

Identifying hidden and new young carers: A tool for practitioners

Introduction:

Working Together to Safeguard Children defines young carers as 'a person under 18 who provides or intends to provide care for another person (of any age, except generally where that care is provided for payment, pursuant to a contract or as voluntary work)'.

Estimates of their number in England range from approximately 166,000⁴ to more than 800,000⁵. This significant variance highlights the challenges around the identification of young carers. Children can undertake caring responsibilities from a very young age which can have significant implications. These responsibilities can include tasks such as cooking and household chores, administering medication, washing and helping with toileting needs or being there to listen and help calm a situation.

Evidence shows that having a caring role can impact negatively on a child's physical and mental wellbeing, social relations, education and employment prospects.

Identification, and more importantly early or timely identification, is a crucial first step in ensuring young carers receive the support they need before a child becomes vulnerable. Often young carers don't get identified until a crisis. The sooner we can find out someone is a young carer, the more support can be put in place to help keep them safe, well and able to attend and achieve their best

Research on young carers demonstrates the multiple, intersecting and compounding disadvantages they experience as a result of their caring role:

- **Education:** At GCSE level young carers perform the equivalent to nine grades lower than their peers who are not carers, that is the difference between nine Cs and nine Ds. 27% of young carers of secondary school age experience educational difficulties or miss school, rising to 40% when caring for someone who misuses drugs or alcohol. On average young carers miss or cut short 48 school days a year.

- **Health:** The 2011 Census showed that young carers providing 50+ hours of care a week were up to five times more likely to report their general health as 'Not good'. The 2017 GP Patient Survey found that 45% of young adult carers in England reported suffering from depression or anxiety compared with 31% of young people not in a caring role.

- **Socialisation:** A quarter of young carers said they were bullied at school because of their caring role. 23% of young carers said their caring role has made it harder for them to form friendships. More than 80% of young carers felt that their caring role affected their opportunity to take part in leisure activities.

Early identification is the crucial first step to support which means a young carer and their family can receive appropriate help before a child becomes vulnerable. Many young people with caring responsibilities aren't known to their schools or colleges and don't see themselves as being young carers or feel too worried or embarrassed to ask for help.

Many children take on additional caring responsibilities; this can be both an additional pressure, impacting on their education, friendships and involvement in everyday child activities. These young caring responsibilities can also be a source of pride, with a sense for the child that they are contributing to the wellbeing of the whole family. This will all depend on whether the caring responsibilities are appropriate (no personal care), consistent with age and developmental abilities, they do not interfere too much with day-to-day life and the child feels they are managing and that the caring is making a difference to family life.

Many young carers have challenged professional views about their caring responsibility, reminding adults of the need for an individualised response. That is why the local authority is required to carry out an assessment of a young carer's needs and consider what support is necessary.

Policy and Legislation

On 1 April 2015, two new pieces of legislation came into force, giving new rights to care and support for young carers, young adult carers, and their families. The new laws are called the Children and Families Act 2014, and the Care Act 2014. The new duties and powers placed on local authorities mean that arrangements must be in place to identify, assess and provide information and advice to young carers, young adult carers, and their families. This is to ensure that no young person's life is unnecessarily or inappropriately affected because they are providing care to a family member.

Working Together 2023 states that if a local authority considers that a young carer may have support needs, it must carry out an assessment under section 17ZA of the Children Act 1989 to establish how best they can support the young carer and their family. The local authority must also carry out such an assessment if a young carer, or the parent of a young carer, requests one.

Such an assessment must consider whether it is appropriate or excessive for the young carer to provide care for the person in question, (which may be a sibling, parent, or other member of the family), in light of the young carer's needs and wishes. The Young Carers (Needs Assessment) Regulations 2015⁹⁶ require local authorities to look at the needs of the whole family when carrying out a young carer's needs assessment.

Local authorities must consider whether to combine a young carer's needs assessment with any other assessment of the needs for support of the young carer, the person cared for, or a member of the young carer's family.

Choice and Consequences

Many children help out around the house or with their siblings. This, in itself, does not make them a young carer. The key elements to be aware of are CHOICE and CONSEQUENCES. For example, if you do not live in a family where someone has a disability and you choose not to do whatever tasks are your responsibility, then the consequences are likely to be stopped pocket money or a telling off. If you make the same choice as a young carer, the consequences are potentially more profound.

- Your brother with Autism runs out of the house and goes missing
- Your parent goes without something to eat or drink for hours
- Your dad has a seizure whilst you are out playing football
- Your mum is crying when you get in from your friend's house

Signs that someone might have caring responsibilities:

- Regular lateness
- Low attendance
- Not completing homework
- Tiredness
- Low attention span
- Lack motivation
- Low mood/mental ill-health
- Anxious
- Parent/guardian uses disabled parking space
- Lack of parent/guardian attending parents evening/other school events
- On pupil premium/free school meals
- Change in hygiene/appearance
- Change in behaviour – becoming aggressive or angry, withdrawn or quieter.

Are you aware of a young person's family member...

- Experiences illness, disability, mental ill health or has a history of substance misuse?
- Often misses appointments with school/other professionals?
- Is it difficult to engage with or contact the child's parents/carers?

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. I wanted to have a quick chat to ask how you are. I've noticed you've [see signs listed above etc]. I just wanted to check if you're OK or if there's anything we can do to help?

2. Sometimes when things are happening at home it can affect how we feel at school/college. So, I wondered if there's anyone in your family who needs extra support because of physical or mental illnesses, or any disabilities, or because of drugs or alcohol?

3. Do you do anything to help them or look after them? Or to help anyone else in your family because of their [illness/disability/drug or alcohol use]? [If yes] What kind of things do you do?

4. Is there anyone else at home who helps out? Or anyone who doesn't live at home who helps with looking after your family?

5. Do you often think about or worry about your family when you're not with them? Does it distract you or make it hard to concentrate? [If yes] Is this on your mind all the time or just when you're away from home? [If yes] What kind of things do you worry about?

6. How does this make you feel?

7. Do you get time to yourself to relax, see friends or do any hobbies on your own away from the people you care for? Does looking after someone ever take up too much time and stop you doing things you want to do? What kind of things?

8. Does caring have any effects on your own health? [physical and/or emotional]

9. How are things going at school/college? How does caring affect school/college for you?

10. Do you have anyone you already talk to about your caring? You're not alone and there is support out there if you want any [more] support.

Agreed plan – in and out of school/college: