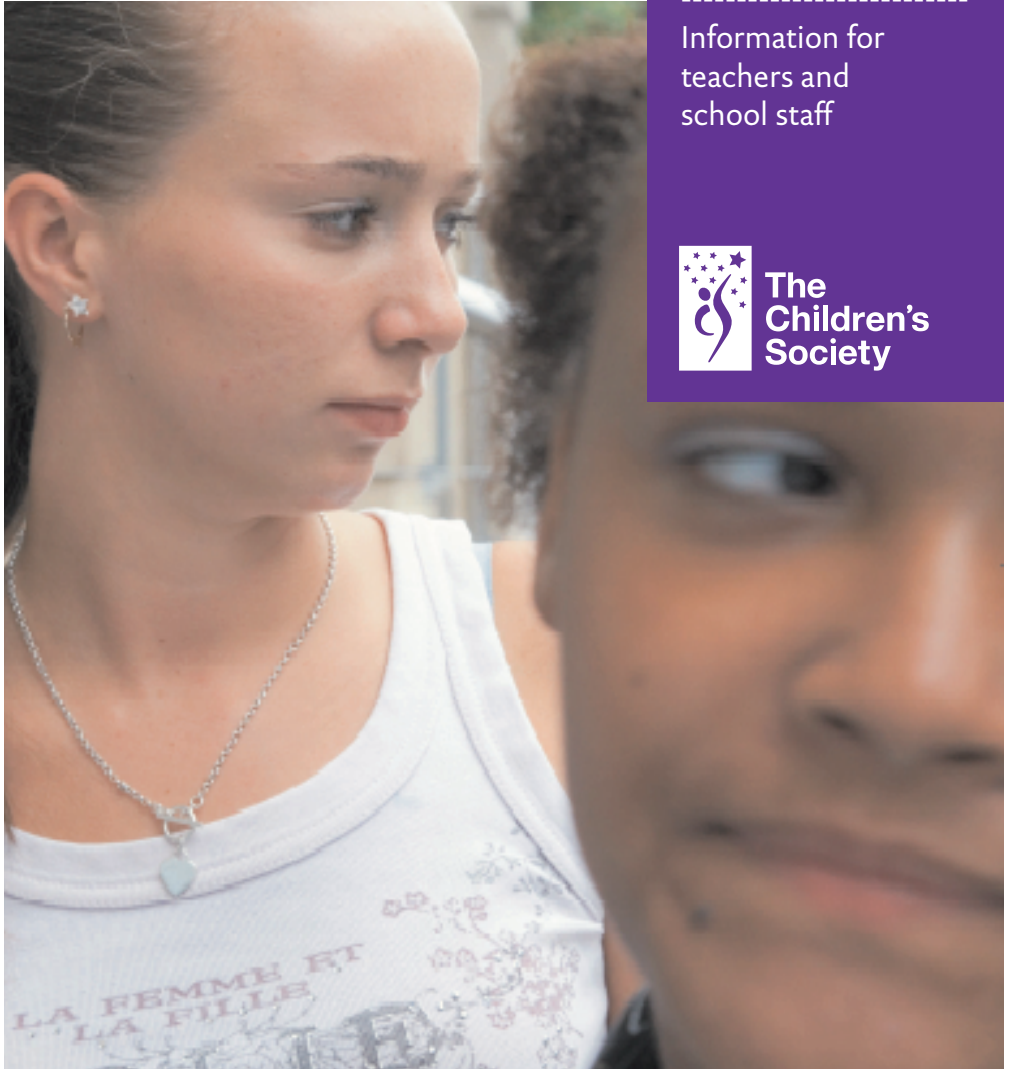


Include Project

Information for
teachers and
school staff



The
Children's
Society



supporting pupils who are
young carers



Who are young carers?

