

Young carers and their education

"We spend most of our time at home or in school, so it's vital that schools recognise and understand our needs, wants and aspirations."

Who is this chapter for?

- All staff
- School lead or staff interested in becoming/establishing a school lead within your school

This chapter will support schools to:

- inform staff of the impact that a caring role can have on young carers.
- inform staff about how these impacts can lead to barriers in learning.
- develop a whole-school approach to supporting young carers in your school.

Synopsis

27% of young carers aged 11-15 experience educational difficulties or miss school because of their caring responsibilities, this rises to 40% where there is parental mental ill-health or substance misuse. ¹

A young carer becomes vulnerable when the level of care-giving and responsibility to the person in need of care becomes excessive or inappropriate for that child, risking impacts on his or her emotional or physical well-being, educational achievement or life chances.²

The impacts of caring

Young carers, like all young people, have hopes and dreams, stresses and worries. However, not only do they have the pressures experienced by all those their age, they also have the added responsibilities of caring for a family member; responsibilities that would normally be expected of an adult.

School can be a haven for young carers where they can forget their caring responsibilities. For some, school can be a place of safety and normality away from the chaos of home. For others, school can be a miserable place: where they are misunderstood, bullied and where the pressures of work compound their already difficult lives.

As a result, young carers can often encounter barriers to their learning. The impacts of these can be variable, severe and enduring. Schools should aim to counter such impacts by removing or



lowering any additional barriers to their learning caused by their family circumstances and by ensuring that they have equal access to education and career choices as their peers.³

It is important to remember that your school doesn't need to do everything. Instead it should aim to involve a range of professionals, and local and national agencies to provide a broad spectrum of support.

Underachievement

There is much anecdotal evidence of young carers underachieving at school from those working with young carers and former young carers themselves. Currently very few schools are monitoring the achievement of this particular vulnerable group.

Withdrawn and unnoticed

Some young carers become very quiet and withdrawn and some may immerse themselves in their work and be seen as model students.

Missing school

Young carers can miss significant amounts of their education due to their family situation and caring role. This may involve missing large chunks of school or frequent shorter absences. It is likely that a proportion of school absence is due to young carers who may be struggling to juggle the combined demands of caring and education. Some young carers are physically present in school, yet admit to feeling unable to access their education fully due to worry or stress. They may also find accessing extra curricular activities difficult or impossible due to caring demands, financial reasons, or because of transport difficulties.

Missing deadlines

Young carers sometimes find meeting homework and coursework deadlines difficult, because of the additional demands on them at home. They may not cope with the accumulative stress of trying to juggle home and school life.

Bullying

Young carers are often the victims of bullying at school. Some young carers are bullied because of the condition or illness of the person they care for, whilst others can be bullied because they appear to lack social skills or seem more mature than young people of the same age. Social isolation at school will impact on a young carer's well-being and their ability to engage fully in school.

Behavioural issues

Some young carers may react with negative behaviour. They may keep negative feelings to themselves to protect their parents from additional stress and anxiety but may not be able to keep their feelings in at school.

Bereavement and loss

It is important to remember that although young carers (and families) may try hard to juggle their responsibilities, including keeping up with their education, sometimes it is the latter that falls off the list of priorities when up against other issues such as the fear of a bereavement, or bereavement itself.



Other chapters to help you understand this topic

- 4 Barriers to learning faced by young carers
- 5 Attendance
- 6 Behaviour
- 7 Addressing bullying
- 8 Transport to and from school

Key resources

→ Professionals website

The Princess Royal Trust for Carers' website dedicated solely to professionals who work with adult and young carers in health, education or and social care.

www.carers.org/professionals

→ Toolkit for primary school teachers

The Trust has developed a complementary resource specifically for primary school teachers to help them identify young carers at an early age. The toolkit also has resources which will help primary school children understand the concept of being a young carer.

www.carers.org

¹ Dearden, C. & Becker, S. (2004). *Young Carers in the UK: the 2004 report*. Carers UK and The Children's Society.

² Frank, J. & McLarnon, J. (2008). *Young carers, parents and their families: key principles of practice*. The Children's Society.

³ Frank, J. & McLarnon, J. (2008). *Young carers, parents and their families: key principles of practice*. The Children's Society.