

TIME TO CARE?

Advice for people planning a new career as a care worker, on how to fit your working time around the rest of your life



Includes coffee break exercises to help you decide the working pattern that will suit you best

Hello – we're here to help you with some of the less obvious sides to being a care worker



What you'll get out of this guide:


- A clearer idea of what a daily schedule might look like.
- You'll also do some thinking about what you want YOUR daily schedule to look like, and how to ask for it.
- Helpful tips to deal with some of the early challenges of getting started.

Welcome. It's great that you are considering a role in adult domiciliary care work. It takes a special kind of person to care for others at vulnerable stages of their lives, and you will find it hugely rewarding on a daily basis. What's more, it's a growing sector in the UK, so there will be opportunities for you to progress your career if this is something you are looking to do.

But being a care worker is not your typical nine to five role, and it will take some extra thought in organising your life outside of work in order to get the amount of hours work you want, to maximise your earnings.

That's what this guide is all about. It has been developed by Timewise, a social enterprise that helps people to access good flexible work. Over the past six months we have spent time with care workers who are living and breathing the role every day. They have been kind enough to share their experiences and tips, to help you get the best start to your career in social care.

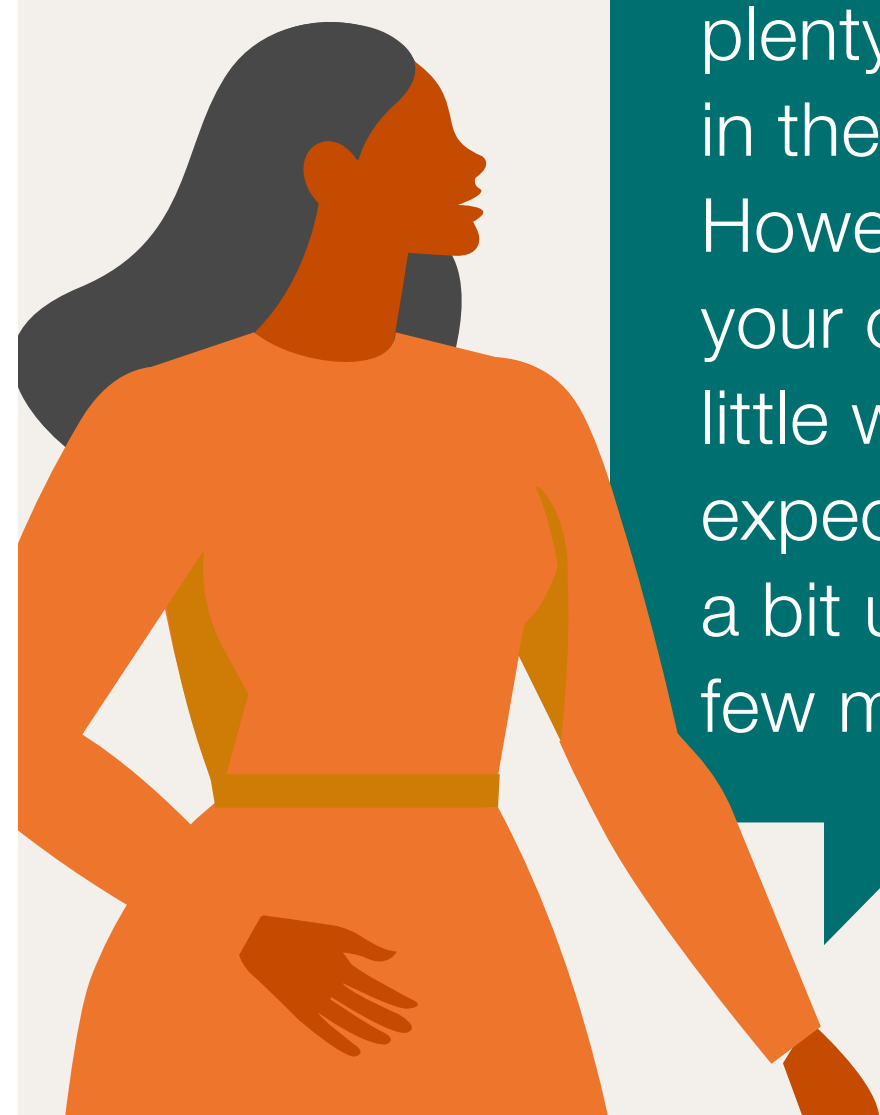
Our focus is to help you understand how your schedule will work. So less about the tasks you will do, and more about how you can fit your working day around your other responsibilities and your personal time.



Thank you to Caronne Care and Supreme Care for letting us spend time with their staff; and to the social care and economic regeneration teams of the London Borough of Barking & Dagenham, and also to Skills for Care, for their advice.

01 ZERO HOURS CONTRACTS

Most care roles are based on zero hours contracts, which means you will not have a guaranteed amount of work each day/week/month.



Don't worry, there is plenty of available work in the care sector. However, you might find your client rota takes a little while to build up, so expect your hours to be a bit unsettled for the first few months in the job.

If zero hours sound a bit scary, remember there's also an advantage to you: you have the ultimate choice over which jobs you agree to take on. So your day is flexible to fit with your life outside work.

The trick is to know what you want. Be clear in your mind what kind of duties you want to take on, what times of day suit you, and how far you are willing to travel. Then you'll be able to make quick decisions when you're asked to take on new clients.



Clients like the familiarity of having the same care worker, so once you're established in the job, your hours are usually fairly settled. But of course, sometimes clients stop using the service (they may pass away or move into a care home, for example) and you will lose that part of your work.



It's true there is quite a bit of chopping and changing, especially as some clients only need short-term help (for example following an injury or illness). But while you wait for a new client to be allocated to you, there are sometimes extra tasks you can take on, such as emergency cover for other care workers.

MANAGING ON A LOW INCOME?

We are not benefits experts, but if you are on a zero hours contract paying around minimum wage, and any other adults in your household are also on a low wage, then we expect you will be eligible for Universal Credit to supplement your earnings. Citizen's Advice have loads of really practical help and advice.

