

# Attendance

*"If I'd have gone to school regularly, I would have done all right, but, under the circumstances, I felt I couldn't. It would have just made me feel more guilty, if you know what I mean. I just didn't want to do that."*

## Who is this chapter for?

- School lead or school staff interested in becoming/establishing a school lead within your school
- Education welfare service
- Attendance officer
- Inclusion staff
- Parent support adviser

## This chapter will support schools to:

- understand why young carers may be late to or absent from school.
- support pupils and address attendance issues.
- understand how educational provision can be made for young carers whose attendance and education has been interrupted.

## Synopsis

Caring responsibilities can lead to lateness or absence from school. Absence often forms patterns and can occur either over extended periods or can be shorter and more frequent in nature.

If the pupil's absence is due to caring for someone with a long-term or recurring illness, this may be an indication of inadequate levels of support from adults' services and should, therefore, be addressed as a priority.

Low or sporadic attendance, or patterns of absence, can often be one of the first indicators of a caring role. Your school should aim to identify and support young carers before attendance becomes an issue.

## Young carers can struggle when juggling two roles

"Young carers often make enormous efforts to manage their caring responsibilities and maintain full school attendance. However, some may struggle to cope all the time and subsequently their education, physical and mental health may be affected. Young carers can often feel as if they have somehow failed or feel extremely guilty for not coping."<sup>1</sup>



Young carers often say that when forced to choose between staying at home to look after the person they care for and going to school, caring will come first. Young carers often miss after school activities to rush home and look after a parent or collect younger siblings from school. Conversely, punctuality can also be compromised when young carers have to transport younger siblings to school.

Inadequate support in the home for the person needing care can lead to the young carer missing school to care for a parent for example, by carrying out tasks that need to be done or by keeping them company. This can create isolation from peers and from friends, and the young carer may then prefer to stay at home where they feel valued and safe.

## Addressing attendance issues

Patterns of non attendance are often an indicator of a young carer's underlying need, such as insufficient support for a parent during the day. Schools should also look for and address secondary barriers to learning that may stem from a pupil's caring role, such as anxiety or bullying which can then impact on attendance.

By working alongside pupils and their families, your school can help address needs and resolve the underlying causes of absence. This will probably mean involving other agencies.<sup>2</sup> Facilitating the return of punctuality or full-time attendance requires a strong relationship with the Education Welfare Service (EWS). The EWS and parent support advisers play a vital role in forming a bridge between school and parents and working with parents is the key to supporting young carers effectively.

Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) guidance states that your school should ask the family if they are willing to contact community care or adults' services for more support for the person being cared for so as to reduce the need for the pupil to take on inappropriate caring responsibilities.<sup>3</sup> Ensuring that support is in place is paramount; if the person with care needs has appropriate support in place, pupils should feel more confident in coming to school and less anxious about leaving that person.

The family may welcome efforts to advocate on their behalf for better support arrangements to be in place. Your school should respect a family's decision should they be unwilling to discuss support needs. You should, nevertheless, consider and address the pupil's welfare using their usual assessment procedures.

Please also refer to the Common Assessment Framework (CAF).

It is vital that your school balances a supportive, flexible approach towards the young carer and their family alongside the consistent message of the importance of education to the pupil.

As well as missing school, young carers may well be missing out on after school clubs and activities (because of transport issues, having to return home promptly to care for someone at home or to pick up or look after siblings).

Drawing up an emergency plan for a young carer may help prevent future school absence.



## Other chapters to help you understand this topic

**27** Crisis or emergency plans

### Key resources

→ **DCSF Advice and guidance to schools and local authorities on managing behaviour and attendance**

Provides advice and guidance to schools and local authorities on managing the behaviour and attendance of groups of pupils at particular risk.

<http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/154426>

→ **Behaviour, Attendance and SEAL (Secondary)**

<http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/secondary/behaviourattendanceandseal>

→ **Behaviour, Attendance and SEAL (Primary)**

<http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/primary/behaviourattendanceandseal>

→ **School attendance**

Advice and guidance provided by Teachernet.

[www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/attendance/](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/attendance/)

---

<sup>1</sup>Baker, G. (2002). *Unseen and Unheard: The invisible young carers*. Carers Lewisham, Princess Royal Trust for Carers.

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

<sup>3</sup>Department for Children, Schools and Families' *Guidance on behaviour and school attendance*: [www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour)