supporting young carers

a resource for Scottish Secondary Schools
There are over 100,000 young carers in Scotland, and many shoulder responsibilities well beyond their years. It is crucial that schools are able to play their part in supporting these incredible young people to become the best that they can be despite the pressures they face.

The resource will be useful for those involved in developing and implementing school policy, as well as educating schools in the simple but very effective measures they could be putting in place to ensure the correct support for young carers is available.

Raising awareness and understanding of young carers and the difficulties they may face is key to ensuring that young carers are identified and therefore able to receive support. The resource provides materials to assist those in an education setting to do that, as well as providing the evidence base for doing so.

All materials have been adapted from an original resource produced by The Princess Royal Trust for Carers (now a part of Carers Trust) to suit a Scottish audience and encourage schools to support young carers.

Orkney Young Carers Service was responsible for much of this rewrite and for providing the graphics. We thank them for this valuable contribution.

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An Overview
**Who are young carers?**

Young carers are children and young people who look after someone in their family who has an illness, a disability, or is affected by mental ill-health or substance misuse. Young carers often take on practical and/or emotional caring responsibilities that would normally be expected of an adult.

Research shows that 81% of young carers care for a parent, often a single parent, and a quarter look after a disabled sibling. It is important to remember that young carers helping to look after a sibling are often overlooked. It is also very important to remember that not every child whose parent or sibling is ill or disabled is necessarily a young carer.

The tasks undertaken by young carers can vary according to the nature of the illness or disability, the level and frequency of need for care and the structure of the family as a whole.

A young carer may undertake some or all of the following:

- Practical tasks, such as cooking, housework and shopping.
- Physical care, such as lifting, helping a parent on stairs or with physiotherapy.
- Personal care, such as dressing, washing, helping with toileting needs.
- Managing the family budget, collecting benefits and prescriptions.
- Administering medication.
- Looking after or “parenting” younger siblings.
- Emotional support.
- Interpreting, due to a hearing or speech impairment or because English is not the family’s first language.

Some young carers may undertake high levels of care, whereas for others it may be frequent low levels of care. Either can impact heavily on a child or young person.
What are the effects of being a young carer?

A young carer’s personal and physical development, physical and emotional health, as well as social opportunities can all be affected by the family situation and their caring role.

Young carers learn practical and caring skills at an early age and often take on practical and/or emotional caring responsibilities that would normally be expected of an adult. However, it is important to remember that they are young people with the same emotional needs as others their age.

- Stress, tiredness and mental ill-health are common for young carers.
- Their physical health is often severely affected by; caring through the night, repeatedly lifting a heavy adult, poor diet and lack of sleep.
- Many experience traumatic life changes such as bereavement, family break-up, losing income and housing, or seeing the effects of an illness or addiction on their loved one.
- Inappropriate caring roles during childhood can impact later in life, affecting a young carer during the transition to adulthood or in adulthood itself. This can include the long-term impacts on physical or emotional health, further education and/or career opportunities.

Why are young carers hidden?

Many young carers receive no (or very little) help during their childhoods. It is difficult to believe that their issues go unnoticed but there are several reasons for this.

Adult’s services often fail to recognise their clients needs as parent and children’s services often intervene too late when a young person’s caring role has already affected their well-being and in some cases, when they are at crisis point.

Adult’s and children’s services often struggle to work together effectively and often fail to look at the needs of the whole family.

Families are often wary of intervention by services and conceal illness, particularly mental ill-health and substance misuse, while some parents don’t recognise their child’s caring role. In addition, young carers may feel they will be bullied if other young people find out about their caring role.
Young carers and their education

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 a young carer 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.

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

Underachievement
There are strong links between being a young carer and underachieving at school, with many failing to attain any Standard Grades at all. Of young carers aged 11-16, 27% are missing school or experiencing educational difficulties and nearly all miss school when the person they care for is having difficulties.

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 significant number of the so-called “serial truants” responsible for much of the truancy statistics are unsupported young carers, who have dropped out because they cannot juggle the combined demands of caring and those of education. This can lead to young carers being locked into unpaid caring roles well into adulthood with no hope of independence or a career. Some young carers are physically present in school, yet admit to feeling unable to access their education fully due to worry or stress. Also, they may find accessing extra curricular activities difficult or impossible due to demands on them, financial reasons or because of transport difficulties.
Withdrawal
Some young carers become very quiet and withdrawn, whereas others react with negative behaviour. Others immerse themselves in their work and are model students.