02 DIFFERENT WAYS OF FITTING WORK WITH THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

Care workers use their zero hours arrangements in many different ways. So there really is scope for you to shape your daily schedule to suit your life. Take a look at some of these examples:

I need to work around school hours

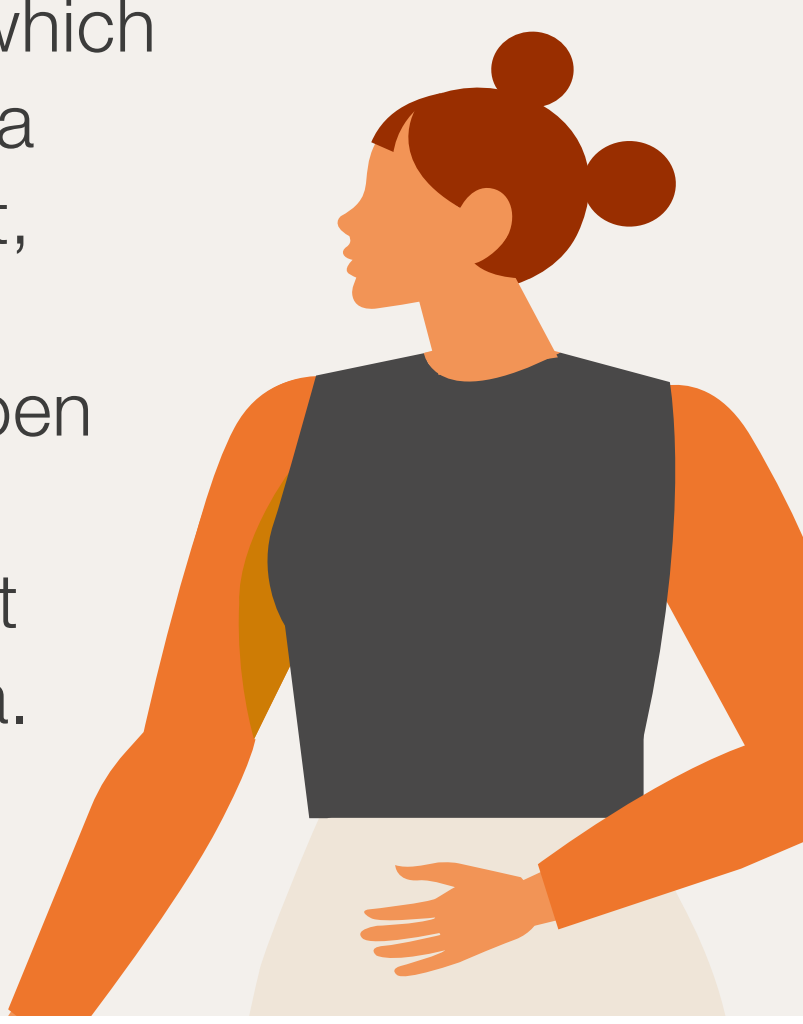
I can only work fixed hours between 9am and 3pm. This limits my work a lot, because I can only fit in one breakfast visit and can't do dinner/evening visits - the most popular slots for most clients. So a lot of my duties

tend to be cleaning and shopping for clients, rather than personal care. My restricted times mean I can't earn as much money as I'd like, but it's the best arrangement for me.

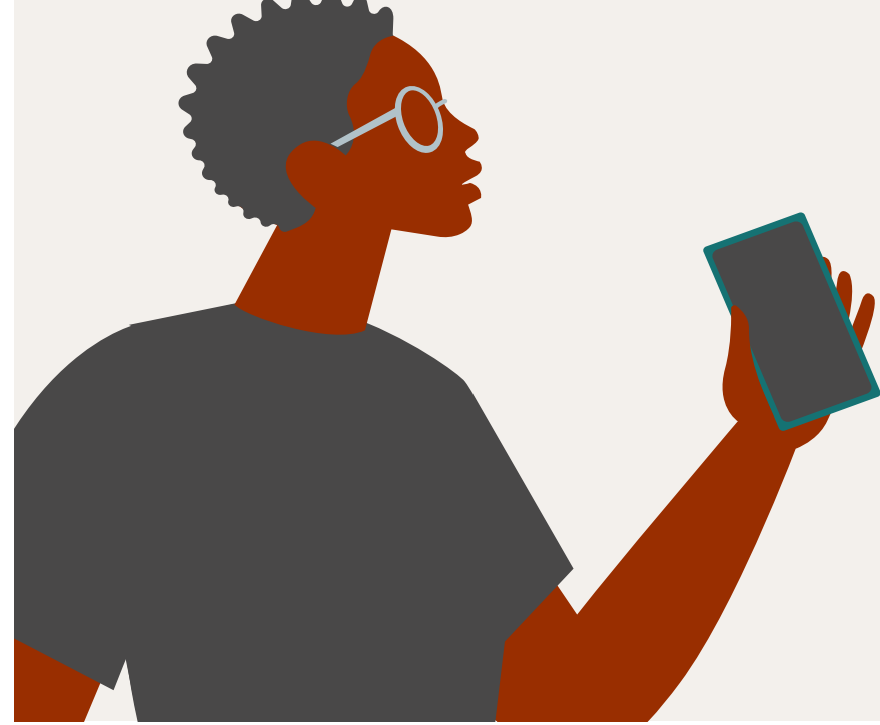


I like to work as locally as possible

As long as I don't have to travel far, I'm happiest working a small number of hours a day, across all seven days. Over time, I've managed to build up a small client base of people who live near me. It means I've got to know them really well, which I find rewarding. It took a while to get to this point, and when I lose a client (which is bound to happen at some point) it will be difficult until a new client comes along in the area. But this works best for me for now.

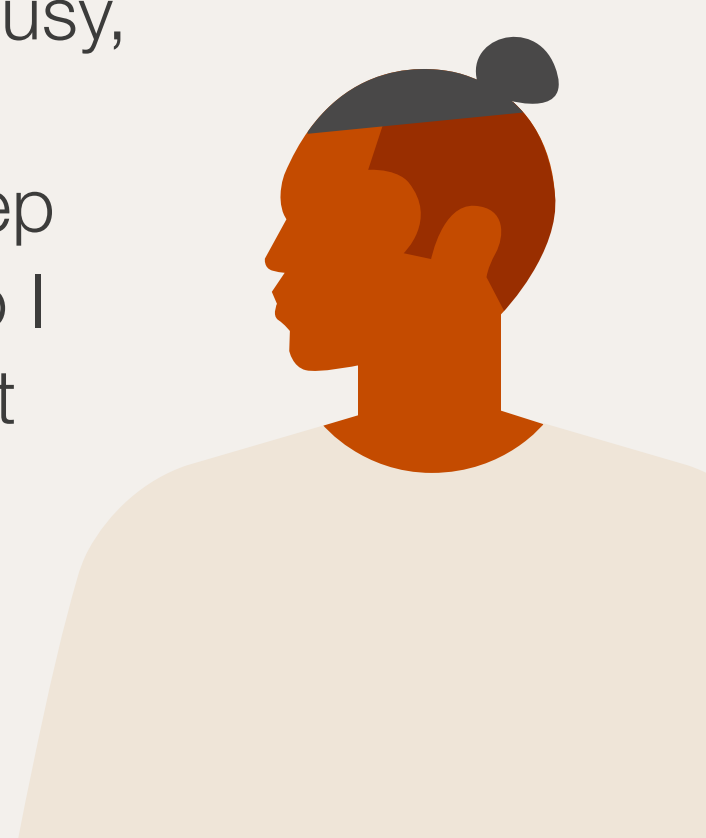


I just work weekends I do care work at the weekend, to get extra money on top of my weekday job. It makes me really popular with the team, because many of them have children and find it difficult to cover the weekends.



