org.uk

Telephone: 0808 223 1133

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

Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS)

Website: www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

Telephone: 0808 16 89 111

Related Articles

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

[Age discrimination and ageing well](#)

[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](#)