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 keep negative feelings to themselves to protect their parents from additional stress and anxiety. However they may not be able to keep their feelings in at school. The real reasons for a young carer’s behavioural problems might not be discovered until it is too late to help them change.

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.
Legislation and guidance

There exists a great deal of legislation and guidance concerning young carers which affects schools. Good practice exists where professionals within universal services are aware of the needs of young carers so they can be identified and supported.

Getting It Right for Young Carers: The Young Carers Strategy for Scotland 2010 - 2015 states: ‘Young carers may require additional support to help them make the most of their school education and be included fully in their learning. Local authorities have a duty to provide this.’

By 2012, if they have not already done so, local authority Education Services will wish to:

- Revisit their policies, procedures and approaches for identifying young carers in schools, to reflect the impact of current policy and legislation, including Curriculum for Excellence and the Supporting Children’s Learning Code of Practice.

- Explore opportunities for developing partnership working with their local schools, parents and the third sector, including young carers’ services in order to improve identification of and support for young carers.

This resource has a Model Memorandum of Understanding which has been developed to support young carers. The model encourages schools to:

- Have a named staff member with lead responsibility for young carers and to recognise this role within continuing professional development.

- Establish a policy to encourage practice that identifies and supports young carers, such as adapting school arrangements if needed, provision for personal tutors and private discussions and access to local young carers’ projects.

Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) is the overarching approach to supporting children and young people and to effective inter-agency working to deliver the right support at the right time for every child in Scotland.

Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004/2009 lies within the principles of GIRFEC and ensures that every pupil who has a support need within the education system is identified and supported with that need.

Health and well-being are one of the building blocks of the Curriculum for Excellence. Through this curriculum there will be a more active approach to mental health and emotional well-being. Young carers are expected to benefit from this ‘whole school’ approach.
Barriers to Learning
Barriers to learning

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

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. 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.

Compassion, consideration, determination, empathy, understanding and tolerance of disability and illness can also all be acquired 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.
Attendance

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. They can often feel as if they have somehow failed or feel extremely guilty for not coping.”

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. They 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, schools can help address needs and resolve the underlying causes of absence.

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.

It is vital that schools balance 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.
Young carers are not immune to difficulties at home leading to negative behaviour within school. Worry, stress, pressures, confusion, a disrupted or chaotic family situation and feeling misunderstood or unsupported can all lead to poor behaviour in pupils. The links between a young carer’s family situation, their caring responsibilities and their behaviour should not be ignored and needs to be addressed in an appropriate and sensitive way.

It can be easy to miss or overlook the reasons behind poor behaviour but an increase in awareness amongst staff members of a pupil’s caring role and home environment will result in a more appropriate response to the pressures that the young carer is under. Problems often occur when staff have not been informed and consequently handle a particular situation inadequately.

Young people all react to situations differently. The behaviour of one pupil may be up and down just as their caring role and family situation is up and down, whereas another pupil may have been the ‘model’ student who then ‘cracks’ after years of caring. If the root of the problem is not addressed and the young carer feels that no one understands them, their behaviour is unlikely to improve.

Of course, young carers should be expected to follow the same rules as any other pupil and young carers themselves tell us that they want to be treated like their peers. However, by seeing and understanding that the root of the problem may be coming from the pressures and emotional turmoil that many young carers face at home, issues can be handled with more sensitivity and understanding and thus positive outcomes are more likely to be achieved.

Pupils will not open up to every member of staff, only those with whom they feel comfortable and trust. It is, therefore, important that young carers are aware of available staff with whom they can share home life. Young carers advise that it can be good to be asked by staff how they are or how the person they care for is, provided it is done so privately. Professionals often skirt around the issues, whereas the ‘direct’ approach, although perhaps difficult, may often be best.

Detentions

Consideration should be given to lunchtime detentions rather than after school detentions which may cause excessive conflict for a young carer who has after school caring responsibilities. If a young carer has to get home quickly to check on the person they care for and support them, then they will most likely not attend the after school detention, thus getting themselves into more trouble. Young carers tell us that detentions in lunch time are a much better option.
Bullying

Research by the National Centre for Social Research found that one of the main characteristics of bullying victims aged between 14 and 16 was that they had a caring responsibility. However it is not only this age group who are affected.