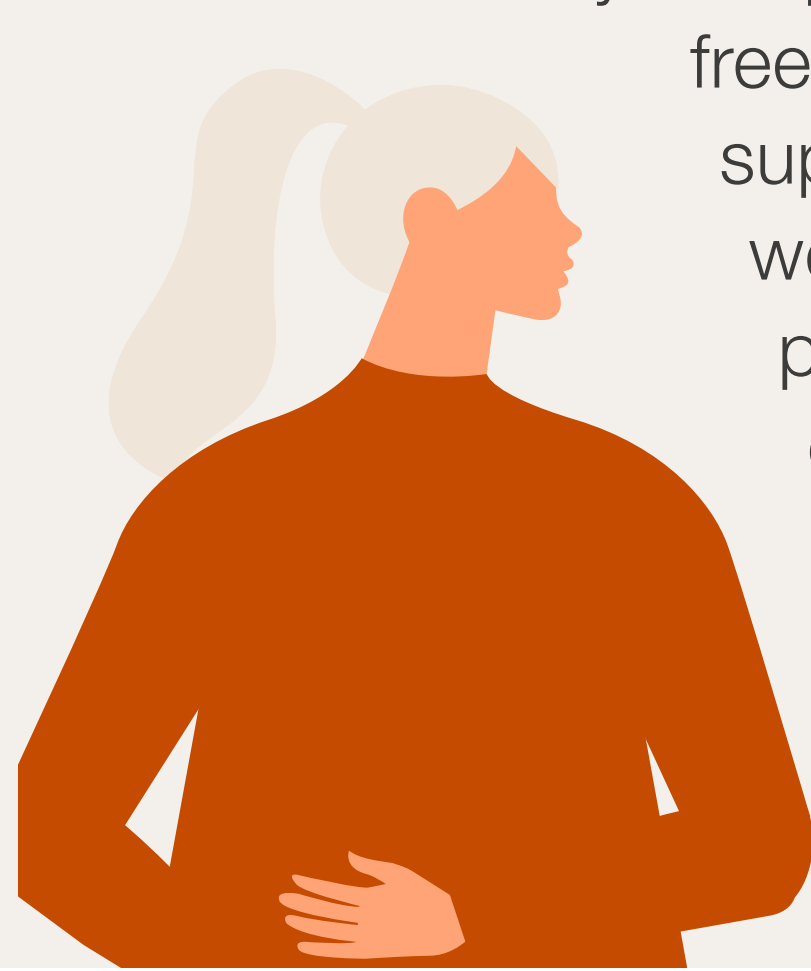
I'm happy to work across the whole week

I'm a care agency's dream, because I'm available any time of the day or week. I have 5 regular clients who I support 5 days a week, for all their visits. And I sometimes take on extra work on the other two days to cover emergencies. I like being busy, and I like to maximise my earnings. But I need to keep time for myself as well - so I generally aim to work client time of around 30 hours a week, which means about 45 hours including my travel time.



I work in bursts, sharing childcare with my husband to get the most work I can

My husband is a plumber, so his hours are flexible and we share the school run and looking after the kids. It means I can work in bursts throughout the day - breakfasts between 7am and 10am, lunches from 12-2.30, tea-time visits between 4pm and 6pm and final bedtime duties for a couple of clients between 9 and 10pm. In between I head home to do a bit of housework, prepare dinner for the family and do the afternoon school run. I always keep 6.30 to 8.30pm free for family time and supper time, when we're all together. It's pretty full-on, and it only works because my clients are fairly local. But I need to maximise my income right now.



03 WHAT A FULL DAY'S ROUTINE LOOKS LIKE

Clients prefer to have just one or two care workers looking after them over the week, so they become familiar faces. So your working week will depend on the number of clients you have.

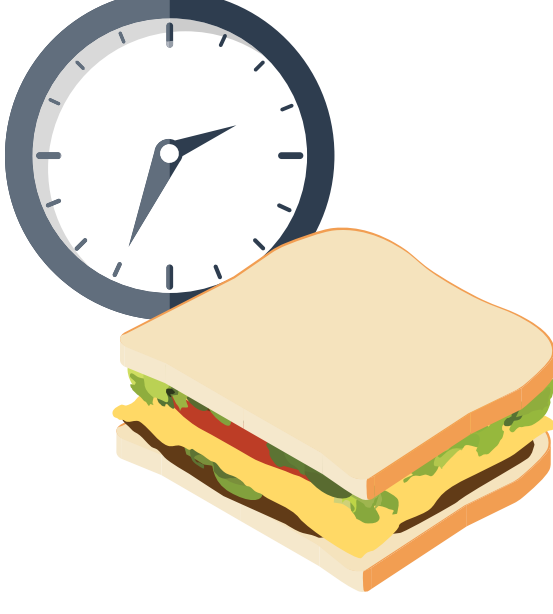
On a day to day basis, the work tends to centre around four key shifts; breakfast, lunch, dinner and bedtime.

Breakfast



At this visit you will probably help your client with morning personal care (washing, dressing) and provide breakfast. Each client will have a particular time they like to get dressed and eat in the morning, and the care agency will schedule the various clients to try to meet their preferences.

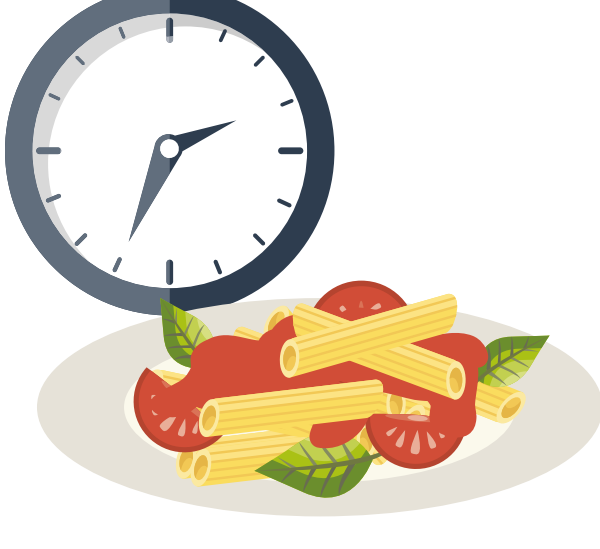
Lunch



This is likely to involve preparing food for your client, maybe giving medication, clearing up the breakfast dishes and ensuring all is well.

