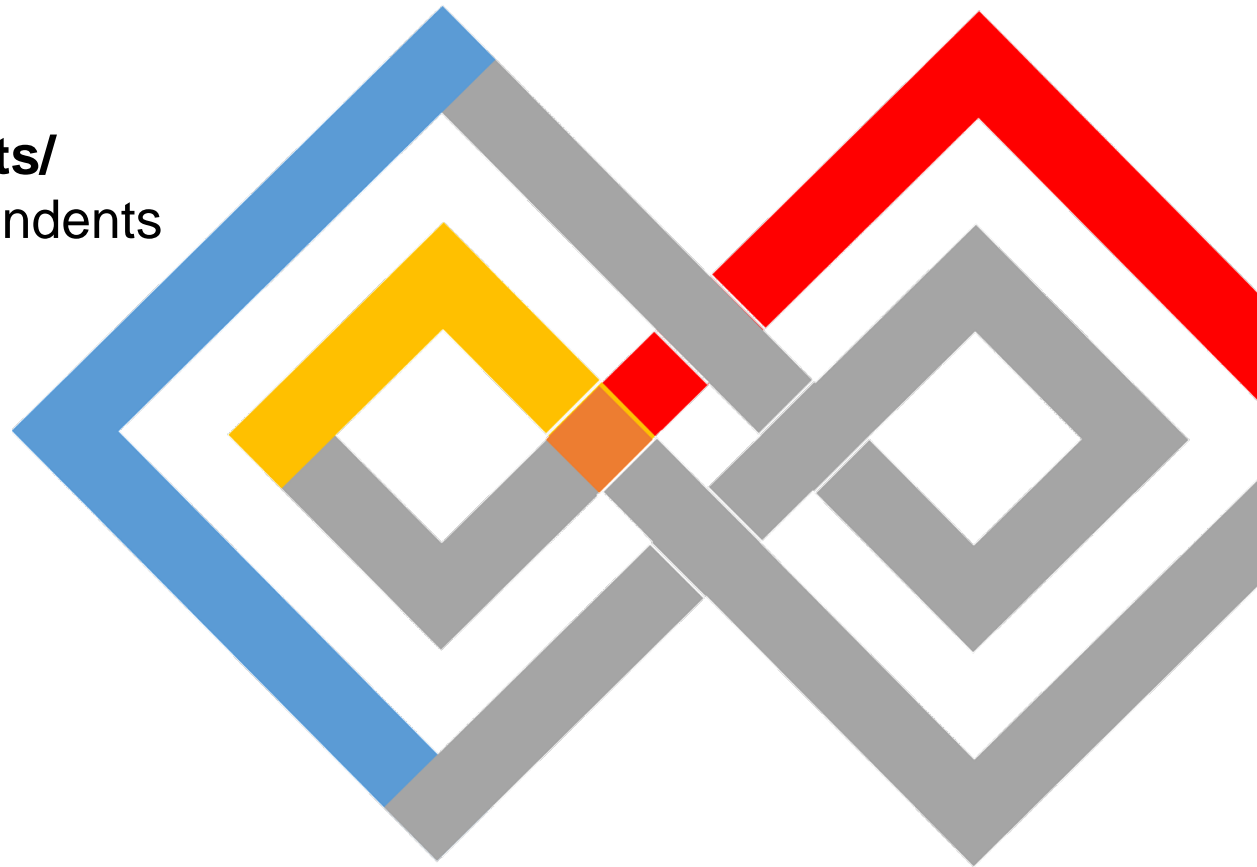


THE LEGAL NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK.

Suggestions for legal services
employers: **supporting parents/
carers** of neurodivergent dependents





FOREWORD

This report presents some suggestions from the [Legal Neurodiversity Network \(LNN\)](#) for how legal services employers can best support partners and employees who are parents/carers of neurodivergent dependents (henceforth referred to by the short-hand “parents/carers”). This is a collaborative document reflecting discussions at a LNN roundtable event hosted by Freshfields on 17 October 2024, as well as other discussions between LNN members and various neurodiversity stakeholders. Whilst directed towards neuro-inclusivity, many of the recommendations might also be seen as good practice to enable *all* carers working in our organisations (and indeed those in other sectors) to feel supported and perform at their best.