Young carers may experience bullying due to a number of different reasons:

- They may have greater maturity than (and therefore not accepted by) their peers.
- They may have minimal social skills.
- They may find it harder to make and sustain friendships.
- They may be withdrawn.
- They may be over-sensitive.
- They may have untidy or unclean clothing or general appearance.
- They may be teased or ostracised because of family circumstances.
- They may be seen as isolated or different.
- Fellow pupils may make fun of them or of their family’s problems.
- They may find it difficult to have a social life, or be isolated from peers.

To help support young carers who are bullied, your school can:

- Make sure that any bullying policies reflect the specific needs of young carers.
- Train peer mentors on the specific issues that affect young carers.
- Set up a peer support group within school.
- Ensure that staff are available to offer emotional support and understanding.
- Ensure tight confidentiality, so that young carers can identify themselves as young carers, access support discretely and know that conversations and questions about their home life are carried out in private.
- Work towards an environment where disabilities and issues around caring are taught and understood.
- Address bullying through good partnership working between the school and an outside agency such as a young carers service.
- Try to ensure that young carers are able to attend after school clubs and activities where they can build peer groups.
Family circumstances can make transport to and from school difficult and so young carers may often be late to school or even miss it altogether. The implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 means that local authorities must provide adequate support to parents with disabilities who need support in getting their children to school.

Why might a young carer have difficulty in getting to school?

There are several reasons why young carers may have transport problems in getting to school:

- A parent may be unwell and therefore unable to transport their child to school.
- They may be responsible for escorting a younger sibling when a parent is unable to due to their illness or disability.
- Another family member, perhaps a sibling, may be unwell or need to attend an appointment.

It is important to be mindful that a family’s needs can change and parents with episodic illnesses may find transport difficult at times when they are unwell.

Providing transport support

Having a disability or illness can result in great difficulties for parents in getting their children to and from school and thereby fulfilling their responsibility to ensure their children attend and engage with school. Currently, only families who live beyond “walking distance” from school are automatically provided with free transport, but local authorities may give help to families who live within “walking distance” if the family is in “special circumstances”.

The Disability Discrimination Act (Scotland) 2005 has placed a duty on the public sector to promote equality of opportunity for people with disabilities and to eliminate discrimination. Local authorities are therefore obligated to amend their home to school transport policy if, for example, that policy relied on parents with disabilities accompanying their children along a walking route for it to be considered safe, and where the parents’ disability prevented them from doing so. In such circumstances, a reasonable solution could be for the local authority to provide free home to school transport for the children of disabled parents. This applies even if the disability, for example MS or mental ill-health, does not affect the parent every day.
In partnership with The Princess Royal Trust for Carers, and other national organisations, The Scottish Young Carers Services Alliance organises an annual Scottish Young Carers Festival (funded by the Scottish Government) for young carers to have the opportunity to have fun, relax and forget about their daily worries. The young carers are also consulted on a range of issues, including education, health and young carers’ services to find out what support they want.

Below is some feedback from them on how you can help make their school day easier.

1. Recognise that our responsibility as carers can affect our education and schoolwork.
2. Find out about us, what we need and how we are not like other students.
3. Take time to find out about individual problems at home. Sometimes we’re too embarrassed to tell you ourselves.
4. Don’t automatically punish us if we’re late. Sometimes we can’t help being late because we’re helping out at home.
5. Provide more support such as lunchtime drop-ins or homework clubs.
6. Be flexible – give us more time and help to do homework and/or coursework.
7. Include information about young carers and disability issues in PSE lessons.
8. Let us phone parents if we need to find out if they are OK.
9. Make sure there is a clear and up to date notice board showing where we can get support in the community.
10. Make sure that teachers are offered training on young carers and disability issues on ‘in service’ training days.
A Strategic Approach
A model for setting up a framework of support

First phase: sign up and vision
- Training and awareness for head teachers and senior management team
- Acknowledgment and understanding of the importance of supporting young carers

Development of a young carers’ policy
Amend other relevant policies to include young carers and their families

Second phase: introduce a school lead and team
- Assign a school lead
- If appropriate assign a small team to work alongside school lead (more senior pupils could be involved)

Develop an action plan
Partnership work
Consider working with other schools in your cluster and find out if the local young carers’ service can support your school.