QUICK TIPS

Some clients may only require the breakfast or the lunch visit. Others will require two separate visits.



Dinner

At this visit, you will provide the evening meal, maybe clear up from lunch and maybe give medication.



Bedtime

Depending on the needs of the client, this could involve preparing a light snack, as well as helping your client to wash and change for bed.

Some clients will be able to wash and dress themselves while others will need help. Some clients will just need you to heat their meal and sit with them while they eat it, but others may need you to feed them. You will be given a briefing document for every client that will explain what the client can and can't do.

QUICK TIPS

Other tasks you might be asked to take on



Some clients need support at times that are not so fixed around meals and bedtime. Cleaning the house, for example, or doing their shopping.

You might prefer these kinds of tasks, and they may fit better with the times that you can work. They don't come up so often though, so it can be hard to get a lot of hours' work and maximise your income this way.

QUICK TIPS

04 TRAVELLING CAN BE TRICKY



Watch out for the time it takes to travel between clients, as you'll need to factor it into your day. So, before you take on a new client, think carefully about where they live. How far is this from your other clients, and how far from your own home if you want to pop back during a break?



8:15–8:45am

Client one breakfast tasks

8:45–9:00am

Travel to client two



9:00–9:30am

Client two breakfast tasks

9:30–9:45am

Travel to client three



9:45–10:15am

Client three breakfast tasks

10:15–10:30am

Travel to client four



10:30–11:00am

Client four – check medication taken, check all is well, do a little household cleaning each day



11:00–11:45am

No clients – take a break! How will you use the time? How far are you from home?

11:45–12:00

Travel to client five

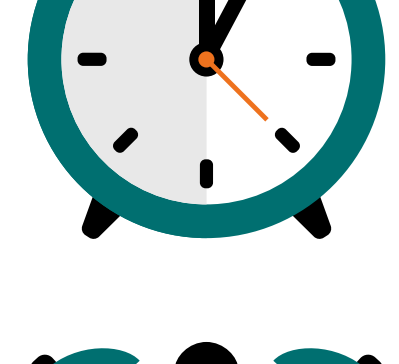


12:00–12:30pm

Client five lunch tasks

12:30–12:45pm

Travel to client six



12:45–1:15pm

Client six lunch tasks

1:15–1:30pm

Travel to client seven



1:30–2:00pm

Client seven lunch tasks

So, your morning shift has taken 5 hours and 45 minutes. You've spent 3 hours 30 minutes working, 1 hour 30 minutes travelling, and 45 minutes on a break. How much of this time will be paid?

Are you paid for your travel time?

Yes, but it's hard to see it. You're unlikely to be paid by the hour for your travel time, but it should be included in your pay calculation. Your employer should pay you an hourly rate that's high enough to include an allowance for travel.

To see if you are being paid fairly, you'll need to add up all the time you spend on your job, including time travelling between clients and waiting for the start of an appointment. Then you can work out your true hourly pay rate, by dividing the total actual pay you get for visit time by the TOTAL number of hours your job takes you INCLUDING the travel.

Do ask your care agency to explain how the allowance for travel works. As a minimum, your hourly rate of pay including travel time should be at least the national minimum wage or living wage, which is:

£9.50 for workers aged 23 or over

£9.18 for workers aged 21-22;

£6.83 for workers aged 18-20

QUICK TIPS

Look at a map of your local area and mark out a reasonable travelling distance from home. If you're using public transport, check the route maps. Be clear about where you are willing to travel to, so you can make quick decisions on whether or not to accept new clients when your care agency asks you.



What about the cost of travel fares?

Some care agencies pay for travel expenses such as petrol mileage, but many don't. Make sure you ask about this, and understand what will and will not be paid, so that you can factor this in. It's one of the reasons why the location of your clients matters so much.

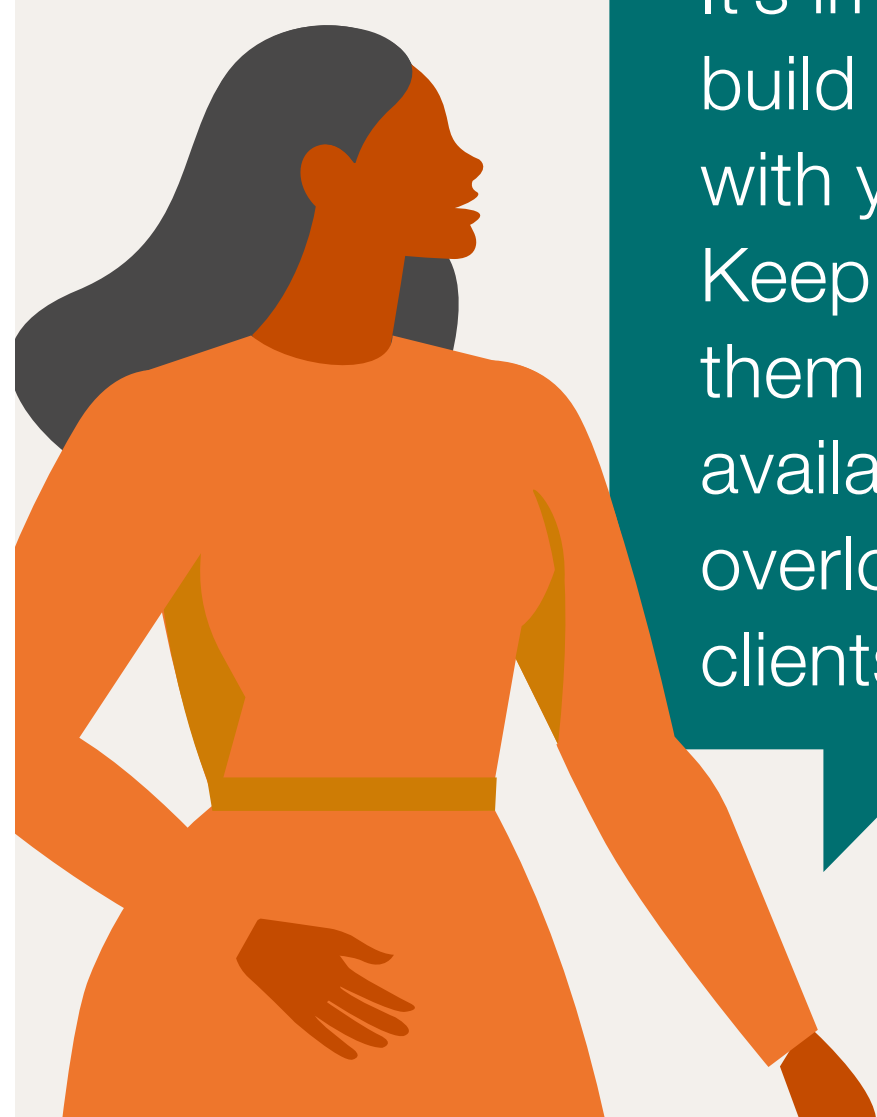
05 THE TRADE OFF BETWEEN WORKING TIME SLOTS THAT SUIT YOU, AND MAXIMISING YOUR EARNINGS

Good care agencies try hard to meet their clients needs, which include continuity with the same carer. So their ideal is to have care workers who are able to work across all four shifts of the day, for as many days of the week as possible... and this is also how you can maximise your earnings.

