

Human Resources

SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES WITH CHILDCARE

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South Yorkshire
Fire & Rescue
WORKING FOR A SAFER
SOUTH YORKSHIRE

SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES WITH CHILDCARE

INTRODUCTION

1. South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue (SYFR) is a family friendly employer and recognises the need to provide a fair balance between work and personal life. SYFR is committed to considering the needs of employees who have to balance the demands of work with childcare responsibilities. It will seek to remove any barriers that might make it difficult for existing and potential employees to balance work and childcare.
2. SYFR acknowledge that personal circumstances will vary greatly amongst staff and that the support required will be individual to each employee. As such, there cannot be a 'one size fits all' approach. This policy aims to provide an overview of the support and services on offer to employees in the hope that solutions can be sought for differing issues.
3. All employees within SYFR who require support regarding childcare can fully utilise this policy.
4. As a member of the Dignity at Work Partnership¹, SYFR is committed to promoting a positive working environment where the dignity and respect, to which all employees are entitled, is not undermined. No employee should be treated less favourably on the grounds of race, gender or gender reassignment, disability, sexual orientation, religion or spiritual belief, colour, nationality, national or ethnic origin, marital/parental status, family ties, trade union or political belief, hours worked, or any other reason, either directly or indirectly.

RELATED POLICIES

5. SYFR has a number of enhanced 'family friendly' policies, introduced to support employees in balancing work with family commitments (all available on the Intranet). The majority of these policies have been supported with training directed at managers across the organisation in order to ensure employees are aware of their entitlement, and that they are applied appropriately. A summary of the policies is provided below however SYFR recommend that the policies are read in full in order that content and eligibility criteria is fully understood:
 - Flexible Working policy – this policy highlights the statutory right all employees have to request flexible working when caring for children under the age of 6 years, or 18 years if the child has a disability. Any amendment to working hours would constitute a permanent change to terms and conditions.
 - Time off for Dependants – SYFR offers an enhanced benefit of 3 days paid leave (per annual leave year) for any employee requiring time off for unforeseen domestic issues i.e. when a child is rushed to hospital, sent home from school ill or where there has been an unexpected breakdown in care arrangements.

¹ The Dignity at Work Partnership is a partnership between the Government, Unite (the UK's largest union) and major public and private sector organisations. For further information see www.dignityatwork.org

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- Parental Leave – this policy highlights the right that parents have to request unpaid leave to balance work and home life. Parents are entitled to up to 4 weeks unpaid leave per annum, per child. Leave must be taken in blocks of weeks unless the child has a disability, in which case days may be taken.
- Maternity Leave – SYFR has enhanced statutory maternity entitlement by providing employees with sufficient qualifying service half pay for 20 weeks of their maternity leave.
- Paternity Leave – SYFR has enhanced statutory paternity entitlement by providing employees with sufficient qualifying service 2 weeks at full pay throughout their paternity leave.
- Adoption Leave – Adoption leave mirrors the entitlement to statutory leave and pay as laid out within maternity regulations. SYFR enhances provision by providing 1 week at full pay and 5 weeks at 90% of earnings before statutory adoption pay commences.
- Childcare Voucher Scheme – Childcare vouchers can be used to pay for registered and approved childcare, including holiday clubs and after school clubs and cover children up to the age of 16. Please see the Childcare Voucher section below.
- Supporting Carers policy – This policy highlights both internal and external support available to employees with caring responsibilities. Relevant policies are highlighted alongside a list of appropriate contacts.
- Jobshare policy – This policy sets out the process for employees who wish to apply for a jobshare role to support their family commitments. Employees may be able to share their full-time post with a colleague in order to work part-time, or split their shift patterns e.g. to work only days whilst a colleague covers nights.
- Career Break – Career breaks are available to qualifying staff who may need a fairly lengthy break from work (e.g. 6 months/ 1 year) in order to address family commitments. Although unpaid, the employee has the right to retain their continuous service date and return to the same or similar post on the same terms and conditions.
- Flexible Working Hours scheme – Eligibility for working under this scheme will be highlighted in the employee's contract. The scheme allows, subject to operational requirements, flexibility in start finish times as well as a build up of hours so that flexi leave can be taken.

BENEFITS

6. There are many government benefits available to staff with childcare responsibilities/families i.e. Working Families Tax Credit/ Childcare Tax Credit (see appendix A). SYFR recommends that employees visit www.direct.gov.uk in order to fully understand the benefits on offer.