“Young carers are children and young persons under 18 who provide, or intend to provide, care, assistance or support to another family member. They carry out, often on a regular basis, significant or substantial caring tasks and assume a level of responsibility, which would usually be associated with an adult. The person receiving care is often a parent but can be a sibling, grandparent or other relative who is disabled, has some chronic illness, mental health problem or other condition connected with a need for care, support or supervision.”¹

“Every school will have young carers... and just one individual teacher or support worker being involved can make a huge difference.”²



Relevant guidance

Department for Education and Skills *Advice and Guidance to Schools and Local Authorities on Managing Behaviour and Attendance* states:

Young carers care for a relative who has a disability, physical or mental illness or substance misuse problem. Whilst young people should not be expected to carry inappropriate levels of caring which have an adverse impact on their development and life chances, the 2001 Census found almost 150,000 children and young people undertaking caring roles in England and Wales, including nearly 11,000 who cared for more than 50 hours per week. Young carers may be late or absent from school because of their responsibilities. They may appear to be tired, disengaged, isolated from peers or under-achieving. Many report bullying. Many young carers keep their caring role a secret for fear of inappropriate intervention or because of the stigma surrounding some health conditions, addictions and disabilities.

Schools can help young carers in two ways. Firstly by helping the family, if they are willing, to contact appropriate community care or adults' services to provide more support to the cared-for person, thus reducing the need for the pupil to take on inappropriate caring responsibilities. Secondly, by providing flexible and sensitive support to the young carer when their caring role is particularly stressful or making it hard for them to complete work on time. Again, outside agencies such as youth services, voluntary sector young carers services and if appropriate, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services can assist. There is a voluntary sector database of young carers' services at www.youngcarer.com. Any referrals to, or discussions with, outside agencies must be undertaken sensitively, confidentially, and with the pupil's knowledge, recognising that both the child and their family have a right to privacy and self-determination. Some children may fear being "put into care" if their parents are seen as unable to cope. It is

important to be clear that Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 places a duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their area, through the provision of services, and where possible, to promote the upbringing of children within their families.

In a genuine crisis, a school can approve absence for a child to care for a relative until other arrangements can be made. The school should set a time limit for the absence and set some school work so the pupil does not fall far behind while at home. It may also be appropriate for a pupil whose close relative is in the final stages of terminal illness to take time off school to be with them.

Should the pupil's absence be due to their caring for someone with a long term or recurring illness, this may indicate an inadequate level of support from community care/ adults' services. The family may welcome efforts to advocate on their behalf for better support arrangements to be in place for future emergencies. If the family is unwilling to discuss their support needs, that must be respected. The school should nevertheless consider and address the pupil's welfare using their usual assessment procedures.

Schools should consider designating a member of staff to have responsibility for young carers. Pupils and parents should be made aware of what to expect if they contact this staff member, for instance through publicising a School Policy on young carers.

Further advice about is available on the following TeacherNet pages:

- **Young Carers**

- www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/library/youngcarersandschools/youngcarers/

- **Helping schools to be in tune with young carers**

- www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/library/youngcarersandschools/

Also see:

www.dfes.gov.uk/behaviourandattendance

www.dfes.gov.uk/schoolattendance



Legislation

Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995;
Carers and Disabled Children Act 2001;
Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004

Together these Acts give young carers varying rights to an assessment of their needs, which must take into account their right to an education. See the SCIE practice guide to the Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004 commissioned by the Department of Health (available at www.scie.org.uk).

Effective Attendance Practice in Schools: An overview of attendance guidance

This states that schools should have “*support systems in place for vulnerable groups which provide, among other things, signposting and access to external support for parents and pupils*” and “*training for staff on specific needs of pupils e.g. young carers*”.

“Pupil performance and well-being go hand in hand. Pupils can’t learn if they don’t feel safe or if health problems are allowed to create barriers. And doing well in education is the most effective route for young people out of poverty and disaffection.”

Every Child Matters: Change for Children in Schools DFES/1089/2004



Will there be any young carers in my school?