However, within reason, care agencies will pretty much grant workers whatever hours they are willing to do. This is because there is a shortage of care workers to support the number of clients. So you should be able to negotiate the hours you want.

Watch out for these pitfalls:

If you are only willing to do very restricted hours, you are unlikely to be front of mind when your coordinator is choosing the care worker for a new client.



It's important for you to build a good relationship with your coordinator. Keep reminding them (gently!) of your availability, to avoid being overlooked when new clients come in.

Restricting your time naturally means you will have less choice of clients you can support, especially if you're limited on travel distance too. It might take a little while to build up enough clients to fill the time slots that you want.

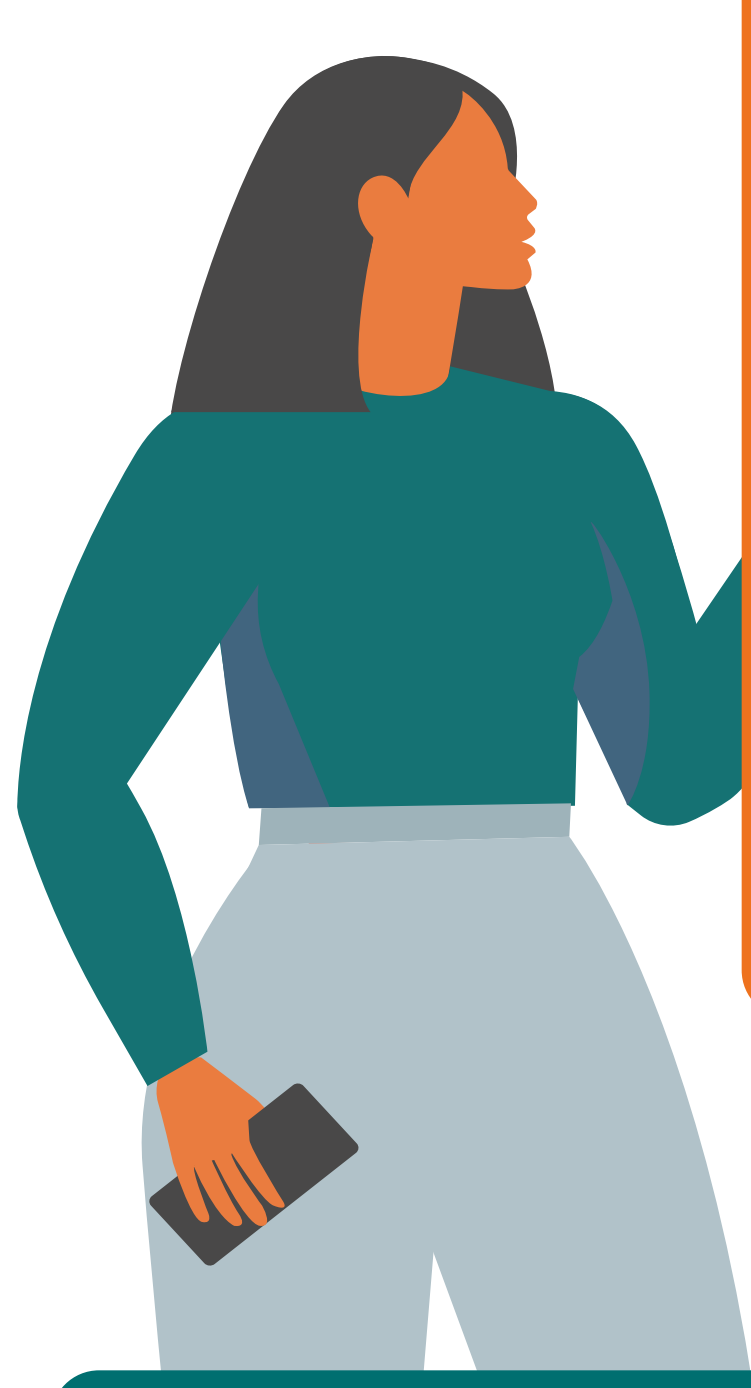
To get the amount of work you want, think about different tasks you could do beyond personal care, such as additional domestic duties like cleaning or shopping for clients.



06 HOW DO YOU WORK OUT THE WORKING PATTERN THAT WILL SUIT YOU BEST?

So far, we've tried to give you a good idea of a care worker's daily routine. We've said you can usually work as much or as little as you want to, at times that fit with the rest of your life. But also that it can be tricky to maximise your earnings at the same time as limiting your availability.

