

# Young Carers

A young carer is a child or young person (under the age of 18) who looks after someone in their family who has an illness, disability, mental health problem or drug and alcohol abuse/misuse problems. Young carers take on practical and/or emotional caring responsibilities that would normally be expected of an adult.

Young carers can provide physical care such as washing and other personal care. They might provide emotional support, for both the person who is ill and other members of the family. In addition, many young carers are responsible for looking after younger brothers and sisters or doing cooking and housework.

The 2001 census estimated that there are 175,000 young carers in the UK, but many professionals believe there are many more. The average age of a young carer is 12.

Caring can have a considerable impact on the quality of the young carer's childhood and can also affect future opportunities. Young carers are at risk of social isolation and bullying, under-achievement, absenteeism from school, and physical and mental health problems.

## Identifying a young carer

In dealing with adults with a care need, you may want to consider the question: who else looks after my client apart from me?

It is helpful to amend your assessment procedures to include some quick and simple questions:

- Who helps care for you at home?
- Do you have children?
  - What effect do your health problems or care needs have on them?
  - How do you feel about this?
  - How much do they do to help out?
  - How do you feel about them doing these tasks?
- Do you need more support as a parent?
- Do you know how your children feel about your illness?
- Have you noticed changes in your children, eg in their behaviour, sleeping etc?
- Do your children need more support?

## Talking to young carers

When talking to a young carer, listen carefully and accept the child's experience. It is important to acknowledge the young person's contributions and give appropriate support, information and choices.

Speak to the young person in private and explain the confidentiality rules you

operate within. Establish what caring tasks they are performing and why. Find out how their caring role affects them. Do they struggle with schoolwork? Do they worry when they are out of contact with home? How can you help with these issues?

It is important to be sensitive to the fact that many young people do not want to be labelled as a 'young carer', or singled out as different.

Young carers may be frightened, rather than reassured, by too much information – a small amount of relevant information is often best. Also they are likely to feel more secure if they can get to know one person who they can trust, rather than lots of people 'doing their bit'.

### **Helping the whole family**

With the young person's permission, speak to their parent(s) about their caring role. Are there other forms of support open to the family or another family member that could help more? Remember – few parents choose a caring role for their child. It is often the only option they are aware of and many feel very guilty about the effect their illness has on their child.

Explain to parents and children that they may both be entitled to an assessment of their needs from social services. Young carers who are 16 or over are entitled to a carer's assessment, but some Local Authorities will also assess younger carers.

Some people think that social workers want to take children into care. You may need to reassure the parents/young carer that social services will seek to ensure they have the support they need, and that the young carer does not take on inappropriate levels of caring.

Help the family to contact the nearest Young Carers Project or other agencies, if they want you to. You can find out about Young Carers Projects by clicking Projects/Support at [www.youngcarer.com](http://www.youngcarer.com)

### **Health Issues**

One of the biggest stresses identified by young carers is that they often know very little about their relative's health problems. Try to encourage the cared-for person to allow you to explain their health condition to their children. If this is not possible, there is no data protection barrier to giving a child or young person general information about the relevant health condition. Some of the unspoken questions that trouble many young carers include:

- Can I catch it/will it happen to me too?
- What caused it? Why us? Is it my fault?
- Can I do anything to make the person better?
- Will the person I look after get worse or die?
- What should I do in an emergency?

## Child Protection

Child abuse is defined as someone causing significant harm to a child or young person under the age of 18. The four main types of abuse are: physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and sexual abuse. All organisations that come into contact with parents or children should have a child protection policy; ensure that you are familiar with your organisation's. If you are worried that a child is being abused, call the 24-hour NSPCC Child Protection Helpline on 0808 800 5000. Helpline counsellors are trained child protection officers – they will pass the details on to the local social services child protection team.

## First aid

It may be appropriate to give the young carer the opportunity to learn some basic first aid. It would be useful if you could investigate what is covered by the courses so you know whether they are suitable for a particular young carer.

[www.bbc.co.uk/health/first\\_aid\\_action](http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/first_aid_action) has interactive cartoons that tell you what to do to help adults and children in different first aid situations, such as someone burning themselves, or finding someone unconscious.

St John's Ambulance runs a First Aid course for children and young people called Young Lifesaver. This could take place in a school, youth club or Young Carers Project. For further information contact your nearest St John's Ambulance office by ringing 08700 10 49 50.

## Schools

You might consider contacting the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) at the young person's school if there are particular problems, eg they are being bullied, having difficulty with homework or they are unhappy or stressed.

You might also want to consider contacting the SENCo, or someone else at the school, when the cared-for person dies. Does the school know about the Help the Hospices' project for secondary schools, *The Hospice Pack: Hospice and Palliative Care for Citizenship, PSHE/PSD and RE?*

## Information to provide

You should be able to provide contact details – name, address, telephone number, email, website – of the following:

- Social Services Department or Social Work Department (Scotland) – you may decide to contact a social worker on the young carer's behalf
- Young Carers Project – find your nearest Young Carers Project at [www.youngcarer.com](http://www.youngcarer.com)
- Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)
- Youth Enquiry Service (YES) – this offers confidential advice for young people. The best way to find your nearest YES is to type 'Youth Enquiry Service' and your nearest town into a search engine, such as [www.google.co.uk](http://www.google.co.uk)

- Connexions Centre – if you are in England, Connexions runs one-stop shops in many towns where young people can turn up without an appointment and ask for information about learning, careers, health and relationships. Visit [www.connexions-direct.com](http://www.connexions-direct.com) to find your nearest Connexions centre.
- Other resources for young carers, including young carers groups or clubs, local charities that offer support for young carers, or other local specialist organisations.

It is also useful to have the names and job titles of people within your organisation who can provide advice and/or support to young carers. You might want to include one or more of the following:

- social worker
- family support worker
- bereavement counsellor
- carers support worker
- befriending coordinator.

### **Using this guide**

This guide aims to give support and information to young people who care for someone with a terminal illness. Many young carers would be overwhelmed by being given too much information at one time, so the materials have been designed so they can be photocopied and given out in small sections. If possible, it is recommended that you photocopy the pages onto coloured paper. You can also download this guide from [www.timetocare.org.uk](http://www.timetocare.org.uk)

The materials are suitable for young carers 12 years old or over. Some pages are clearly designed for specific carers, eg the pages about cancer, MS, and 'Information for carers aged 16 and over', while others are intended for all young carers.

### **Duplicating/photocopying**

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### **Feedback**

Help the Hospices welcomes feedback from young carers and professionals about this guide. Please send comments to Help the Hospices, Hospice House, 34–44 Britannia Street, London WC1X 9JG, or email [caring@helpthehospices.org.uk](mailto:caring@helpthehospices.org.uk)

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### *The Princess Royal Trust for Carers*

This is the largest provider of comprehensive carers' support in the UK, which provides information, advice and support services to carers, including young carers.

The Princess Royal Trust for Carers,  
Young Carers Programme,  
142 Minories,  
London EC3N 1LB  
Telephone 020 7480 7788  
[www.carers.org/www.youngcarers.net](http://www.carers.org/www.youngcarers.net)

### *The Children's Society*

The Young Carers Initiative offers information and training to young carers, their families, and anyone who works with young carers. It has developed a good-practice guide *Making It Work*. This guide is a partnership publication by The Children's Society and The Princess Royal Trust for Carers. It provides comprehensive guidance in the areas of assessment, provision of effective services, support for young carers in school, and the role of young carers projects. The content contains the views of young carers and their families.

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