- The 2001 Census has shown that there are approximately 175,000 young carers in the UK.
- A study in one authority suggested there may be up to 30 young carers in a secondary school.³

Many young carers have problems at school, including poor educational performance and difficulty fitting in with their peers. Such problems may be a consequence of poor attendance and the pressure and stress caused by their caring responsibilities. Although there has been a gradual decrease in absence from school among young carers since 1995, between 13 per cent of those of primary school age and 27 per cent of those of secondary school age are still experiencing some problems at school (Dearden and Becker, 2004). In addition, when families include someone with a disability, the family income is likely to be lower than average. This may affect the young person's opportunities for further education. (Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act)

“I wish I did not have to keep explaining my situation at school. I just want them to understand.”

Young carer



How will I know which pupils are young carers?

It is possible that you will not know formally that one of your pupils is a young carer.

This could be for several reasons:

- The young person may be reluctant to draw attention to their family's situation.
- The pupil may not recognise themselves to be a young carer.

It is important for schools to raise awareness among pupils and staff about the issues relating to young carers in order to allow them to feel able to ask for help and support.

Teachers need to be alert to reasons why pupils who are often late or miss days or weeks off school for no apparent reason, are tired or withdrawn, have difficulty joining in extra curricular activities appear isolated or are victims of bullying. It may be because they are a young carer.

Governing bodies in schools should make provision for policy and practice that supports young carers and promotes good communication with their families, by having inclusive policies that enable the identification of young carers and that deliver effective methods of supporting them to achieve their full potential.⁴

Caring about Carers (DoH, 1999) recognised schools as one of the most likely places where young carers who are not already known to statutory authorities can be identified and then helped.



What tasks might young carers have to undertake at home?

Most young people undertake caring tasks at some time within their family. However, some young people may be undertaking levels of care that have a negative impact on their own well-being. This is called inappropriate care.

Some examples of the tasks young people undertake are:

- **Household chores** – including washing, cooking and cleaning on behalf of the whole family.
- **Personal care** such as giving medication, changing dressings, assisting with mobility.
- **Emotional support** – monitoring and meeting the emotional needs of the person.
- **Intimate care** – washing, dressing and assisting with toilet requirements.
- **Childcare** – helping to care for younger siblings, including escorting, to school in addition to other caring tasks.
- **Other** – Accompanying parent to hospital and acting as a translator for non-speaking sensory impaired, or whose first language is not English.⁴

There are many reasons why children and young people care and why the level of care may become inappropriate. It may be because of a lack of effective services from outside the family, the structure of the family itself, or the nature of the illness or disability.



How might a young carer's academic performance and life at school be affected?

Inappropriate levels of care impact on a child's own emotional or physical well being or educational achievement and life chances.

It is possible that a young person's caring responsibilities will mean that they may:

- Have difficulties completing homework on time
- Arrive late to school
- Need to take days off
- Be constantly tired
- Be unable to concentrate in class
- Find their parents are unable to attend parents' evenings.
- Experience being stigmatized or bullied
- Underachieve academically
- Have behavioral difficulties
- Experience bullying/isolation
- May be unable to attend extra-curricular activities.

“I missed a lot of school because he wasn't well and I didn't like leaving him in case he fell over and he couldn't reach a phone or pull the cords...”

Young carer



Admissions and transport

It would be good practice for admission authorities to consider the responsibilities of young carers and the impact of any family disability or illness on those young carers when setting admission criteria for their schools.

Being disabled or ill can result in great difficulties for parents to get their children to and from school and to fulfil their responsibility for children to attend school.

Local authorities may take into account a parent's capacity to accompany their child on the journey to school. It is for individual authorities to make decisions on these matters and social services should play their part in supporting disabled people to fulfil their responsibilities as parents.

Many young carers attending secondary school are responsible for escorting younger siblings to primary school when a parent with a disability or long term-illness is unable to escort them. This can cause difficulties for the older child, particularly when younger children do not attend schools close to or en route to the older child's school.

“Free home to school transport is a service that local authorities provide to parents of school pupils where they consider it ‘necessary’ to secure a child’s attendance at school. Local authorities must consider transport necessary for all pupils of compulsory school age (including those with disabled parents), and who attend their nearest suitable school, provided that the school is beyond the statutory walking distance”

Jacqui Smith (Minister of State, Schools and 14-19 Learners) in a written answer to Parliamentary question on 23 January 2006



What can we do as a school or schools worker?

