The self-directed learning modules presented in this section provide supervisors with essential information about end-of-life issues, as well as tools to help them support their employees. Each module introduces an end-of-life topic, outlines objectives and provides basic content and key messages for supporting employees who are dealing with these issues. At the end of each module is a list of Caring Connections resources that can be obtained through the Caring Connections Web site at www.caringinfo.org or by calling the HelpLine at (800) 658-8898.

This section also contains five case studies, one for each topic listed above.

- Employees Who Are Family Caregivers.
- Supporting Seriously Ill Employees.
- Supporting Grieving Employees.
- Advance Care Planning (Making Future Healthcare Decisions).
- Death of an Employee.

This section also contains five case studies; one case study for each topic listed above.

A. Supporting Employees Who Are Family Caregivers

This section will discuss the issues facing working caregivers and teach you about resources that can assist employees in maintaining a healthy balance between work and home life. It also covers the importance of being familiar with the company’s benefits and resources for family caregivers.

Working caregivers are not uncommon in today’s world. The dual responsibilities that working caregivers carry can be very demanding, and an employee in this situation usually requires extra support. Supervisors should become familiar with the issues of working caregivers and learn about the available resources and benefits that can help employees maintain a healthy balance between work and life. This type of support can increase employee productivity and commitment to the company.

The objectives in this section are to identify the benefits and resources available to your employees who are also caregivers, and to describe the dual roles and responsibilities of the working caregiver.
Benefits and resources for employees who are family caregivers

You might have one or more employees who work at your company during normal work hours and then return home to an evening of caring for a disabled spouse/partner or a parent whose health is failing. Because these two responsibilities amount to two full-time jobs, such employees might become exhausted, forget work-related tasks, arrive late to work and/or just not appear to be “themselves.”

A. Identifying benefits and resources

An employee might be thinking about the following questions, but not ask them out of fear of losing his or her job. As a supervisor, you can anticipate situations like this and consider what support you can offer.

• “Are there alternative work options available to me? Is telecommuting or flextime an option? Is there a way to shift the workload for a specified time?”  

Job sharing, telecommuting, flextime and schedule rearrangement can help to minimize the employee’s stress and fatigue.

• “Where can I go for emotional support? Are there any resources and information that can help me? Could our Employee Assistance Program help me? Is there anyplace else I can find help?”

Showing your employee that your company cares and has resources in place to help balance these dual roles will positively affect his or her morale and increase his or her loyalty to your company.

• “I know that I am not doing my best right now. Am I in danger of losing my job?”

What your employee wants to hear and needs to know is whether or not the company will be patient during this difficult time. Obviously the answer depends on a variety of factors. Your company must weigh the individual’s circumstances and productivity with the cost of replacing a valuable employee and training a replacement.

B. Types of support

You and your company can support employees in a number of ways:

• Accommodate their inevitable need to handle caregiving responsibilities during normal working hours. Specifically, you could offer a flexible work schedule (a four-day workweek, long lunches or a reduction in hours), flexible use of accumulated leave time or leave pooling.

• Recognize their emotional needs and support these employees in every way possible. This could be done, for example, through personal gestures of support, by encouraging peer support groups, by providing referrals for counseling and by encouraging a sensitive environment.

• Provide information and educational materials that will help caregivers to deal with caregiving-related decisions and to find high-quality services.
For the supervisor, supporting an employee who is a caregiver involves becoming familiar with available benefits and resources, creating a supportive work environment and identifying outside referrals for additional support.

Learn about the challenges that working caregivers face

Working caregivers juggle two full-time jobs: Providing care to a loved one and working at your company. A working caregiver might go from caregiving in the morning to working during the day and then back to caregiving in the evening. This leaves little or no time in between to care for oneself or live one's own life.

A. Challenges of a working caregiver

Working caregivers experience many challenges in trying to maintain a balance between work and life. Below are some examples:

- Taking a loved one to doctor appointments and making phone calls usually can be done only during work hours.
- They are coping with the emotional stress of watching a loved one decline and the grief that follows.
- Navigating the healthcare system when advocating for a loved one can be difficult, and even overwhelming.
- They sometimes feel resentful about being a caregiver, and then guilty for having felt resentful.
- Managing the challenges of being a working caregiver can leave them exhausted and vulnerable to illness.
- They worry about how they will continue to manage all of their work and personal responsibilities.
- They often must forgo their own needs—doctor’s appointments, vacations, fun activities—because they just do not have enough time do those and carry out their caregiving responsibilities.
B. Caregiver Resources

In addition to becoming familiar with your company’s benefits and policies, it would be helpful for you to learn about outside resources that might benefit your employees.

- Talk with your employees about the issues of working caregivers and learn about their situations as working caregivers. Ask them about the community organizations from which they currently receive services, as well as what help they might still need.

- Learn about the caregiver resources in your community:
  - Do the local hospices, hospitals or other community organizations offer caregiver support groups?
  - Is there a voluntary health association, such as the Alzheimer’s Association, that might be helpful to employees?
  - Do any faith communities to which your employees belong have caregiver support programs?

Be aware of the challenges that working caregivers face, including balancing the daily tasks of caregiving with work responsibilities. Also, know your community and be able to identify community resources that might be helpful for employees.

It also might be helpful to share these Caring Connections publications with employees:

» End-of-Life Caregiving.

» Providing Care and Support to Your Loved One.

» Caring for Yourself: How to Ask For Help.

To order publications, visit www.caringinfo.org or call (800) 658-8898 or (877) 658-8896 (Spanish).

For information for parents of serious ill children, visit www.partnershipforparents.org
Case study: The working caregiver

Cathy has worked as an administrative assistant for five years. Her colleagues describe her as dedicated and “invaluable.” For the past two years, she has been helping her grandfather care for her grandmother, who has Alzheimer’s disease. Cathy helps her grandfather coordinate her grandmother’s care and drives him to the nursing home every evening so he can spend time with his wife. Cathy’s grandfather is emotionally and physically exhausted and Cathy is very worried about both of them.

Cathy has been responsible not only for providing emotional support to her grandmother and grandfather, but also for helping them organize all of their financial, insurance and legal affairs in anticipation of her grandmother’s death. Although she has continued to work during the past six months, Cathy has occasionally had difficulty balancing her responsibilities to her work team with those to her grandmother and grandfather.

Last year Cathy discussed these issues with her supervisor, who put her in touch with the human resources department. Cathy has found their informational resources and the support of her co-workers to be very helpful. As a result of the overall response to her situation, she feels much closer to her co-workers and supervisor than she did when this process began. Now that her grandmother is close to death, she appreciates that her co-workers can fill in for her when she wants to spend some extra time with her grandmother, and that through her company’s flextime policy, she can do so without compromising her position at work.