

Is someone you teach a young carer?



A 'young carer' is someone under 18 whose life is restricted because of the need to take responsibility for a family member due to sickness, disability, mental health, and alcohol or drug problems.

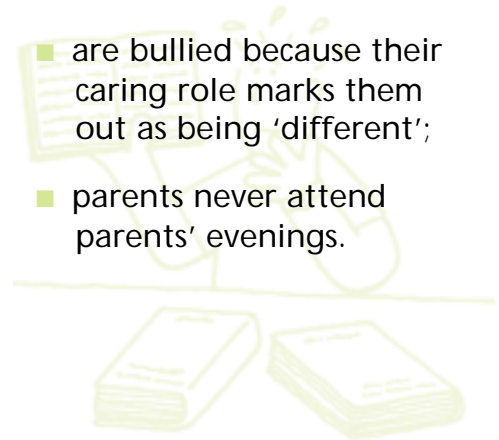
Young carers may fall behind in school. They often have to take time off and can display disruptive behaviour. Teachers who are unaware of their pupils' home situation often react to the behaviour rather than search for the reasons behind it.

You can help by identifying young carers and supporting them

Warning signs to look out for

Many young carers:

- are regularly late for school;
- miss school because of their home commitments;
- fail to complete homework because of caring commitments;
- may show signs of illness, tiredness or depression because of the physical and emotional strain of providing care at home;
- lack concentration;
- are withdrawn or isolated;
- may exhibit unacceptable patterns of behaviour;
- have limited social skills and few friends;
- are unexpectedly mature and responsible for their years because of taking on an adult role at home;
- miss out on extra-curricular activities;
- underachieve;
- lack confidence;
- are bullied because their caring role marks them out as being 'different';
- parents never attend parents' evenings.



Young carers' experience of school

- Problems in school, with completing homework, concentrating in class and in getting qualifications because of missed schooling.

"I don't always feel my homework is good enough. I have to rush to get it done."

- Isolation from peers.

"No children should ever have to live like I lived."

- Lack of recognition, praise or respect for their contribution.

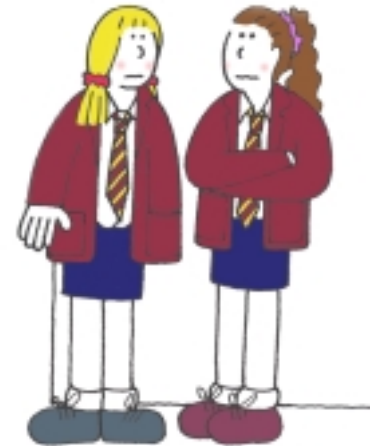
"No one ever asks how I am, they just say, how's Mum?"

- A sense of being different from other children and an inability to be part of a group.

"Sometimes you feel like no one can help you, that you are the only one this stuff happens to."

- Problems with bullying by other children because their caring situation often means that they don't fit in.

"They say stuff like 'your mum is a bat she flies around and bumps into lamp posts' because they know she is half blind."



Tasks young carers often have to perform

Intimate personal care – washing, dressing, toileting, medication and so on.

Emotional support – young carers themselves are often seen by the parent as a shoulder to cry on.

Care of younger siblings.

Basic household chores.

Shopping.

Cooking.

The snapshots below were taken from personal interviews in a study of young carers for the Welsh Assembly Government's Carers' Strategy for Wales. (All names have been changed.)

Paul is 15. He takes sole responsibility for his father who suffers from drug and alcohol addiction. Paul does almost everything for his Dad.

Aliyah is 17, Raj is 15 and Nadia is 14. They look after their disabled mother. She has diabetes and suffered a suspected stroke. Her English is poor so they also act as interpreters for her.

Gary is 12. His two brothers have severe learning and behavioural problems. He helps as much as he can.



How schools can help?

- Being alert to the signs that a child might be a young carer.
- Knowing what support structures and services are available – such as Young Carers Projects, Education Welfare Officers, Social Inclusion Officers and local social services.
- Listening to young carers and being sensitive to their needs. This includes respecting their desire for confidentiality as many youngsters see their family situation as an intensely private matter.
- Nominating a link teacher who may be able to help by: encouraging peer support, providing opportunities in school time for young carers to complete schoolwork and providing access to a telephone.
- Offering pastoral support through the Education Welfare Service within schools.
- Respecting the wishes of young carers by not singling them out or drawing attention to them by treating them differently.
- Understanding and respecting that each individual's needs and requirements are different.



Impact of Caring

Caring frequently has a negative impact on a young person's health and well being, as well as their social and educational development. A significant number suffer from depression, anxiety and low self esteem, and have difficulties forming relationships.

Across the UK an estimated 51,000 young people are in this situation, with around 3,000 living in Wales. However, caring is largely a hidden problem. Some young people fear being taken into care if their family problems are made public. They also worry about appearing 'different' to their peers. Shame may

also be a factor in revealing that a parent has mental health problems or misuses substances such as drugs or alcohol.