Third phase: awareness and support systems

Awareness training for ALL staff

Ongoing awareness training for ALL staff included in CPD

Set up support systems
- Practical and pastoral support for young carers and their families (including effective communication systems)
- Young carers’ issues embedded into the wider curriculum and schools plans.

Fourth phase: identification, support and monitoring of young carers
- Refer to “Working with young carers: a model” (page )

Fifth phase: monitoring and revising of policy, provision, and action plans
Developing a school lead

It is recommended that each school assigns a school lead, with specific duties and responsibilities to support young carers in school more effectively. The aim of the school lead is to develop a framework of support which is embedded within the whole school (The role could be part of continued professional development).

In larger schools it is recommended that a school leadership team be put in place to support the school lead. School leadership teams should be aware that all schools will have young carers and that these young carers have specific needs. Many young carers face enormous barriers to learning. It is vital that the leadership of the school puts in place measures to identify and support young carers proportionate to the school.

Why is the role of school leadership teams important?

Without identification and support, young carers are at risk of underachieving. Understanding the needs of young carers and providing them with support will help attendance, behaviour, achievement and well-being, as well as help them to reach their full potential.

Establishing a support framework for young carers based around a whole school approach is vital for removing the barriers to learning that young carers can often face. Providing the right support at the right time will help young carers experience the same educational and life experiences as their peers.

A whole-school approach of support should be underpinned by policy and aim to develop a culture of understanding and respect where young carers and their families feel safe and confident to seek support. It should include how support is managed and provided, training of staff, teaching on the issues of caring and disability using relevant parts of the curriculum and wider school activities, such as assemblies, and working in partnership with other agencies. Above all, it should enable pupils who are young carers to help shape the support.

► Checklist for schools lead/management teams

This document contains a list of points to help ascertain what steps your school has taken so far and what steps you could consider for the future.
Developing school policy

A caring role can impact heavily upon a young person, creating barriers to learning both in school and at home. Young carers can often be victims of bullying and so, in addition to a policy specific to young carers, it is essential to revisit all policies, including your school’s bullying policy, to make sure that they are really working for young carers. It is vital that the voices of young carers and their families are heard in the development and delivery of these documents.

Each school should have a policy in place that recognises the needs of and outlines the provision of services for young carers. This can either take the form of a new policy developed specifically for young carers, or it can be the revision of an established policy or policies. This policy should then be monitored to make sure that it is, and continues to be, effective.

The policy should reflect a whole-school approach to supporting young carers, as well as detail how your school will work alongside other professionals and agencies, including the voluntary sector, to provide a more coherent and holistic support framework.

The policy should also consider the needs of the family as a whole, including parents who may need further assistance due to mobility or communication difficulties, so that they are fully engaged with the education of their child.

Bullying

Much of the bullying experienced by young carers results from the stigma associated with certain disabilities and health conditions, such as mental ill health or substance misuse. Strong policies on bullying, inclusion and anti-discrimination, which identify young carers as a group of pupils at particular risk, can help to reduce this.

► Policy Content Guidance

This document contains a list of points to be considered when creating/revising your schools policy for young carers that can be adapted accordingly.
Staff training and awareness

It is important that all staff within your school are trained in and understand the needs of young carers, the issues they and their families face and the barriers they experience to learning. It is recommended that staff be familiar with possible indicators, the importance of early identification and how to initiate timely support.

Young carers consistently say that they want someone in their school with whom they can talk and share any worries and concerns. It is often a non-teaching member of staff who first becomes aware of a young carer’s situation, which is why it is imperative that it is not solely teaching staff who benefit from training. Issues often arise when supply teachers encounter pupils who are young carers and they are unaware of the issues so it is wise to include them in training and awareness raising as much as possible.

Training and awareness-raising should be embedded into ongoing professional development so that young carers remain at the forefront. Reminders on staff notice boards along with other prompts are also useful and a strong link with your local young carers' service will elevate young carers on the 'radar'.

In addition to an understanding and awareness of the issues faced by carers, staff should be aware of the importance of a whole school approach as well as the procedures for bringing in support from within and from outside the school. It is also useful to understand the importance of PSE lessons and how these can help promote an understanding and awareness of young carers and their families' needs.

It may be beneficial to utilise outside agencies, such as a local young carers’ service to provide support with staff training. Your school might want to consider inviting other professionals working within your school to join training sessions, and even share training with other schools in the same cluster group.