A carer is defined by the Carers Trust as “anyone who cares, unpaid, for a friend or family member who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support.”











At the LNN, we believe that supporting parents/carers with challenges they may face – challenges that we briefly explain in the following pages – is an integral part of a more holistic neurodiversity and wider diversity and inclusion strategy, for the Law in general, and the individual employer organisations that make up its eco-system.

Starting from a viewpoint that parents/carers have a huge amount to offer their organisations, including being some of the most fervent allies and advocates for neuro-inclusion, this report opens with our general suggestions to work towards creating workspaces that are as supportive as possible for this group. As with all demographic groups within a workplace, it remains the case that the experience, and associated strengths and needs, of any parent/carer individual are unique. Good practices take that into account and are not “one size fits all”, in other words. We hope this report is a good starting point to begin to make some positive changes, whatever the size and nature of your business. If you have any feedback or would like to share your own experience, we would be grateful to hear it so please do get in touch via our [LinkedIn page](#).

How can employers help parents/carers?

Some 'easy wins' suggestions to get started

***Note:** while this publication is focused on supporting partners and colleagues with caring responsibilities for neurodivergent dependents, many of these ideas should also support others with different caring roles*

- | | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
|  <p>1</p> | <p>Elevate general awareness about parents/carers and the unique challenges they encounter across the organisation as part of an integrated D&I strategy</p> |  | <p>Ideally this should centre lived experience of colleagues, including senior leaders (role models), where they are comfortable sharing their stories</p> |
|  <p>2</p> | <p>Embed inclusive career development and performance management frameworks that make full space for retaining and advancing talented individuals whose working patterns may be atypical</p> |  | <p>Both empirical metrics and subjective evaluation should not penalise parent/carer individuals for aspects like reduced working hours / flexible working patterns and limited capability to participate in extra-curricular activities</p> |
|  <p>3</p> | <p>Create and sustain “safe spaces” (such as networks or support groups) in which parents/carers can meet and provide mutual support/advice</p> |  | <p>Some (typically smaller) organisations might have a single neurodiversity community bringing together parents/carers and individuals with lived experiences; others offer both groups separate as well as combined meeting spaces</p> |
|  <p>4</p> | <p>Ensure general employee (and, where separate, partner) mental health and well-being support is robust, highly visible/accessible – and informed by suitable neurodiversity expertise</p> |  | <p>Both internal resources (e.g. mental health first-aiders / champions) and outsourced providers (e.g. employee assistance helplines) should have appropriate levels of expertise on neurodiversity and parent/carer subject matter</p> |
|  <p>5</p> | <p>Sign-post external resources and sources of assistance available to parents/carers both locally (where available) and nationally/ online</p> |  | <p>This could encompass anything from local WhatsApp and meet-up groups to specialist charities that support parents/carers to online resource and advice portals; some employers have a ‘carers champion’ to assist in this area</p> |

How can employers help parents/carers?

Further suggestions to take support to the next level

Note: while this publication is focused on supporting partners and colleagues with caring responsibilities for neurodivergent dependents, many of these ideas should also support others with different caring roles

