

Identifying hidden and new young carers: A tool for education providers

Young carers are children and young people who provide care for family members who have physical or mental illnesses, disabilities or substance misuse issues. 1 in 5 young people are young carers, with 1 in 12 taking on mid- to high-level care. Young carers are a particularly vulnerable group, especially during lockdown and as we come out of it.

Why we need to ask questions:

- 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
- **Early identification is vital.** 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
- Lots of people will have had an **increase to their caring role** due to the Covid-19 pandemic too, because they won't have had their usual support or breaks at school/college or with friends
- Some young people may also have **become carers** as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, due to increases in ill health and substance misuse, and lack of access to services and support.

Education staff have a key role in identifying and supporting young carers. Just asking a few simple questions can help identify these vulnerable young people in your school or community and also help reduce the stigma of caring, making it feel OK and normal to talk about it at school or college.

We know some staff might not feel like they have the experience or training to talk about this though, so here are some questions that young carers have written to help you do this. You could use some or all of the questions on pages 3-6:

- If you're speaking to young people who aren't attending over the phone
- On forms (e.g. admissions or transfer forms, assessment forms, well-being surveys etc)
- As part of regular meetings with students, especially if you've noticed anything has changed about their behaviour or well-being (see 'Signs someone might have caring responsibilities' on page 2)
- By adapting them as group discussion questions if you're doing work to raise awareness about young carers in your school or college.

Thanks to all the young carers from these organisations who created this document (August 2020)





TOP TIPS

Things to remember though!

- If there is an information session or assembly, make sure there's a follow up as some young carers won't identify themselves in large groups.
- It might be harder for young people to speak openly over the phone or for you to pick up on their feelings if you aren't seeing them face-to-face.
- If you do add questions to forms, ask these regularly so it's not just a one-off tick box exercise. And make sure there is some follow up – if people let you know they're a young carer on a form, they need to be acknowledged and offered support.

How to use this tool – IMPORTANT!

- We recommend these questions are asked by **someone who the young person knows and feels comfortable with**
- This is **not meant to be read out as a full script**. These are ideas for you to work into your everyday conversations with students using your skills, experiences and knowledge of the young people in your school/college
- Think about the **right time and place** to have this conversation so people aren't rushed and feel safe and comfortable to talk
- It's also important to be aware that lots of people might **feel worried** about being open about what is happening in their family or that social care might get involved. Explain this is a **confidential conversation** and you will only share what you talk about if you're worried anyone is at risk of harm or to try and get extra help for them and their family.

Signs 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.

Young Carer Identification Questions

The questions in **blue** are for you to use/adapt in your conversations using your skills, experiences and knowledge of the young person.

The text in **black** below each question is to help you understand more about young carers, not to be read out to them.

A list of just the questions can also be found on P.6 for you to type or write on.

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

Explain again that this is a confidential conversation and you will only share what you talk about if you're worried anyone is at risk of harm or to try and get extra help for them and their family.

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?

If the answer is YES – this person could be a young carer or young adult carer. Continue with the rest of the questions

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?

This might be practical things like cooking or cleaning, looking after siblings, self-care, providing emotional support, managing finances, personal care (washing/toileting etc), giving medicines, or providing emergency help or first aid.

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?

Explore this with them. If this young person is the sole carer, or is taking on a lot of caring, they might be very isolated, struggle with their emotions, or need help or support. They might get some support already from services or family/friends who live nearby though, so it's important to ask what they think and feel they need, perhaps offering or referring for a Young Carers Assessment if they want this [*look for information online about Young Carers Assessments in your area*].

5. Do you often think about or worry about your family when you're not with them?

[If yes] 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?

- They might worry they might fall, not take medication, not eat, harm themselves, drink too much alcohol, take drugs, not care for their siblings properly etc.
- This could make the young person anxious, stressed and/or unable to concentrate at school/college.
- It might also mean they are really tired, can't pay attention, are always be checking their phone, or aren't able to meet deadlines with homework.

6. How does this make you feel?

- Allow time for this question – it might take young people time to open up and understand how they feel if they've not talked about this before. They might also get upset so make sure they don't have to go straight back to lessons if that happens.
- You could use feelings cards, picture cards, ask people to draw or use other interactive activities to help them understand and share their feelings. Adapt these activities to the age and interests of the young person you're talking to.
- They might not realise that they are a young carer or think what they do is 'normal' and that everyone does it. They might also have been caring a really long time and so feel indifferent to it as it's how life has always been.
- They might feel worried that talking about this might get them or their family in trouble.
- They may feel they have no choice but to care and that nothing can help.
- Sometimes young carers can feel very alone - that feel no-one asks how they are or how they feel about caring. The focus is on the person they care for.
- Sometimes people feel very positive about their caring and feel they can manage it really well. But sometimes caring can make people feel lonely, left out, misunderstood or not listened to.
- It is important to recognise and celebrate what an amazing thing young people are doing as carers. If they don't mention any, you might want to ask them if there are any positive feelings, things they're good at as a carer or things they're proud of about what they do. Celebrate the positives with them as well as letting them know they can get support for the things that are hard.



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?

Caring responsibilities can mean young people can't always get time for themselves to attend after-school activities, go out with friends, have friends over or have a hobby, leading to isolation and stress.

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

- Caring can sometimes cause health problems like back strain, headaches, difficulty sleeping, eating disorders, self-harming, depression, anxiety, and panic attacks
- The 2017 GP Patient Survey found that 39% of young adult carers reported experience of anxiety or depression compared with 28% of young people without a caring responsibility
- If they say yes, think about advising them to see their GP or offer emotional well-being support when talking through Q10 below.

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

- For some young carers, school/college is a break from home and they do really well (although stressful periods like transitions, exams or things getting worse at home can affect this)
- For others though, school/college can be hard. They might not be able to attend all the time or be late because of their caring. Some find it hard to concentrate, they might not be able to complete homework on time, or they may get upset/angry which can get them into trouble
- Education can suffer and, on average, young carers GCSE grades are 9 grades lower than non-carers. Support, understanding and flexibility at school/college can make all the difference though.

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.

- **In school / college we can offer young carers**
Tell them about all types of support available – e.g. someone to talk to, flexibility about homework, not asking questions when you're late, a weekly group for young carers, funding to help you get a break or manage with essentials etc
- **Would any of this be helpful for you? Agree a support plan with the young person**
- **Is there anyone you'd like me to talk to who you've already spoken to about this?**
- **There is also support outside school/college from...**
Talk through local support agencies and what they offer e.g. your local young carers organisation or city council support.
- **Would you like any more information about this? If yes, signpost or make referrals if they want this**

Remember this might have been a hard conversation. Ask them if they need anything now and let them know what will happen next. And remember to check how they are again soon – they might feel worried about what they have shared with you afterwards.



Name: _____ **Date:** _____

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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: