

Usdaw

Campaigning
For Equality

Parents and Carers Looking After Grandchildren?



An advice leaflet
for Usdaw Members



Many grandparents are juggling work with looking after grandchildren, enabling more parents, especially mothers, to go out to work.

Recent Usdaw research confirms that balancing paid work with caring for grandchildren is a priority issue for members aged 50 plus. It also affects around one-fifth of Usdaw members aged under 50.

Despite the vital role grandparents play providing much needed informal childcare for grandchildren their contribution is all too often overlooked by policy makers and Government.

Not only is there a clear need to increase the availability and affordability of formal childcare to ease the pressure on grandparents but grandparents need better rights at work.

Usdaw is campaigning for better support for grandparents to make it easier for them to balance paid work with caring for grandchildren.

Key statistics

- There are 14 million grandparents in the UK, of whom around half are under the age of 65.
- Almost half of children aged under five whose mother is in work are looked after by grandparents.
- Grandparents provide more than 1.7 billion hours of childcare each year.
- The value of the grandparental childcare contribution has been estimated at £3.9 billion.
- 2.2 million grandparents who look after their grandchildren do so to allow the child's parents to work.
- 1.9 million grandparents have reduced their hours of work, given up a job, or taken time off work to care for a grandchild.
- Of working grandparents who have never taken time off work to care for grandchildren under 16, around one in 10 have not been able to do so because they have either been refused time off by their employer, or simply felt that they weren't able to ask.

The experience of Usdaw members

In recent years how the Union can better support members who are juggling paid work with caring for grandchildren has emerged as a key issue and will undoubtedly remain a priority as growing numbers of Usdaw members are working beyond State Pension Age. In many cases this is because members can't afford to retire when they want to. Sometimes it's because members make a positive choice to carry on working.

To find out more about the pressures grandparents are under Usdaw conducted its own survey. The key findings are below:

Usdaw's Older Workers Survey

- Over a third of Usdaw members are aged over 50, more than two and half times the number of members aged under 24.
- There are almost twice as many women members aged 50 plus than there are men.



- Half of men and almost two thirds of women members in this age group are planning to work beyond State Pension Age. Three quarters of women compared to less than two thirds of men identify financial reasons as the most influential factor in reaching this decision. Only 5% said that financial considerations had nothing at all to do with their decision.
- Half of all women and over a quarter of men are looking after grandchildren.

What this tells us is that just as parents might need to change their hours of work to enable them to better balance paid work with childcare commitments, so too do grandparents.

However members who care for their grandchildren find it difficult to get their caring commitments taken seriously by employers. They have told us that managers and colleagues often overlook their caring role, view it as unimportant or as something that 'doesn't really count' as the caring arrangement is more often than not a voluntary one.

One woman said on her survey form:

"I have my grandchildren to stay for three, sometimes four nights a week. I do not have parental rights (do they look after themselves?). When I was told my hours of work would be changing I was told my caring responsibilities were my own choice and had nothing to do with work. Also having not worked Mondays for 10 years to be asked to change from Friday to a Monday is impossible due to grandchildren and other commitments. At the moment I have no choice but to reduce my hours which I simply cannot afford."

Another member told us that she has recently started working a night shift so that in the day she can look after her grandchildren so her daughter can go out to work. She tries to have a nap in the daytime when the grandchildren sleep.

Usdaw believes it is about time that the important contribution grandparents make, both to their families and to the wider economy by providing childcare, should be recognised and supported by the Government, employers and policy makers.

Rights at work

The rights grandparents have at work to take time off to spend time caring for grandchildren or to rearrange their working hours to fit around their caring commitments are very limited. Grandparents who have legal parental responsibility (for example, who have a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order) have more rights than grandparents who are providing care informally.

Time off in an emergency

All employees have the right to take a reasonable amount of **unpaid** time off to make care arrangements for someone who 'depends' on them. This is known as the 'right to time off for dependants'.

The definition of who the law considers 'a dependant' is complex and more commonly covers grandparents who live in the same household as their grandchild(ren) than those that don't.

If you do live in the same household as your grandchild(ren) and you need to take time off in an emergency because your grandchild is injured or ill or because the usual care arrangements for them break down then you should be entitled to 'time off for dependants'.