Now it's over to you

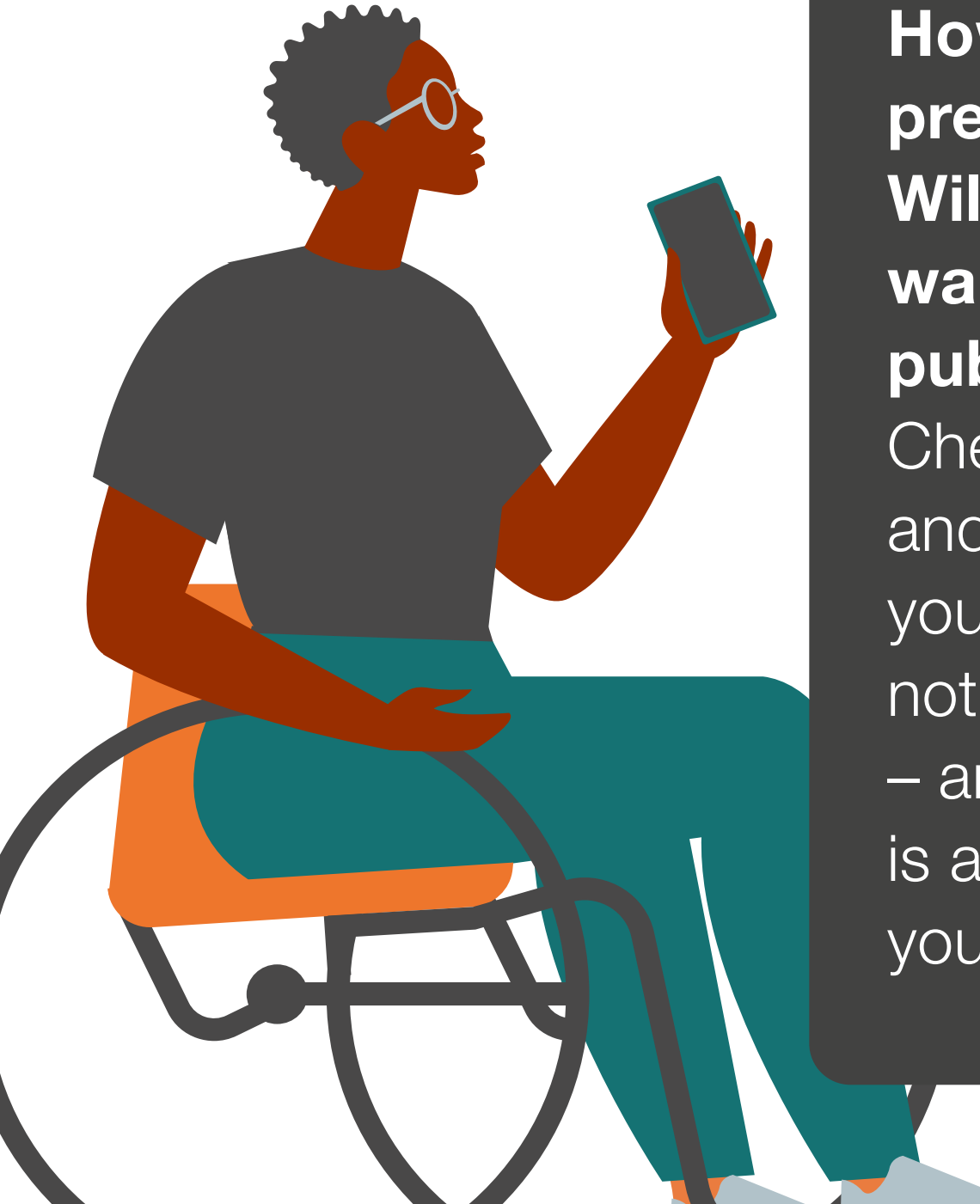


What times of day are you available for work? Will it be in short bursts of two hours here and another hour there? Can you work a solid block of time such as 8am until 2:30pm? Or can you work whenever you're needed?

Which days of the week? Remember that clients like to see the same care workers as much as possible, so the more days the better. Also that being able to work weekends will make you popular with your coordinator.



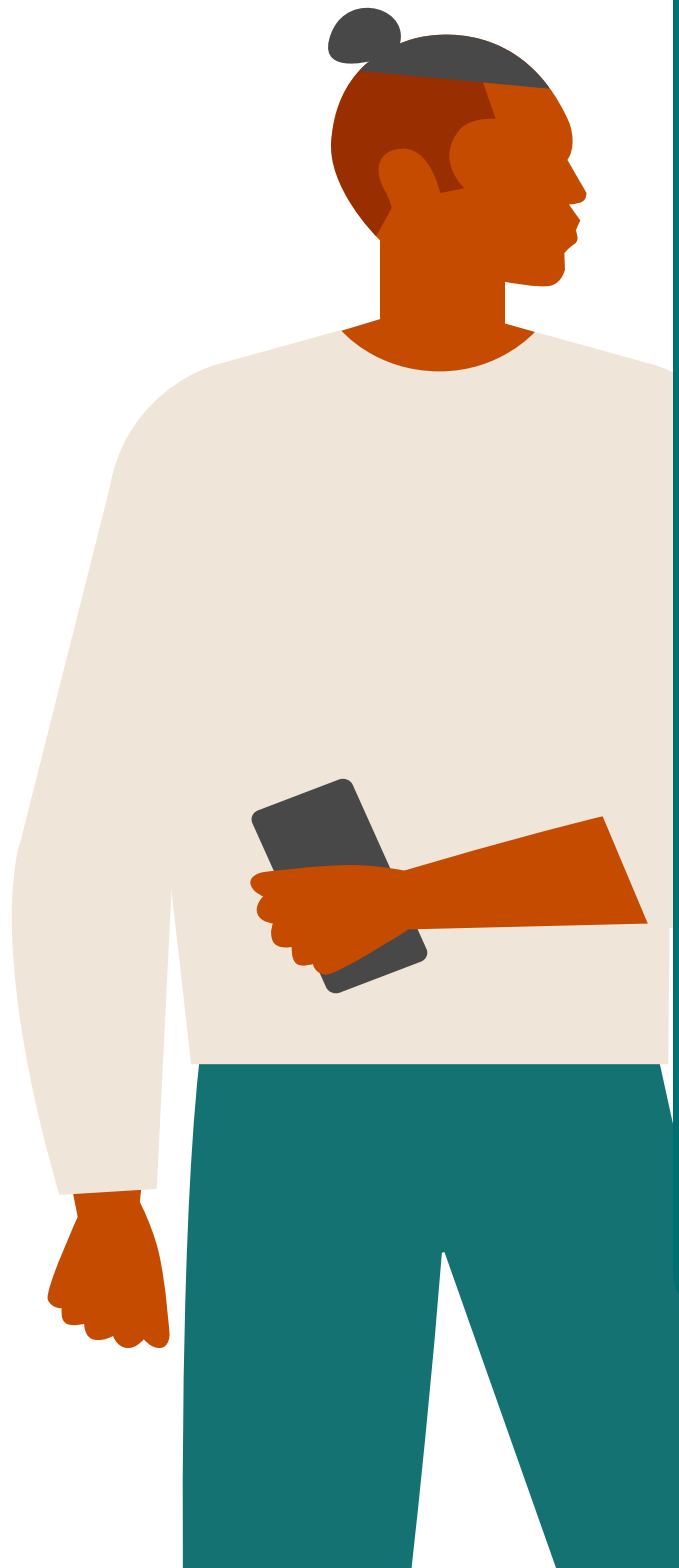
How far are you prepared to travel? Will you be driving, walking, or using public transport? Check out the route and remember that your travelling time is not paid separately – an allowance for it is already included in your hourly rate.



And how much money do you need to earn? Have you done a budget that shows you need to earn a certain amount each week? Or is it more a case of earning as much extra cash as you can, to supplement the household income?



How will you manage during school holidays? If you have children, this can be a nightmare. Relatives and friends may be able to help a bit, but you're likely to need a school holiday scheme for some of the weeks. The cost of privately run clubs can be high, so try googling your council's name together with the letters HAF (which stands for 'holiday and food programme'). More information is available [here](#).