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7. Via Sure Start (Appendix A), the government funds local authorities to ensure a free part-time early education place is available for every three and four year old in settings that have been inspected by Ofsted and found satisfactory in terms of quality in England. From 1 April 2006 three and four year old children are entitled to free early years education, comprising 12.5 hours per week for 38 weeks of the year (increasing to 15 hours per week in 2010). Parents do not contribute towards this minimum entitlement but may be charged fees for any services or childcare that is additional to the free place. Free places can be provided by a variety of providers in the maintained, private, voluntary and independent sectors including registered childminder networks.

SERVICES

8. The Families Information Service offers free, accurate and reliable information and advice to parents on a range of services for children, young people and families. Advice can be provided on:
 - childcare services such as registered childminders, pre and post-school clubs, crèches, nurseries, holiday clubs etc
 - Help with childcare costs and tax credits
 - Activities, support and health services.
9. In order to obtain information regarding the above, please contact the national Families Information Service (www.childcarelink.gov.uk), freephone 0800 2 34634 6 or, in your area:
 - Sheffield Information Link: Tel: 0114 275 6699
 - Rotherham Children's Information Service: Tel: 0800 073 0230
 - Barnsley Families Information Service: Tel: 0800 345340
 - Doncaster Families Information Service: Tel: 0800 138 4568
10. **Children's Centres** are a new way of supporting families with children under 5. They offer integrated childcare and education, health, family support, help with finding jobs and training, drop-in sessions and groups. They bring services closer to the public, and put them all in one place, so that people can get the services, advice, help and information required all in one go. The centres will be opened in most areas within South Yorkshire by 2010, with a large majority currently open. Please contact the relevant Children's Centre Team:
 - Sheffield: (Tel: 0114 281 1881)
<http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/education/information-for-parentscarers/child-care/childrens-centres>

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- Rotherham:
<http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/graphics/Learning/Early+Years/Sure+Start+Childrens+centre/>
- Barnsley: (01226 773516)
http://www.barnsley.gov.uk/bguk/Education_Skills/Early_Years_Childcare/Children's%20Centres/Children's_Centres
- Doncaster (01302 862112)
http://www.doncaster.gov.uk/Health_and_Social_Care/caring_for_our_children/Early_Years_and_Childcare_Service/Surestart_and_Family_Centres.asp

CHILDCARE VOUCHERS

11. In April 2005, a new government child care voucher system was introduced, allowing employers to provide child care vouchers as part of their programme of incentives.
12. To help employees maintain their working life without compromising the childcare services they choose, South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue offer a Childcare Voucher Scheme through Busy Bees. Busy Bees childcare vouchers are offered through a salary sacrifice agreement. Parents and legal guardians benefit from the vouchers because they are exchanged on gross salary and are therefore tax and National Insurance (NI) free. Additionally, an employee is then only taxed on their remaining salary (and therefore a reduced amount) and a further tax saving is made.
13. As an employee of South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue and parent or legal guardian to a child 0-16 years of age, employees can request childcare vouchers up to the value of £243 (for monthly paid staff) and £220 (for 4 weekly paid staff). If a partner is already receiving childcare vouchers, an employee can still register. Both parents and guardians can claim up to the maximum value each week or month, doubling the savings available.
14. The vouchers are redeemable for a wide range of registered child care including before and after school clubs, child minders, nannies, nurseries, play schemes and holiday clubs. This allows parents to benefit no matter what stage their child is at.
15. All SYFR employees must read the 'in house' Childcare Voucher Scheme Policy and sign the Childcare Voucher Scheme Agreement (available on the intranet) before fully registering with Busy Bees. Once the policy is understood and the signed agreement is sent to the Human Resource Function, employees can contact Busy Bees directly and enrol on the scheme: 0800 430 860 or see www.busybeesvouchers.com.

DISCOUNTS

16. The Human Resource Function will seek to negotiate discounts with registered childcare providers. Information regarding these providers will be published on the Childcare page of the Intranet.

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CASE STUDIES

17. The following examples are hypothetical, and used for illustration purposes only:

Case Study 1

Sarah is quiet often required to stay at work quite until 5pm due to the nature of her post. However, her 6 year old daughter finishes school at 3.30pm and there is no one available to pick her up and care for her until she finishes work. The school has an after-school club, which is open until 5.30pm.

What help and support is available from SYFR?