Even if you do not live in the same household as your grandchild(ren) you should be able to take a reasonable amount of **unpaid** leave if **you are the only person** who is available to help in any one of the following specific circumstances:

- a) Where your grandchild falls ill or is injured or assaulted; and/or
- b) To make alternative care arrangements in the event your grandchild is ill or assaulted; and/or
- c) To make alternative care arrangements where existing ones (such as being looked after at school or nursery) are unexpectedly disrupted.

The law says that you have the right to a reasonable amount of unpaid time off to deal with the emergency and to make alternative care arrangements. What is considered reasonable will depend upon the particular circumstances of your case.

For more information see Usdaw's leaflet *Time off for family emergencies* (Leaflet 349) available to download from the website at www.usdaw.org.uk or by contacting your local Usdaw office. For advice contact your Usdaw rep or your local Usdaw office by calling 0800 030 80 30.



The right to request flexible working

Anyone who has worked in the same job for 26 weeks or more can submit a formal written request to their employer to ask for a change in their working arrangements. You can ask your employer for different hours of work or you can ask to change the days you work, or to change where the work is done.

It is important to bear in mind that the law only gives you the right to ask for a change in your working arrangements – you cannot insist. Your employer must seriously consider your request and can only refuse where there are clear business reasons for doing so.

They should usually make a decision within three months of the request. Whilst the legislation does not compel an employer to allow an internal appeal process, the ACAS code of practice on handling requests in a reasonable manner, encourages employers to do so.

It is important to understand that a change granted under the right to request flexible working is permanent, so consider the future implications carefully.

Any reduction in hours may have an impact on benefits such as Working Tax Credit, so you may need to get advice about this before making any decisions. If you only want a temporary change this has to be negotiated with your employer.

Unfortunately agency workers are excluded from this right but this doesn't stop them from asking for a change in their working hours. They can ask for the change but they are excluded from submitting a formal request under the 'Right to Request Flexible Working' regulations.

For more information see Usdaw's leaflet *Flexible Working – Your right to have a say in the hours you work* (Leaflet 346) available to download from the website at www.usdaw.org.uk, or by contacting your local Usdaw office. For advice contact your Usdaw rep or your local Usdaw office by calling 0800 030 80 30

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Unpaid Parental Leave

Parents who have worked for the same employer for one year and have a child under the age of 18 years old are entitled to take up to 18 weeks unpaid leave for each child.

Unfortunately, most grandparents are excluded from this right. Only grandparents who have legal parental responsibility for the child (for example, who have a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order) have the right to take unpaid parental leave. Even then, this type of leave may not start when the grandparent needs it most as it takes time – sometimes many months – to take legal advice and apply to Court for such orders. Foster carers are not entitled to parental leave, because they do not have legal parental responsibility for the children.

For more information about unpaid parental leave see Usdaw's leaflet *Working Parents – Know your rights* (Leaflet 381) available to download from the website at www.usdaw.org.uk, or by contacting your local Usdaw office. For advice contact your Usdaw rep or your local Usdaw office by calling 0800 030 80 30

The Government has said that it intends to extend the right to shared parental leave and pay (currently only available to parents) to grandparents by 2018. A consultation on the extension was expected in May 2016, but has yet to be published.





Support Groups

Grandparents Plus

Grandparents Plus is a national charity offering advice, information and support to grandparents who are looking after a relative's child or are thinking of doing so.

They also run a helpline for grandparents who have lost, or are losing, contact with their grandchildren.

Family and Friends Advice Line

for those looking after a relative's child:
0300 123 7015

(The helpline is open between 10am and 3pm Monday to Friday).

Grandparent Contact Helpline

for those who've lost contact with a grandchild: 0300 033 7015

(The helpline is open on Mondays and Fridays only between 2pm and 4pm).

Web: grandparentsplus.org.uk/advice
email: advice@grandparentsplus.org.uk

Age UK

Age UK is a national charity providing services and support at a national and local level to inspire, enable and support older people.

Advice line: 0800 678 1174

Web: www.ageuk.org.uk

Carers UK

A national charity giving expert advice, support and information to people caring for someone.

Advice line: 0808 808 7777

Web: www.carersuk.org

Usdaw Contacts

To find out more about the work of the Divisional Equalities Forums and Usdaw's equality work or about joining Usdaw contact:

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Improving workers' lives –
Winning for members
www.usdaw.org.uk/equalities

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