Have a named staff member with lead responsibility for young carers:

- a) to ensure that they have the same access to a full education and career choices as their peers; and
- b) to be responsible for promoting and co-ordinating the support they need and liaising with other agencies as appropriate.

Become informed

- Enable staff to gain an understanding of how being a young carer affects their ability to access educational opportunities fully. (This should take place before raising pupils' awareness to ensure support is in place.)
- Include training during Inset or twilight sessions. The Young Carers Initiative (YCI) can advise on this.
- Make resources available to staff (See page 16)
- Enable staff to access additional training about how the needs of young carers can be better met. (For details contact the YCI.)

“It’s difficult to talk to teachers – it’s not easy to explain – its always in the corridor or class. I just don’t tell them”

Young carer

Promote an inclusive environment so that all pupils can access the curriculum

- Promote positive messages about people with disabilities and mental ill health throughout the whole curriculum, as a way of leading to a better understanding of the caring role: it can happen to anyone!
- Implement a policy statement on young carers and amend other policies e.g. bullying
- Referral to outside agencies should be done sensitively, recognizing that a child may fear being “put into care” if the parents are seen as unable to cope.
- Consider including a statement on the school admissions form to help identify families where someone has a long-term illness or care need.

“I don’t wan’t to be different, I am worried they will just tease me again about Mum and the way she is ... so I just keep quiet.”

Young carer

Support the individual pupil

- When speaking to any known or possible young carers do so in private, not in front of their peers.
- Establish what the young carer's needs are and how these may be met.
- Be sensitive to cultural issues.
- Ensure that existing individual plans recognise the pupils' specific needs as a young carer. e.g. Support to enable them to complete their homework and coursework; Access to a telephone while in school/college; during breaks or lunchtime if necessary this may reduce the possibility that a young person might miss school when a parent is particularly unwell.
- Consider notifying an examination authority about young carers circumstances.
- Establish a drop-in group for young carers to have time with their peers
- Find different ways of communicating with parents other than parents' evenings, which may be difficult for some parents to access. E.g. home visits, taped letters.
- Schools and colleges should be accessible to parents who are disabled or have a long-term illness.
- Communication strategies include provision for any parent with a visual, hearing or communication impairment (as covered in the Disability and Discrimination Act 1995 with regards to access to goods, services and facilities.)

Raise awareness and link with other agencies

- Raise awareness of young carers issues amongst pupils and staff sensitively within PSHE and/or assemblies, once support systems have been put in place.
- Create a community health notice board, promoting sources of support for young carers and their families. (Pack available from YCI)
- Become informed about the agencies in your area that can offer support to young carers.
- Ensure that full use is made of the available support services, for example education, welfare, social services, youth service and Connexions.

“Please don’t tell everyone about our family, we want schools to support us but to respect our privacy and we don’t want to be seen as ‘different’.”

Young carer

“School staff may be the first to be aware of the young person’s caring situation, and therefore be key to setting the tone for the service response and trigger inter-agency action”.

Department of Health 1996

Recognise and support the positives

- The experience of being a young carer does have positive aspects. Young carers can be highly self-motivated, multi-taskers coping with and achieving at school while undertaking a caring role.
- However, it is important that such recognition does not inadvertently encourage the continuation of inappropriate care taking place or that caring becomes a cause for celebration and not action. Their ability to cope and achieve must not be used mask their need for support. It is also important that careers advisors do not assume that the care profession should be the only career path but assist young carers to explore all options.⁵
- Enable those young carers in Further Education to access Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) if eligible.