As Sarah's daughter is under 16 years old, Sarah is eligible to apply for Childcare Vouchers as part of the Childcare Vouchers Scheme. This would allow the child to attend the after-school club whilst Sarah is at work and until she is able to collect her at 5.30pm. Information on the Childcare Vouchers Scheme is available from the policy, which can be obtained from the intranet or from Transactional HR.

This scheme gives provision for the employee to benefit from tax savings as the amount payable for the childcare is taken directly out of their salaries, BEFORE tax and NI is deducted. As Sarah is corporate staff, the flexi-scheme could also be utilised to allow for them to leave earlier on occasion, if they have flexi credit and dependent on the exigencies of the service.

Case Study 2

Sam is a firefighter on Blue Watch. He has three children, of varying ages and has recently taken full custody of them following his divorce from the children's mother. Due to the nature of Sam's operational role and shift system, he is partner cared for them whilst he was at work. However, under the circumstances this is no longer possible.

Sam is worried that he will have to consider looking for another job in order to solve this problem and speaks to his manager to see what help is available. What options would be open to him and the organisation with this?

In this instance it is important that a meeting is convened in order to discuss the options available. Due to Sam being an operational firefighter, it may seem that he is somewhat restricted with the flexibility his role can offer, but that does not mean there is nothing that can be done in order to help him balance his work and family commitments.

Sam has the right as a parent, under the Right to Request Flexible Working regulations, to request a change in his work routines and as his employer they would need to take her request seriously and investigate ways to help accommodate that request. It would therefore be best to read the Flexible Working Policy (available from the intranet or Transactional HR). Following the procedure being followed and all options being considered and discussed, it is decided that Sam would benefit for a job share arrangement where he works only night shifts at a station nearer his own home. The day shifts usually done by him will then be covered by a colleague. This allows him the flexibility to spend time with his children in the day, take them to and from school

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and put them to bed. Sam has been made aware that he will have to be flexible and work the required day shifts to attend necessary training and maintain his competence.

Using the Children's Information Service, Sam located a registered childminder who is able to care for his children overnight on the 4 shifts that he works. He can also benefit from the Childcare Voucher scheme to aid with costs of the childcare. Sam has been made aware that he will need to be flexible and work some days so that he can maintain her competence via training.

The options available under the Flexible Working for Parents and Carers Policy are wide ranging and can relate not only to the hours someone works, but the location and shift system. It is therefore important that, to ensure fairness and compliance with the law, Transactional HR is involved in the process.

PLEASE NOTE: Our present shift system of 9/15 makes it very difficult to manage flexible working for operational employees; however moving to more balanced shifts i.e. 12/12 or 3 x 8 would make it far easier to facilitate these requests.

Case Study 3

Penny has worked in the Payroll and Pensions section for three years. Recently her sister sadly passed away and she and her husband have taken guardianship of her two young children. She is keen to take some time away from work in order to help the children cope with their loss. She would like to take three months off work in order to spend time with the children in Newquay with their grandparents.

The best option available to Penny would be to apply for a Career Break. This would allow her to take an extended period away from work, whilst retaining her continuous service date and the ability to return to work to the same or similar post on the same terms and conditions. A Career Break is usually only available to all employees who have five years continuous service, but this can be waived, depending on the circumstances, by the Head of Human Resources.

Following Penny's return to work, it becomes clear that she is no longer able to work the same hours that she did previously as she needs to take the children to school every morning. She therefore utilises the flexi-system to ensure that she works the same number of hours, but comes into work an hour later every day. After reading the Supporting Employees with Childcare policy Penny realises there is help available to her via her Local Family Information Service and she is additionally able to access bereavement counselling for both herself and the children.

REVIEW

18. In order to ensure SYFR has effective provisions in place to support employees with childcare issues, regular review of this policy will be undertaken in conjunction with information received via the policies listed in point 4, as well as any relevant data gleaned from Exit Interviews.

If you require any further guidance on this Procedure please contact the

A GUIDE TO BENEFITS AND TAX CREDITS AVAILABLE TO PARENTS & CARERS

1. CHILD TAX CREDIT

Child Tax Credit is an income-related allowance for parents and carers of children who are still in full-time education. Most families with children qualify for this tax credit. You must be responsible for at least one child or qualifying young person, and the benefit is paid direct to the person who is the main carer for the child or children. Please visit www.direct.gov.uk for full information.