Staff training should cover:

- The barriers, issues and needs faced by young carers.
- The impacts of being a young carer.
- Why young carers are often hidden and the possible indicators of a young carer.
- The importance of whole family support and of multi-agency working and what support is available both within and outside of the school.
It is worth noting, that issues may arise during training sessions for staff who have been carers or who are currently carers. It may be useful to make information available for adult carers as well. Your local Carers Centre offers advice and a range of support services for both adult and young carers.

Who else can help?

Your school should not feel as if it has to do everything and should ensure that full use is made of the available support services, such as the local young carers service, social services and Skills Development Scotland (SDS). Staff should be aware that young carers are entitled to an assessment of their own needs from children’s services, and that joint working with adults’ services will enable help to be provided that could benefit the whole family.

Other individuals who can help you to support young carers are:

- Parent support adviser
- School nurse
- Guidance staff
- School counsellors
- SDS staff
- Educational psychologists
- School based social workers
- School librarian
- Youth services
- Specialist young carers service
- Peer mentors (buddying)
Supporting Young Carers In Our School
Working with young carers: a model

First phase: identification and assessment
Awareness of a pupil being a young carer through enrolment information, parents, self-identification or indicators.

- Use of questionnaire and checklists for information gathering
- Use of Common Assessment Framework
- Speaking with parents

If appropriate, initiate child protection and safe-guarding procedures.

Second phase: establishing involvement of staff and other professionals

- School lead/personal tutor/guidance staff
- Lead professional

Third phase: support
- Use a multi-agency joint approach, for example; a young carers’ service, counselling service, educational psychology or Skills Development Scotland (SDS).

Support for the whole family
Referral for the whole family assessment to consider parent/family needs.
Consider, for example:

- Parent support advisers
- Adult services
- Health services
- Carers’ services
- Respite care for the family

Set up support systems

- Personalised plan
- Homework/exam support
- Peer group support
- After school clubs
- Telephone home
- Staff to talk to/ counselling
- Young carer card
- Emergency or crisis plan
- Transport support

Support with transition to secondary school, college or university.

Be mindful that pupils’ and families situations may change rapidly. Ongoing formal and informal monitoring is therefore important. It may be necessary to re-visit any of the above parts.
Identification of young carers

Many pupils struggle through the education system without being recognised as a young carer; their needs and those of the person for whom they are caring are often only identified at crisis point. Even then, the extent of their caring role and the impact on their own development may not be recognised quickly or fully assessed.

Schools should be proactive in identifying young carers as soon as possible and not simply when tackling absence. A secure environment should be created so that young carers and their families feel comfortable enough to self-identify. The earlier a young carer is identified, the less likely an inappropriate caring role will become engrained.

Self identification

Before encouraging young carers to come forward, it is helpful to understand the reasons why they may feel uncomfortable doing so:

» They worry that the family will be split up and taken into care.
» They want to keep it a secret and/or are embarrassed about the person they care for.
» They may not realise that they are carers or that life is different to that of their peers.
» They don’t want to be any different from their peers.
» They believe that the school will show no interest in their family circumstances.
» School is different; they have a new or different identity.
» It’s not the sort of thing that can be discussed with friends.
» There has been no opportunity to share their story.
» They are worried about bullying.
» They see no reason or positive actions occurring as a result of telling their story.

Young carers are not easy to identify and many will actively try to conceal their caring role.

Good practice in identification

Some young carers may tell their teacher about their additional responsibilities. A member of staff may be alerted to their caring role following conversation with the pupil or by direct information from parents or carers. Before your school actively seeks to identify young carers, it is strongly recommended that support for pupils should already be in place. In addition, it is important for pupils to see that it is readily accessible before they identify themselves as young carers.
Good identification stems from a whole-school approach. The following are practical ways of doing this:

1. Provide training to all relevant school staff which includes:
   - Reasons why young carers and their families do not wish to be identified.
   - Possible indicators of a young carer.

2. Publicise information about available support.

3. Raise awareness of the issues faced by young carers to pupils and staff.

4. Develop a secure and safe environment where pupils have the confidence to let staff know that they are a young carer.
   - Implement a school lead and ensure that pupils know who that school lead is.
   - Promote positive images of disability, illness, mental ill-health and caring throughout the school curriculum and environment.
   - Develop policies and practice to prevent bullying, stigma and to raise the self-esteem of children who are young carers.