- | | | | |
|--|--|------------|--|
| <div style="background-color: #007bff; color: white; width: 60px; height: 60px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin: 10px 0; border-radius: 50%;">6</div> | <p>Go beyond statutory minimums* to offer an annual allocation of paid carer's leave</p> | <p>...</p> | <p>We are delighted to see that several solicitor firms have over the past year announced five-day allocations of <i>paid</i> carer's leave, going beyond the UK statutory five-day minimum of unpaid leave*</p> |
| <div style="background-color: #007bff; color: white; width: 60px; height: 60px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin: 10px 0; border-radius: 50%;">7</div> | <p>Truly commit to flexible working arrangements that fully support parents/carers' needs (for example, to attend key meetings and appointments for their dependents during primary working hours)</p> | <p>...</p> | <p>An additional consideration here is providing team-building social and training events that include rather than exclude parents/carers: during rather than after-hours, and delivered in hybrid format where feasible</p> |
| <div style="background-color: #007bff; color: white; width: 60px; height: 60px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin: 10px 0; border-radius: 50%;">8</div> | <p>Provide or subsidise access for parents/carers to specialist back-up and respite care and/or to school vacation camps/childcare programmes that fully accommodate neurodivergent and disabled children</p> | <p>...</p> | <p>Securing suitably SEN- (special educational needs)-supportive childcare, in particular in an emergency and during school vacation periods, is another challenge for working parents/carers</p> |
| <div style="background-color: #007bff; color: white; width: 60px; height: 60px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin: 10px 0; border-radius: 50%;">9</div> | <p>Include options for parents/carers in employee benefits: in particular, private health insurance that includes rather than excludes access to neurodiversity diagnosis, therapeutic, coaching and counselling services</p> | <p>...</p> | <p>Several solicitor firms have created neurodiversity diagnosis pathways recently. Other ideas here include access to specialist estate-planning services and access to expert neurodiverse family and/or relationship counselling support</p> |
| <div style="background-color: #007bff; color: white; width: 60px; height: 60px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin: 10px 0; border-radius: 50%;">10</div> | <p>Offer both legal and non-legal colleagues the opportunity to participate in pro-bono and volunteering activity in support of neurodiversity and carer-focused charities</p> | <p>...</p> | <p><i>Examples:</i> supporting families (and charities engaged in supporting parents/carers) mounting legal challenges to education provision decisions by local authorities; advocacy for neurodiverse families engaged in the asylum process</p> |

Background (1)

Understanding the broader carer population

Carers are not a niche population

According to the most recent UK census (2021), there are at least **2.8 million working carers** in England, Scotland and Wales. One estimate from the charity Carers UK is that carers represent **11%** of the total UK workforce and that as many as **1 in 7 employees** juggle work and care-giving responsibilities.

Anyone can become a carer at any time

It's estimated on average over **5,000 people** join the carer population every day, and over **2 million** every year – numbers that are increasing with the UK's ageing population. Sadly, an average of **600 people** every day leave their jobs due to these caring responsibilities.

Not everyone who provides care recognises themselves as a carer

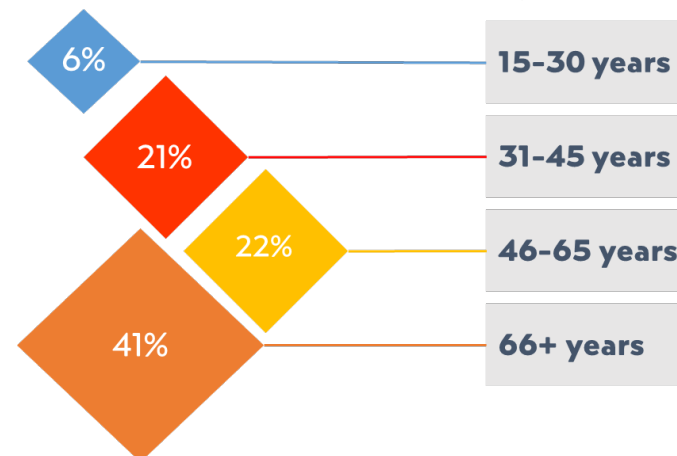
More than half (**51%**) of all new carers took over a year to recognise their role; over a third (**36%**) took over three years to recognise it.

Caring can be equivalent to another full-time job

28% of carers who work full-time also provide **at least 30 hours of care per week**. **44%** of working carers report they find it difficult to combine their paid employment and caring obligations.

It's not just parents

There are many other types of carers such as grandparents, sons/daughters, siblings, guardians and those who know they will be carers in the future. Anyone legally classed as an employee can take time off to help a dependent who needs long-term care.



