

# Pupils caring for a sibling

*"I would like my life to be that my sister not be ill and to be able to get to sleep at night"*

## 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 about the specific needs of pupils caring for a sibling.
- help pupils who care for a sibling.

## Synopsis

Almost a third of young carers have responsibility for the care of a brother or sister.<sup>1</sup> Sibling carers, more so than those caring for a parent, are often unidentified and their caring responsibilities, needs, experiences and feelings can go unrecognised in schools and by professionals.

Sibling carers tell us that young carers' services or specific sibling support groups are often the only place where they are recognised and given support.

## What does caring for a sibling entail?

- Communicating for their sibling.
- Looking out for their sibling and protecting them from other children – particularly emotionally.
- Supporting their sibling with homework.
- Emotional support.

There is a positive side to caring for a sibling as the carer develops various life skills, including relationship skills. However, their lives can also be heavily restricted and they can experience negative impacts, such as:

- lack of quality time with parents.
- reduced parental attention and support from parents.
- lack of time and space for themselves and activities geared to themselves.
- social exclusion and prejudice because of the sibling.



- friendships and leisure may be difficult. Young carers may find it hard to invite friends home for example.
- impacts due to poverty and limited transport opportunities, where families need to prioritise a disabled child.

## Feelings

Sibling carers can worry about their brother or sister and often lack information or understanding about their sibling's illness or disability. In addition to feelings of frustration, guilt and anger (feelings which are shared with other groups of young carers) sibling carers may also feel:

- embarrassment about their sibling's behaviour.
- insignificance due to limited parental attention.
- anxiety about who will care for their sibling in the future.

## Key resources

### → Rethink

Information for siblings who have a brother or sister with a mental ill-health.

[www.rethink.org/how\\_we\\_can\\_help/rethink\\_siblings/information/](http://www.rethink.org/how_we_can_help/rethink_siblings/information/)

### → Siblinks

A network for young people who have or have had a family member affected by cancer to gain support and provide information.

[www.siblinks.org](http://www.siblinks.org)

### → Sibs

A UK-wide charity for people who grow up with a disabled brother or sister.

[www.sibs.org.uk](http://www.sibs.org.uk)

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