Most care agencies are trying to find the best balance between meeting the needs of the client and the working preferences of their care workers. When it comes to negotiating your working pattern, it's really useful to keep this in mind. Clients don't always live where you want them to, or wake up at a time that suits you. Sometimes you'll need to be patient, and wait a while to get the clients that match what you want. If you can compromise a little in the meantime, that will be appreciated by your team.



To help you think through some of these questions, we've developed some 'coffee break exercises' you can do. They're on the next few pages.

Get your pen out, and have a go!



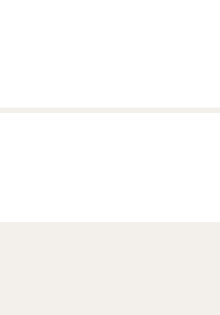
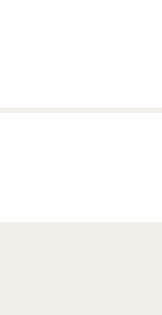
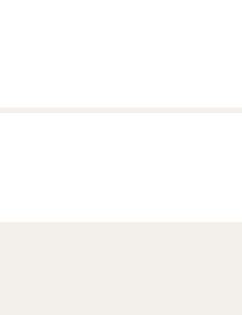
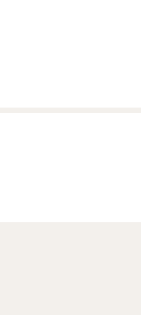
COFFEE BREAK EXERCISES TO HELP YOU WORK OUT WHAT YOU WANT

A) MY AVAILABLE TIME FOR WORK

First of all, think about how you can manage your home life a bit differently, to maximise your available time. For example, can your partner share the school run with you? Can you do babysitting swaps with a friend, to free you up for bedtime duties? Can you prepare and freeze meals at the weekend, to cut down on time during the week?

Next, think about what shifts you can definitely do. And what shifts you can definitely not do.

Use this table to record the times when you can be available:

	 Breakfast	 Lunch	 Dinner	 Bedtime
MON				
TUE				
WED				
THU				
FRI				
SAT				
SUN				

Can you help out in emergencies?

Sometimes the work in social care can be unpredictable. For example, a client might be added at short notice, such as an emergency care package for a patient who has been discharged from hospital. Will your schedule allow you to support this kind of request?

What about when colleagues are off sick? Are there ways to adapt your schedule to support your team with occasional extra cover?

Make some notes on your thoughts here:

Case study

One care worker we spent time with has three young children in primary school. She is able to do the first two shifts, with seven clients, because her husband works as a chef and can look after the children in the morning. But, she needs to complete her final client call by 2:15pm to be back in time to do the school run and take care of the children for the rest of the day, while her husband works until late.

By working in this way she is able to contribute to the household income, and her husband is able to spend daily time with his children. They are both achieving a balance.



B) MY PREFERRED CARING DUTIES

Are you clear about what duties you are expected to support clients with?

Here's a checklist for you to mark any that you think you'd be uncomfortable with:

		
Personal care: <i>These are the key duties in most client visits, and happen at specific times of day</i>		
Preparing meals		
Feeding clients		
Clearing up after meals		
Changing/dressing		
Washing/bathing		
Toilet assistance (eg emptying commodes and changing incontinence pads)		
Administering medication		
Domestic support: <i>These can generally be done at any time</i>		
Household cleaning		
Washing and ironing clothes		
Shopping		

C) MY TIME FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Spending time with friends and family makes us and them happier. All too often when we are busy with work and the chores of everyday life, it's easy to overlook this important aspect of our well-being.

As you start a new job and settle into new routines it can be difficult to get a good balance between work and life. Be kind to yourself by planning in a regular time with the people who matter to you.

Use this simple table to help you prioritise the people who are important to you:

The people I MUST spend time with each week/month
The people I will TRY to spend time with each week/month
Other people I would LIKE to spend time with each week/month

D) TIME FOR ME

Finding time for the things you enjoy reduces stress and helps you to unwind. Caring for others will take its emotional toll at times, so it's important to put some 'self-care' in place. It will keep you well, so you are in a good place to continue helping others.

"Me-time" doesn't have to mean being alone. It's more about finding time to do something you enjoy, which might be reading a book, going for a long walk with a friend, or watching a movie on the sofa with your partner.

Making time for yourself shows other people that you respect your own needs. If you don't respect yourself others are more likely to take advantage of you.

Ask yourself some questions:

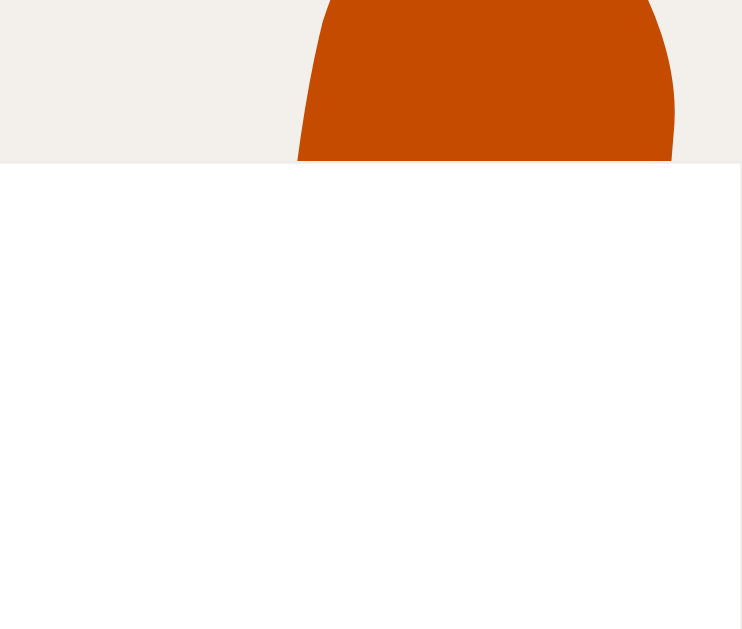
What do I enjoy doing to make me feel good?

Is there a regular time and day each week that I can protect for this?

What will I need to put in place to ensure I protect this time? Can I trade time with my partner? For example, they look after the children on a Wednesday evening so I can have a night out with friends, in exchange for me covering childcare on Saturday mornings so they can go cycling.

If you are parenting solo could you create a similar arrangement with a friend?

Make some notes on your ideas here:



07 THE FIRST FEW MONTHS IN YOUR NEW JOB

Your training

A good care agency will ensure that you have all the training you need to prepare you for the big responsibility of caring for vulnerable people. Some of this will be classroom-based training, and you will also shadow existing care workers as they make their client visits, to learn from them. How long your training lasts will depend on your previous experience and how quickly you learn on the job.

Speak to your employer to understand if your training time will be paid or unpaid, and if there is anything you can start working on while you wait for your references and checks to come through.

