

# Barriers to learning faced by young carers

*"I bring my worries and troubles to school and I cannot concentrate with my school work and my teachers tell me off."*

## Who is this chapter for?

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

## This chapter will support schools to:

- understand the barriers to learning faced by young carers at home and in school.
- see that a caring role can be positive and can engender life skills.
- put solutions and support into place for pupils who are young carers.

## Synopsis

Research and practice highlights that young carers can face many barriers to their learning, both at school and at home. Some of these are more practical and include wider educational experiences, such as problems accessing after school clubs, whereas others are more emotional or psychological, such as difficulties in concentrating due to worrying about a parent at home.

A pupil who suddenly begins to, or repeatedly misses deadlines, or whose attendance fluctuates, may be struggling to cope with caring demands at home. It is essential that staff try and get to the root causes of a pupil's problem before they are labelled as troublesome or lazy.

Be aware that breakdowns in the relationship between a young carer and the school are possible. Pupils who do not find their school understanding, supportive or accommodating of their situation, may feel resentment, frustration and anger and may react with poor behaviour, thus beginning a negative spiral.

Poor attendance can in turn lead to low self-esteem or the loss or exclusion from a peer group. This can become entrenched, leading to further social withdrawal, possibly bullying and decreased school attendance. It is vital therefore to address such barriers as soon as possible.

## Barriers to learning faced by young carers

Young carers can face barriers to their learning in the home and at school. Psychological, emotional and physical barriers to their learning can be met in both home and school.



Some barriers can, of course, be attributed to any pupil. Young carers, however, are particularly vulnerable.

See resource 4.1. for solutions to some of the barriers faced by young carers. Completing or contributing to a CAF assessment can initiate the solution for many of the barriers. For more information on assessment and monitoring, please see Chapter 24 'Assessment and monitoring'. A Children in Need assessment may also be more appropriate for some pupils who have significant needs. Support from a young carers' service is also helpful.

## Life skills and positive aspects of caring

The experience of being a young carer can have positive aspects: young carers can be highly self-motivated multi-taskers, coping with and achieving at school while undertaking a caring role. Many transfer their caring experiences into career and job choices having developed the key skills and competencies needed for their families to function.<sup>1</sup> These skills include effective communication and management capabilities, often coupled with a mature outlook. There is, however, currently no way of accrediting these skills so that colleges or employers recognise them.<sup>2</sup>

Compassion, consideration, determination, empathy, understanding and tolerance of disability and illness can also all be acquired through a caring role. But, the negative aspects of caring often outweigh the positive.

It is important that recognition of a caring role does not inadvertently encourage the continuation of inappropriate care, nor that caring becomes a cause for celebration and not action. It is also important that careers advisors do not assume that the care profession should be the only career path for young carers and that they help them to explore all options. Equally, young carers' abilities to cope and achieve should not be allowed to mask their need for support.<sup>3</sup> (Dearden and Becker, 2000)

## Other chapters to help you understand this topic

- 5** Attendance
- 6** Behaviour
- 7** Addressing bullying
- 17** Early intervention and preventative work
- 18** Identification of young carers
- 24** Assessment and monitoring

## Key resources

As well as the toolkits available in the above suggested chapters, the following resources are key.

### → Every Child Matters (ECM)

See *The Princess Royal Trust for Carers Guidance: Delivering Every Child Matters for young carers* for a detailed list.

<http://static.carers.org/files/trust-guidance-delivering-every-child-matters-for-young-carers-2177.doc>



→ **Include Project: Information for teachers and school staff**

The Children's Society.

<http://www.youngcarer.com/pdfs/nateducation07.pdf>

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<sup>1</sup>Frank, J. Tatum, C. & Tucker, S. (1999). *On Small Shoulders: Learning from the Experiences of Former Young Carers*. The Children's Society.

<sup>2</sup>Dearden, C. & Becker, S. (2000). *Growing Up Caring: Vulnerability and Transition to Adulthood – Young Carers' Experiences*, Youth Work Press for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

<sup>3</sup>Dearden, C. & Becker, S. (2000). *Growing Up Caring: Vulnerability and Transition to Adulthood – Young Carers' Experiences*, Youth Work Press for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.



## 4.1 Barriers to learning and possible solutions

Your school can use the following list of practical solutions to help integrate into your existing pastoral systems or personalised plans.