Graphic: Age profile of people becoming carers in the UK, 2010-2020

Background (2)

Challenges our parents/carers face

CONTEXT

A memorable phrase used by a parent/carer at our event with neurodivergent offspring was “we would like empathy, not sympathy”. This is an important point to underline: parent/carers don’t generally view their lives as tragic. They are fiercely proud of their unique, amazing children (or other dependents), and take great pride in their accomplishments. Their frustration is focused on the challenges in accessing and sustaining the optimal education, health and social care system support these dependents need and deserve – hurdles that can be especially difficult to navigate at the same time as pursuing a busy legal career. That this frustration exists is regrettable, but undeniable – and it is because it is real that we feel it is important to list out how some of these issues manifest, in order to contextualise our recommendations for how employers can aim to support parent/carers living that reality.

SOME KEY AREAS OF CHALLENGE

A

General **change in parental hopes and expectations** / finding an identity outside of a parent/carer ‘box’ (especially where career compromises have been made), which can be exacerbated when parents of neurotypical children make assumptions or ill-judged comments

“

Parents in our situation often talk about cycling through the stages of grief. It’s not grief about who your child is, obviously, but about the challenges they’re going to face in a world not designed for them. There is definitely a case of readjusting your assumptions about what your life is going to look like that goes along with that... and your self-image.

LNN parent/carer member

B

Stress and anxiety related to **struggles accessing appropriate diagnostic, therapeutic, medical and educational support and resources** for dependents and with knowing their current arrangements may be inadequate – delays, medication shortages, lack of funding and capacity, non-existent or over-stretched resources, and the need for constant effort and advocacy (time) to overcome associated obstacles



- As of March 2025, only **4.5%** of NHS England patients with an open autism assessment referral had a first appointment within the recommended 13-weeks period
- Around **two-thirds** of special schools in the UK are full or over capacity
- As at January 2024, the average vacancy rate for children’s speech and language therapy services in England was **20%**

Background (2)

Challenges our carers face (contd.)

C

Physical and emotional challenges such as disrupted sleep; dependents' issues with toileting, and/or a restricted diet, and/or violent and challenging behaviours; dependents with co-occurring health conditions (e.g. epilepsy); school refusal; associated limited time for self-care/fitness and mindfulness

“

My child's autism profile includes struggles with extremely elevated anxiety that sometimes overflows. I've had to develop a range of excuses to explain away questions from concerned colleagues about visible injuries to my face or hands that can be an outcome of this. The imaginary rose bush in my garden is often an easier explanation than the truth.

LNN parent/carer member

D

Financial concerns stemming from a combination of low disability and carer benefits, the need for many carers to work reduced or no hours, and the direct and rising costs of care (including but not limited to: transport, therapy/care, medication, additional comestibles and supplements, disability-related equipment, devices and home adjustments, breakages and damage, etc.)



- **60%** of carers worry about the impact of caring responsibilities on their finances
- **68%** of carers worry about their ability to save and plan for the future
- **55%** of carers have to dip into their savings to cover costs of care
- **47%** of carers cut back on seeing friends and family and **58%** cut back on hobbies and leisure activities to save money

E

Worries about the future, including care provision post-education; dependents' prospects accessing work; their safeguarding and financial security following incapacity or death of primary care-givers

“

One thing that keeps me up at night is thinking about my son's future. He has no brothers or sisters, or cousins either. Who is going to look after him when his Mum and Dad no longer can? The statistics around vulnerability to fraud and criminality, isolation, and suicide for neurodivergent young adults are terrifying.

LNN parent/carer member

Background (2)

Challenges our carers face (contd.)

F

Relationship pressures: both in co-parenting and single-parent settings; ability to sustain friendships and dealing with loneliness and sense of social isolation; consideration for neurotypical siblings and other household members



- **83%** of carers have felt lonely or socially isolated because of their caring responsibilities
- **57%** of carers have lost touch with friends and family because of caring commitments
- **49%** of carers say they have experienced difficulties in their relationship with their partner because of their caring role
- Surveys show the rate of divorce in families with a child with disabilities may be as high as **87%**

G

Cumulative strains of any or all of these factors on personal **physical and mental health and resilience**, especially in the context of a high-pressure legal career. This includes the phenomenon of 'parental blame' leading to self-recrimination for misdiagnosis, not "spotting signs" or "bad parenting" from various healthcare professionals experienced along the journey