“Many young carers have key skills and competencies that go unrecognised and there is currently no way of accrediting such skills... While the acquisition of such will not be best achieved by caring unsupported, such skills, if acknowledged would be an asset to many employers.”⁶

Young carers give top ten tips for schools

1. Recognise that our responsibility as carers can affect our education and schoolwork.
2. Find out about us, what we need and how we are not like other students.
3. Take time to find out about individual problems at home. Sometimes we're too embarrassed to tell you ourselves.
4. Don't automatically punish us if we're late. Sometimes we can't help being late because we're helping out at home.
5. Provide more support such as lunchtime drop-ins or homework clubs.
6. Be flexible – give us more time and help to do homework or coursework.
7. Include information about young carers and disability issues in PHSE lessons.
8. Let us phone parents if we need to find out if they are OK.
9. Make sure there is a clear and up to date community notice board which has support information for us and where else we can get help in the community.
10. Ensure teachers are offered training on young carers and disability issues both at university and on inset days.

Source: Young Carers Festival 2006



Positive outcomes for pupils who are young carers⁷

- Children whose parents or other family members have specific needs arising out of disability or health conditions enjoy the same life chances as all other children in the locality.
- Young carers are enabled and encouraged to attend and enjoy school.
- Educational provision is made for those young carers whose attendance and education has been interrupted.
- Parents and carers are supported to enable their children to attend school and to enjoy and achieve their full potential.
- Young people are prepared for working life.
- Action is taken to reduce poor school attendance.
- Schools are fully accessible and have inclusive communication practices in place.
- The positive aspects of caring are recognised and valued.

“Young Carers will have the same access to education and career choices as their peers”

Key Principles of Practice for Young Carers and their Families⁸



Resources and further information

Include – The Children’s Society National Young Carers Initiative

The Children’s Society Young Carers Initiative provides a national focus for people who work to support young carers and their families across England.

It also has a comprehensive website www.youngcarer.com where you can find the contact details of the young carers projects across England.

The Young Carers Initiative has a range of resources including:

- A practice guide – *Making it Work: Good Practice with Young Carers and their Families* (published by The Children’s Society in partnership with The Princess Royal Trust for Carers)
- *Key Principles of Practice for Young Carers and Their Families*
- An Educational Resource Pack for Young Carers – providing information on how to support young carers in school
- A schools notice-board pack.

Find out more and locate where the nearest local Young Carers Project is at www.youngcarer.com

Useful websites

DfES 2006 guidance on young carers in *Advice and Guidance to Schools and Local Authorities on Managing Behaviour and Attendance: Groups of pupils at particular risk.*
www.dfes.gov.uk/behaviourandattendance/

Young Carers Research Group Reports: *Young carers in the UK 2004* and *Young carers in schools*. www.carersuk.org/Policyandpractice/Research

Teachernet guidance at www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/atoz/y/youngcarer/

Education Maintenance Allowance: www.ema.dfes.gov.uk

The Princess Royal Trust for Carers

The Princess Royal Trust for Carers offers useful information and support for all unpaid carers throughout the UK. It has a website that provides information for young carers and also for schools (including a sample schools policy on young carers). www.youngcarers.net



References

- 1 Becker, S (2000) 'Young Carers' in Davis, M (ed) *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Work*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, p378.
- 2 *Making It Work: Good Practice with Young Carers and their Families*. Published by The Children's Society in partnership with The Princess Royal Trust For Carers.
- 3 *Advice and Guidance to Schools and Local Authorities on Managing Behaviour and Attendance: Groups of pupils at particular risk*. www.dfes.gov.uk/behaviourandattendance
- 4 Dearden C and Becker S *Young Carers in the UK. The 2004 report*. Carers UK/The Children's Society.
- 5 Dearden, C. and Becker, S. (2000) *Growing Up Caring. Vulnerability and Transition to Adulthood – Young Carers' Experiences*. Youth Work Press: Leicester.
- 6 Dearden, C. and Becker, S. (2000) *op cit*
- 7 *Key Principles of Practice for Young Carers and Their Families*. The Children's Society 2007.
- 8 *Key Principles of Practice for Young Carers and Their Families. op cit*

The National Young Carers Initiative (YCI) is part of the The Children's Society Include project

This is a national, England-wide, strategic project, which focuses on the needs of Young Carers and their families. The YCI supports young carers to have a voice and campaigns for them and their families.

The YCI provides information, advice and a range of training to professionals. Contact us for more details.

This information is available in other formats on request.



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