

Pupils caring for someone with a learning disability

"I love my brother, but I feel my needs always come second – I have to keep explaining why he acts the way he does and it makes having a social life very hard."

Who is this chapter for?

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

This chapter will support schools to:

- inform staff about the specific issues relating to caring for a family member with a learning disability.

Synopsis

Young carers of people with a learning disability can experience feelings of embarrassment as the person they care for and their family may be seen as 'different' by their peer group. Living with a person with learning disabilities, whether a parent or sibling, can be hard, since the attention in the family is often focused on the person with learning disabilities and school work may be neglected as a result.

Dealing with the prejudice and negative perceptions

Young carers helping to look after a sibling, a parent or an older relative with a learning disability can find it difficult to get space and time away from the family to study or just to be themselves when living with a person who may not understand the need for privacy. Young carers can feel isolated from their peers as activities like inviting friends round feels embarrassing or difficult. Feeling obliged to explain why the person they care for may look or behave differently can be complicated or upsetting. Some young carers try to 'cover up' for the person's disability as a coping strategy. Dealing with the prejudice and negative perceptions of others can be challenging for these young carers who may have spent their entire lives living with a person with learning disabilities. Older siblings may find themselves caring for younger non disabled siblings as parents' resources are diverted to the person with the disability.

Those caring for parents or other adults with learning disabilities may undertake less practical tasks but more tasks such as helping with benefits and financial issues. They may be required to advocate on behalf of the adult, or talk to health and social care professionals. There may be confidentiality issues to be resolved.



Planning for the future

If their parents have had a negative experience of school or have been educated outside the mainstream school system, the young carer may be disadvantaged by having to negotiate their own path through school, which may in turn impact on course and career choices. These young carers may also lack support and motivation with homework and course work and such problems may not be easily identified if the parents are unable to attend parents' evenings.

Caring for a person with learning disabilities, whether as an adult or as a young carer, can be a life long and stressful experience. Young carers may feel daunted by this responsibility and worried about how they will manage their caring as they grow older. Young carers of siblings may worry about what provision will be made for their sibling when their parents die or become unable or unwilling to continue caring for them.

Other chapters to help you understand this topic

14 Staff training and awareness

Key resources

→ Supporting Family Carers of People with Learning Disabilities

Produced to help develop and provide the best possible information and support to family carers of people with learning disabilities.

www.carers.org/professionals/social-care/articles/learning-disabilities-resources,5538,PR.html