Young carers in school

- Many children and young people who have cared for a chronically sick or disabled parent experience long-term problems in their own lives. This often stems from missed school, which can lead to a lack of qualifications and job opportunities.
- Poor school attendance and performance are common problems that affect young carers greatly. One third of

young carers aged 11-15 miss some school or experience difficulties at school either because they are tired, worried or perhaps being bullied.

- Young carers are also likely to miss out on out-of-school educational opportunities, such as after school clubs, visits and holidays because of their responsibilities at home.



How can teachers help?

- With greater awareness and understanding, young carers may be better able to cope with their responsibilities at home and at school. This in turn may help them develop friendships and a social life appropriate to their age. Added support will also help them fulfil their educational potential.
- Most young carers need support and understanding from their teachers. Teachers can help by identifying the appropriate support systems that are available. Teachers also have a role in reassuring young carers that

referrals to agencies offering support services will not necessarily lead to being taken into care.

- Teachers need to work closely with Education Welfare Officers and/or Social Inclusion Officers to develop an environment within schools where children feel able to approach them through their link teacher. Children need to be confident that their circumstances will be recognised and understood.

Most young carers agree that things would be easier for them if teachers had a fuller understanding of their circumstances.

- Teachers need to be aware that to many young carers, caring brings rewards as well as difficulties. Many young carers do not want to give up their caring role, they just want support and understanding in doing it.
- Teachers can make themselves aware of local young carers' projects and young carers' support services within the area. By doing so they can act as a first sign posting agent.
- Teachers can contact their local 'Young Carer's Project Centre' to discuss support for young carers.

Guidance

For procedures on referrals and support systems on young carers teachers can refer to:

- Pupil Support and Social Inclusion – Circular 3/99 (Pupils at Risk).

The document sets out a range of school-based actions to address pupil disaffection and challenge behavioural difficulties that can often result in young people failing to make the most of their educational opportunities.

Children and young carers' rights

Addressing the needs of young carers requires good quality joint working between social services, schools and health care workers.

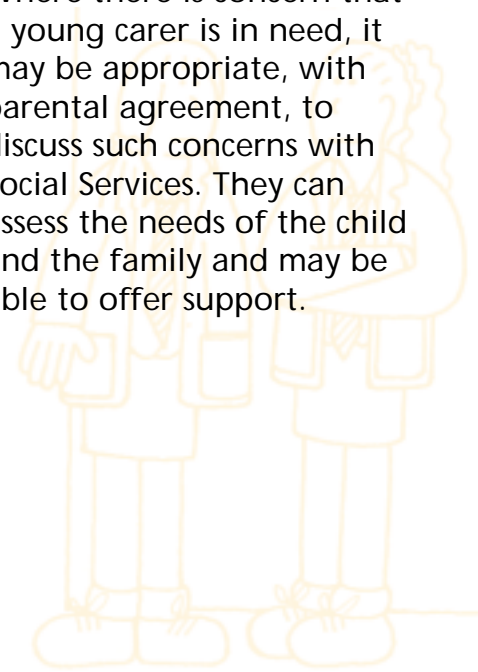
The Children Act 1989

Young carers should not be expected to carry inappropriate levels of caring which have an adverse impact on their development and future life chances.

Under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, a child is taken to be in need if he or she is unlikely to achieve a

reasonable standard of health or development, or whose health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, if additional support is not provided to the child or family.

Where there is concern that a young carer is in need, it may be appropriate, with parental agreement, to discuss such concerns with Social Services. They can assess the needs of the child and the family and may be able to offer support.



The UN convention on the rights of the Child 1989

The The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted unanimously by the UN in November 1989 and by the UK Government in December 1991. The Welsh Assembly Government believes that the Convention should provide the basis for all dealings with children and young people.

Information

- Young Carers Leaflet: Ace Young Carer (Welsh Assembly Government 2001)

This leaflet was produced for young carers and contains information on local young carers' projects and support organisations in Wales. It is also a useful information resource for teachers.

- Supporting Young Carers in School. Carers Lewisham

Available from Young Carers Schools Project on 020 8699 8686. This pack is a useful resource for those with responsibility for the provision of pastoral support to pupils who are young carers.



Full details can be found on the UNICEF website

Some facts

- The average age of a young carer is 12.
- One in three young carers regularly miss school or have educational problems because of their caring role.
- Around 70% of young carers and young people in general claim to have been bullied at least once¹.
- One in four young carers has nobody to confide in regarding their caring role.
- One in four young carers receives no external support other than contact with a Young Carers Project.

Websites

- www.wales.gov.uk/subisocialcarers
- includes list of Young Carer Projects in Wales
- www.youthinformation.com/education
- www.youthinformation.com/health
- www.youthinformation.com/justice
- www.childrenfirst.wales.gov.uk
- www.unicef.org.uk
- details available on The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989