77% of carers working in the legal profession report negative impacts on their **mental health**



70% of carers working in the legal profession report negative impacts on their **physical health**



73% of legal sector carers say that they continue to provide care even though they feel they are "near breaking point"

H

Wondering about **one's own possible neurodivergence**, whether to pursue an assessment to this effect and – if followed through – what to do with the outcome

“

The more you talk to professionals about your child's presentation, the more you realise that you were very similar as a kid... and that this is possibly why it never occurred to you that this behaviour was atypical. Many of us eventually come to the realisation: this must have come from somewhere, and that somewhere could be me!

LNN parent/carer member

Conclusion:

Supporting parent/carers is 'win-win'

Supporting parent/carers isn't just the right thing to do morally: it's a strategic imperative. Failing to accommodate parent/carers leads to avoidable loss of talent, expertise, and productivity. Many parent/carers, disproportionately women, are forced to reduce hours, downgrade roles, or exit the profession entirely, undermining gender diversity and slowing progress toward inclusion targets. With proactive support, organisations can retain skilled professionals, reduce stress-related absences and burnout, and build more diverse, resilient, and innovative teams. Investing in this support now means fewer recruitment and training costs later with stronger performance, improved staff engagement, and faster progress on gender and wider inclusivity goals: strengthening both reputation and resilience in a competitive market.



- 01.** Resilience and tenacity
- 02.** Time management and task prioritisation
- 03.** Research and problem-solving
- 04.** Patience, empathy and compassion
- 06.** Multi-tasking, organisation and attention to detail
- 05.** Communication and advocacy
- 07.** Crisis management

Sources and further information

Reference documents and organisations consulted for data and statistics cited:

- Carers Trust - [Caring as an Unpaid Carer](#)
- Carers UK - [Key facts and figures](#)
- Carers UK - [State of Caring annual surveys](#)
- [Autism Waiting Time Statistics - NHS England](#) (May 2025);
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- [RCSLT vacancy update](#) (January 2024)
- ONS UK census data on carers - [Unpaid care and protected characteristics, England and Wales](#)
- LawCare et al. report (June 2024): [Mind the caring gap](#)
- CIPD carer study (June 2021): [Supporting working carers: how employers and employees can benefit](#)
- ACAS summary of Carers Leave entitlement: <https://www.acas.org.uk/carers-leave>
- Centrica case study – [Supporting carers in the workplace](#)
- Prime Carers article - [Care Support Groups: How to Build a Support Network](#)
- Support SEND kids Charity - [Support SEND kids | Home](#)
- Contact – for families with disabled children - [Contact: the charity for families with disabled children](#)

About the Legal Neurodiversity Network

- The Legal Neurodiversity Network (LNN) was launched in March 2023. We are an unfunded and entirely volunteer-run collaborative initiative; we are proud to be supported in our work by the Law Society of England and Wales and the Law Society of Scotland.
- Our **purpose** is to help the UK legal services sector become truly neuro-inclusive by identifying, sharing and encouraging good practices and by forging connections between employers, individuals and other organisations in the UK legal 'eco-system' who share our commitment. This includes organising thought leadership publications (like this one), advocacy and events, and also hosting community-building social events – something we have so far done in London, Birmingham, Leeds, Edinburgh and Bristol.
- Our **focus** is equally on encouraging organisations in the sector – including solicitors firms, barristers chambers and the in-house legal departments of commercial and non-profit organisations – to prioritise accessibility and inclusive recruitment practices for neurodivergent talent of all ages and experience levels, and on encouraging workplace environments that ensure neurodivergent people already employed in the sector feel safe, supported and empowered to be their authentic selves and face no obstacles to advancing their legal careers as far as they want to attain. For us, this equation very much includes championing improved support for parents/carers of neurodivergent relatives working in our industry.

105+

legal services employers represented

400+

active participating members

Acknowledgements

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We would also like sincerely to thank the Law Society of England and Wales and the Law Society of Scotland for their support for this publication, and the wider work of our Network.

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