Use *The Princess Royal Trust for Carers Guidance: Delivering Every Child Matters for young carers* for a detailed list: <http://static.carers.org/files/trust-guidance-delivering-every-child-matters-for-young-carers-2177.doc>

Barriers to learning in school	✓	Possible solutions
Poor attendance, due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the caring role or a secondary consequence of the caring role.</li> <li>• a psychological or emotional barrier (see below).</li> <li>• transport difficulties.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early identification (Please see Chapter 18 'Identification of young carers').</li> <li>• Refer to adults' and/or children's services to obtain more support in the home.</li> <li>• Referrals to other agencies and professionals.</li> <li>• Amend home to school transport policies to reflect needs in relation to transport difficulties.</li> </ul>
Limited or no access to clubs and extended schools opportunities.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure adequate transport and respite care provision to help young carers to participate.</li> </ul>
Isolation and feelings of detachment from other children. Bullying which can be directly related to a young carer's caring role.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lunchtime or after-school peer support group for young carers.</li> <li>• Peer mentoring support (train peer mentors in young carers issues).</li> <li>• Adequate transport and respite care provision to help young carers participate in after school activities.</li> <li>• Signposting to <a href="http://www.youngcarers.net">www.youngcarers.net</a>.</li> <li>• Available staff to talk to in confidential settings.</li> <li>• See Chapter 7 'Addressing bullying'.</li> </ul>
Financial constraints at college due to family situation, little time for a part-time job, together with being unable to claim Carer's Allowance.		Support through the 16–19 Bursary Fund discretionary element.



Barriers to learning at home	✓	Possible solutions
The pressure to complete homework/coursework deadlines competes with the caring role.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negotiate deadlines for homework at times when the pupil's caring role increases. Sometimes young carers need some flexibility.</li> <li>• Refer to external agencies for more support in home.</li> </ul>
Space at home is limited or an adequate working environment may not be available, due to financial constraints or because the care needs of a parent or sibling make concentration at home difficult.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homework support club.</li> </ul>
Financial constraints, including lack of resources such as a computer, money for school trips.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider financial bursaries or grants, such as <a href="http://www.educational-grants.org">www.educational-grants.org</a></li> <li>• Consider loan of equipment.</li> </ul>
Reduced support from home, due to the family being preoccupied with the illness or disability of the person being cared for.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extra support with work and/or homework support club.</li> <li>• Lunchtime or after school peer support group for young carers.</li> <li>• Parenting support groups to be coordinated in schools.</li> </ul>
Limited wider educational opportunities and life experiences, such as travel or family days out, due to added responsibility at the home, financial constraints or other issues related to the person in need of care.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refer to a young carers' service or other youth provision.</li> <li>• Liaise with extended services.</li> </ul>
Little support or encouragement with career choices.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Available staff to talk to in confidential settings.</li> <li>• Recognition of positives and transferable skills.</li> <li>• Support from local careers service.</li> </ul>



Psychological and emotional barriers to learning	✓	Possible solutions
Anxiety and depression.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet with family and if needed:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– refer to health services such as GP and/or Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Tiredness, stress, worry or low concentration.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet with family and if needed:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– refer to social services, health services and voluntary sector organisations, where appropriate.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• More agency support for the family.</li> <li>• Family respite.</li> <li>• Available staff to talk to in confidential setting.</li> <li>• Allow young carers to telephone home if they are worried about a family member.</li> </ul>
Lack of concentration during exams due to caring responsibilities.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider notifying an examination board about young carer's circumstances.</li> </ul>
Low motivation, or school work low down on the young carer's list of priorities, due to other more pressing demands or responsibilities, such as terminal illness or bereavement.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Available staff to talk to in confidential settings.</li> <li>• Refer to local young carers', condition specific services and/or bereavement support service, where appropriate.</li> </ul>
The feeling that no one understands their experiences and that professionals do not listen.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Available staff to talk to in confidential settings.</li> <li>• Peer mentoring support (train peer mentors in young carers issues).</li> <li>• Signposting to <a href="http://www.youngcarers.net">www.youngcarers.net</a></li> </ul>
Struggling with shyness, low self esteem and confidence.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lunchtime or afterschool peer support group for young carers.</li> </ul>
Young carers displaying behavioural issues which are related to caring role. Feelings of guilt, anger, resentment and confusion.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Available staff to talk to in confidential settings.</li> <li>• Behavioural support.</li> <li>• Family mediation.</li> <li>• Age-appropriate information on relevant illnesses and conditions provided in a timely manner.</li> </ul>
Low academic aspirations/little encouragement to continue into further/higher education or training.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support from local careers service.</li> <li>• FE and HE establishments to identify and support young carers and consider flexible entrance requirements.</li> </ul>



Barriers for parents	✓	Possible solutions
Parents with a disability face difficulties in supporting their child's education if parenting or care needs are not being effectively met.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools and colleges are 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 <i>Disability Discrimination Act 1995</i> with regard to access to goods, services and facilities.</li> <li>• Intervention for example from a parent support adviser.</li> </ul>
Difficulties in attending parents evenings and other school functions, due to disability, long-term illness, or because the event clashes with a medical appointment.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure school parents' evenings are accessible to parents with disabilities or who find it difficult to leave the house without support.</li> <li>• Consider alternatives, such as home visits and phone calls where appropriate to support and encourage parents to attend.</li> </ul>
Parents missing out on vital information perhaps due to stays in hospital.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan communication with family.</li> </ul>
Parents unable to engage, due to communication impairments or language barriers.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan communication with family.</li> <li>• Provide interpreters and/or translators at school events and in communications.</li> <li>• Use large print newsletters, audio/podcast information bulletins.</li> </ul>
Parents are unable to attend events due to lack of transport.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with adults' services to ensure care packages reflect transport needs.</li> </ul>