2. WORKING TAX CREDIT

Working Tax Credit is for people who are employed or self-employed (either on their own or in a partnership), who work 16 hours or more a week, are paid for that work and are expected to work for at least 4 weeks. This tax credit includes a specific element to support the cost of registered or approved childcare for working parents. The childcare element can help with up to 80 per cent of your eligible child care costs. To find out if you are eligible for Tax Credits, contact the Tax Credit Helpline on 0845 300 3900 between 8:00 am and 8:00 pm seven days a week. The website www.direct.gov.uk also offers a calculator to assist you in finding out how much of a tax credit you may be eligible for.

3. FREE EARLY LEARNING FOR THREE AND FOUR YEAR OLDS

Every three and four year old in England is entitled to 12.5 hours of free early learning per week, in nurseries, playgroups, pre-schools or at their childminders for 38 weeks of the year. This is set to rise to 15 hours per week (over three days) in 2010. Your Local Children's Information Service (CIS) can offer a list of available providers in your area that are registered to offer the entitlement. You can get the number of your local CIS by calling 0800 234 6346 or visit (www.surestart.gov.uk).

4. SURE START CENTRES

Sure Start (www.surestart.gov.uk) is a government funded programme which covers care for children from conception through to age 14, and up to age 16 for those with special educational needs and disabilities. To find out more about Sure Start services in your area and how you can access them, contact your nearest Sure Start local programme or children's centre. You can find children's centres through your local children's information service at ChildcareLink on 0800 234 6346. ChildcareLink can also help with a range of queries about early years and childcare services in your area. Sure Start offers a range of services including after school childcare programmes, as well as providing guidance and advice for those looking to find a registered childminder or a nanny.

5. FAMILY FUND

The Family Fund gives grants to low-income families to meet the additional needs of caring for a severely disabled child. The value of the grant depends on the items requested, family circumstances and the funding available. All applications are considered individually on the

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basis of the information provided. Grants are designed with the needs of the whole family in mind: disabled children, parents and siblings. If you live in England, you can apply if you can say **Yes** to all of the following:

- You are the parent or carer of a severely disabled child aged **16** or under
- Your household's earned income before tax, excluding any overtime, is less than £23,000 per year
- You have less than £18,000 in savings
- You have permanent residency in the UK and have lived in the UK for six months

For an application pack, please email info@familyfund.org.uk, visit www.familyfund.org.uk or tel 0845 130 4542

6. CHILD BENEFIT

Child Benefit is a tax-free payment that you can claim for your child. There are two separate amounts, with a higher amount for your eldest (or only) child. In 2008-09, you will get £18.80 a week for your oldest child and £12.55 a week for each of your other children. Child Benefit can be paid into any bank, building society, or National Savings & Investments (NS&I) account that accepts Direct Payment. It's usually paid every four weeks, but it can be paid weekly if you're getting Income Support, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income related Employment and Support Allowance or if you're a single parent.

You may be able to get Child Benefit if your child is:

- aged under 16
- aged between 16 and 19 (up to 20 in some cases) and is in relevant education or training
- 16 or 17 years old and has recently left relevant education or training - however, they must have registered for work or training with the Careers or Connexions Service, Ministry of Defence, Department for Employment and Learning (in Northern Ireland) or an Education and Library Board (in Northern Ireland)

7. CHILD TRUST FUND

The Child Trust Fund (CTF) is a long-term tax-free savings and investment account for children born on or after 1 September 2002. The government will give every eligible child a voucher worth at least £250 to start the fund. If your child is part of a household getting Child Tax Credit, with a household income at or below £15,575 (tax year 2008-2009), your child will get an extra £250 although this will be paid directly into the Child trust Fund account.

You use the government voucher to invest in a special account that your child will be able to access when they reach 18. Parents, family and friends can add up to £1,200 to the account each year. There is no tax to pay on the CTF income or any gains (profits) it makes until your child reaches age 18.

To qualify for a voucher you have to be claiming Child Benefit for your child. If you haven't received a voucher within a month of starting to claim Child Benefit, or if you lose the one you have, call the CTF helpline on 0845 302 1470 or textphone on 0845 366 7870 (8.00 am to 8.00 pm seven days a week).