A good care agency will also explain what further training is available to you, to support your development and progress your career. Most will enrol you to take recognised qualifications, starting with a level 2 Diploma in Care. Do ask them about your future training options, and how to access them.



Be prepared for an unpredictable routine at first

It's important to understand that in the early days you will not be on a fixed schedule and may have to work outside of your preferred shifts. You will probably start by doubling up with an experienced worker, so will not have much input into how those visits are timed. If you have family responsibilities that clash during this phase of the job, can you get friends or relatives to help you out a bit at home?




When you are signed off as being competent, usually after a few weeks, you will begin to be offered your own clients and can start to build the working pattern that suits you. Remember that it might take a while for this to happen, especially if you place a lot of limits on the times, locations and tasks that you are willing to do.

Watch out for the impact on your earnings too. It could be that you only have one or two of your own clients to start with. You can make up the hours you want by taking on some additional double-handed duties, or tasks such as cleaning and shopping. It will be a balancing act for a while, and the more flexible you can be, the quicker you will have the right number of your own clients to fill the hours you would like to work.

08 CHECKLIST OF THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Hopefully you now have some food for thought about how a career in social care could work for you. **In summary, here are the key points to consider:**



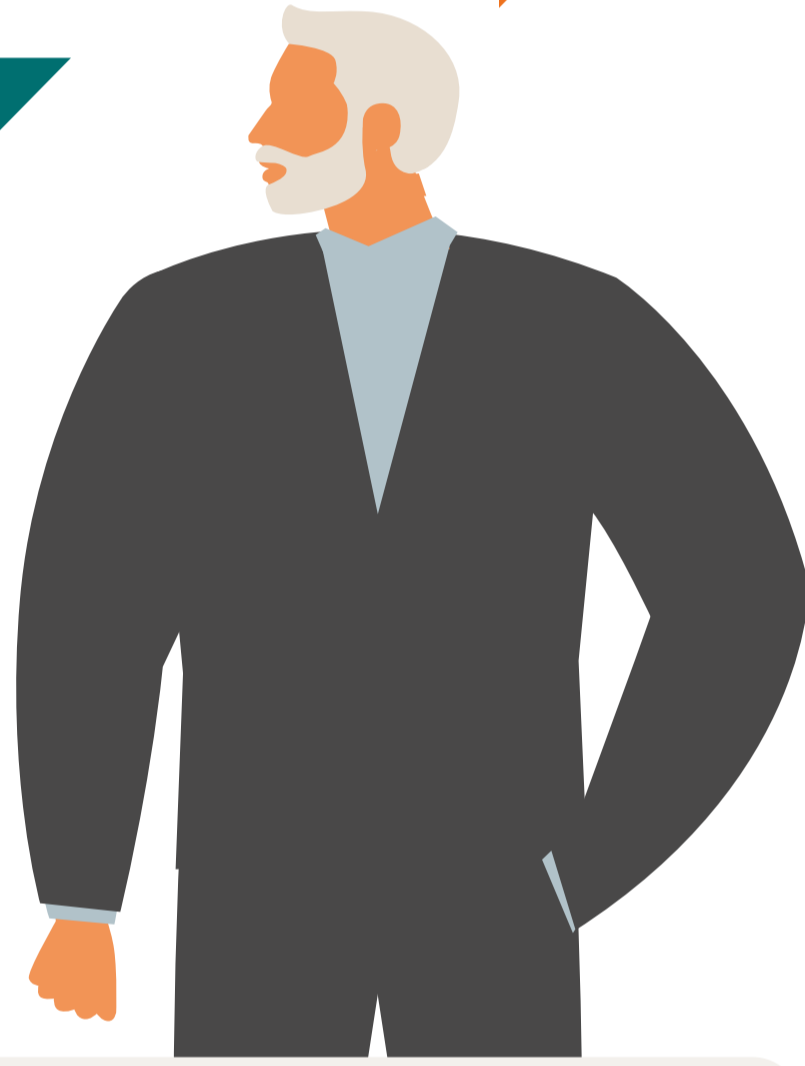
Do you understand the terms of your employment? Read your contract carefully and question anything you don't fully understand.

Are you comfortable with going in and out of the homes of vulnerable people on your own? Or would you prefer double-handed jobs where you work with clients who require two carers?


Are you fully aware of all the tasks you might be asked to do, and are you comfortable with them?

Are you clear on the times that you want to work, and the times you are definitely not available?

Have you thought through how you will manage during your training and first few months, when you might not be able to choose your time slots?



How will you travel between client visits and your own home? How will this affect the locations you can cover?



Remember that most care agencies will pay you based on the time you are with clients, with an hourly rate that includes an allowance for travel time. You will not be paid separately for your time travelling between clients, or for waiting time. Before deciding to take on a new client, make sure you take this into account. Consider if there is room for negotiation on your basic pay to ensure that you can cover your costs.

You're sure to have other questions, so please make a note of them and speak to your recruiter. They should be able to help you or point you in the right direction.



09 YOUR FUTURE CAREER



Congratulations on choosing such a valuable career. Many of the care workers we spoke to love their jobs because of the personal fulfilment they feel from supporting people in need. We hope this will hold true for you too.

The work can be challenging, but interesting too because no two days are ever the same. You're dealing with people, so there is plenty of variety and you will develop strong bonds with some of your clients. The huge reward of seeing your clients happy and well-cared for is something that other jobs simply cannot offer.

You'll also have plenty of opportunity to develop a long-term career in this sector, as the need for adult social care will continue to grow with our ageing population. And as your own life cycle changes, you'll have the flexibility to adapt your role to fit with it. For example, you might have limited availability while your children are young, but as they grow more independent you will be able to take on more work. There is also scope to gain promotion as a team leader, or even move into the training or management side of a care agency.

We hope the advice and exercises in this guide have been helpful to you. The care workers who helped to put it together all say that their supervisor and the office team have always been supportive and easily available to help with any difficult situations. So you'll never be alone – it's a sector that's full of people who care, and that goes for their colleagues as well as their clients.

Our best wishes for you in your new job,

From the Timewise Team



SUPPORT AND RESOURCES:

What makes a good care worker:

<https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/resources/documents/Recruitment-support/Application-and-selection-process/What-values-do-I-need-to-work-in-social-care.pdf>

Starting your career:

<https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Careers-in-care/Starting-your-career/Starting-your-career.aspx>

Developing your career:

<https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Careers-in-care/Develop-your-career/Develop-your-career.aspx>

Gaining qualifications:

<https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Developing-your-workforce/Qualifications/Qualifications.aspx>

Your rights as a care worker:

<https://www.unison.org.uk/care-workers-your-rights/>

Other support for care workers:

<https://www.thecareworkerscharity.org.uk/get-help/>