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8. WIDOWED PARENTS ALLOWANCE

If you're a parent whose husband, wife or civil partner has died and you have a dependent child or young person (aged 16 and under 20) for whom you receive Child Benefit, you may be able to get Widowed Parent's Allowance (WPA) if all the following apply:

- you're bringing up a child or young person under 19 (or under 20 in some cases for whom you're getting Child Benefit)
- you're under State Pension age (60 for women and 65 for men)
- your husband, wife or civil partner died
- your husband, wife or civil partner paid National Insurance contributions (NICs), or
- if you're expecting your late husband's baby or your late civil partner's baby (with whom you were pregnant from fertility treatment)
- your husband, wife or civil partner died as a result of their work - even if they didn't pay NICs

£90.70 a week is the maximum basic allowance of Widowed Parent's Allowance. There may be an entitlement to additional pension. Claims must be made via Jobcentreplus (www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk) Tel: 0800 055 6688.

9. LONE PARENTS

If you are bringing up a child as a lone parent you may be entitled to some financial help:

Child Maintenance Bonus

Entitlement to a Child Maintenance Bonus is based upon whether an individual has been in receipt of Child Maintenance under the CSA's old scheme (before 3 March 2003) and benefit is ending because income has increased or they will be working for at least 16 hours p/week.

Child Maintenance Premium

The Child Maintenance Bonus is not available to people receiving Child Maintenance under the Child Support Agency's new scheme (after 3 March 2003). If a parent is caring for their child and someone in their household receives Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, you can keep up to £10 per week of any Child Maintenance paid for your child.

In Work Credit

In Work Credit is a tax-free payment of £40 to lone parents who have been claiming benefits for a year or more and go back to work for at least 16 hours a week. In Work Credit is paid for a year on top of other working benefits. To find out more, speak to someone at your local Jobcentre Plus office (see point 8 for contact details).

Childcare costs

Jobcentre Plus can help with childcare costs as long as you place your child with a registered childcare provider and you are doing something connected with your chosen career, as agreed with Jobcentre Plus. Once you are working you may qualify for Working Tax Credit, which could enable you to claim back up to 80 per cent of your eligible childcare costs.

Please note, all the information above was gleaned directly from the named sources. Entitlements may change and employees should liaise directly with the relevant contacts to attain the most up to date information. SYFR cannot be held responsible for any changes to the benefit system.

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Appendix B

USEFUL CONTACTS

Citizens Advice Bureau (independent advice on benefits, rights etc): www.adviceguide.org.uk

Directgov (for help with benefits): www.direct.gov.uk

Early Support (for families with young disabled children): www.earlysupport.org.uk. Tel: 01482 871454

██████████ SYFR Occupational Health Nurse/ Counsellor (for counselling support) Tel: ██████████

Gay dads (support for gay fathers): www.gaydads.co.uk

Gingerbread (for single parents): www.gingerbread.org.uk. Tel: 0808 018 5026

HM Revenue & Customs (official information on tax credits & benefit payments, benefit claim forms): www.hmrc.gov.uk

Home-Start (in-home help with parenting): www.home-start.org.uk

- Home-Start Sheffield: Tel: 0114 278 8377
- Home-Start Doncaster: Tel: 01302 340 856
- Home-Start Barnsley: Tel: 01226 245985
- Home-Start Rotherham: Tel: 01709 829165

National Day Nurseries Association: www.ndna.org.uk. Tel: 01484 40 70 70.

Email: info@ndna.org.uk

Northern Support Group (for lesbians and gay foster and adoptive parents): www.nsgroup.org.uk Tel: 07949 254620 E-mail: northernsupportgroup@hotmail.co.uk

Parent Partnership Services (supporting parents with children who are disabled / have special educational needs):

- Sheffield Parent Partnership: www.sheffield.gov.uk/education/information-for-parents/carers/sen/special-educational-needs-faq/parent-partnership Tel: 0114 264 0033/264 0039
- Rotherham Parent Partnership: <http://www.rotherhamparentpartnership.com/>
- Doncaster Parent Partnership: Tel: 01302 862176 Email: parent.partnership@doncaster.gov.uk
- Barnsley Parent Partnership: Tel: 01226 732156 Email: parent.partners@barnsley.gov.uk

Parentline Plus: www.parentlineplus.org.uk. Tel: 0808 800 2222

Parents Centre: www.parentscentre.gov.uk

Phoenix futures (supporting parents with drug and alcohol issues) www.phoenix-

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futures.org.uk Tel: 0114 268 5131 E-mail: sheffield.family@phoenix-futures.org.uk

Pink Parents (for lesbian/ gay/ bisexual/ transsexual parents): www.pinkparents.org.uk Tel: 01380 727 935