5. Provide appropriate opportunities for pupils to self-identify.
   - Publicise how pupils can access support effectively.
   - Offer discreet methods of communication for pupils to self-identify - emailing the school lead, using a school post box or completing an intranet questionnaire.
   - Provide opportunities for identification following assemblies and PSE lessons.
   - Use an awareness raising event, such as Carers Week.

6. Create an environment whereby families have the confidence to inform your school that their child has caring responsibilities.
   - Stimulate good communication between your school and families.
   - Ensure that your school meets the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2005.

7. Adapt your admissions process to provide opportunities for pupils and families to inform schools that:
   - The pupil has parents or other family members who have illness or disability, or who is affected by mental ill-health or substance misuse.
   - The pupil helps to look after them and what impact this may have on his/her education.

“When I found out about her family situation, I suddenly understood why she was often late and seldom did her homework. I was amazed at just how well she had done, but frustrated that we as staff had not known.”
The family is in touch with support services that could reduce the young carer’s role. (Some families may choose to keep their illness or disability a secret, but offering signposting & information about other services at an early stage can make all the difference).

8. Develop good partnership working with your local young carers’ service and use awareness-raising by the local service as an opportunity to identify young carers.

9. Use a Common Assessment Framework and/or other assessment tools when a pupil appears to be a young carer or is in need of extra support. (It is vital to ensure as much privacy as possible when any forms are being completed as some young carers will find divulging personal information difficult. Consider asking students to fold forms, or use envelopes or a secure box).

Young carers have a right to an assessment of their needs. When it is found that a pupil may be taking on inappropriate levels of caring it is important that contact is made with other agencies to share information.
Possible indications of caring

The following is a list of possible indicators of a young carer. Many can be indicative of other issues too. Together, they may help you build a profile of a pupil. Further sensitive information and appropriate questions may then, in turn, lead to a pupil letting you know that they are a young carer.

Is the pupil… ✓

...often late or missing days or weeks off school for no reason?
...often tired, anxious or withdrawn?
...having problems socially or with making friends? Conversely, do they get on well with adults and present themselves as mature for their age?
...a victim of bullying? This is sometimes explicitly linked to a family member’s disability, health or substance misuse problem.
...depressed?
...finding it difficult to concentrate on their work?
...having difficulty in joining in extra curricular activities or is unable to attend school trips?
...isolated because of their family situation or because they lack social skills with their peers (and yet they are confident with adults?)
...not handing in homework/coursework on time, or completing it late and to a low standard?
...anxious or concerned about an ill or disabled relative?
...displaying behavioural problems?
...having physical problems such as back pain (perhaps from heavy lifting)?
...secretive about home life?
...showing signs of neglect or poor diet?

Are parents (or another relative)... ✓

...sick, have a disability, illness or substance misuse problem? (Remember that not all children who have a family member who is ill or with disabilities is a young carer.)
...difficult to engage with?
...not attending parents' evenings?
...not communicating with school?

Possible indications of a young carer

“Sometimes I sleep on the couch in my sister’s room to give mum and dad a break. It’s hard to cope with school the next day cause I’m shattered.”
Early intervention and preventative work

Young carers can go unnoticed in school for years; under-achieving and failing to respond to support that does not tackle the root causes of their problems. Early identification, intervention and prevention are vital to avoid any negative impacts on their education and to ensure emotional and physical well-being.

Juggling the responsibilities of a caring role, along with the pressures of education can be exhausting and burdensome for a young carer. Schools must develop systems of support before young carers’ lives are negatively affected.

School liaison workers, educational social workers, school nurses and other staff are in a position to identify a young carer through absence, but it is more desirable to identify a young carer before they are rooted in a caring role, before their attendance or behaviour drops or a negative relationship develops with the school. Failure to prepare support can impact upon a pupil, leading them to spiral towards further problems and disengagement.

Low level intervention

Some illnesses and disabilities are, by nature, extremely variable whilst others are degenerative, but all have differing impacts on a young carer’s role. It is better to support pupils through early intervention rather than allowing them to struggle later on, if and when their circumstances become more difficult. Even when a young carer appears to be coping reasonably well and caring responsibilities seem limited, ensuring a support framework is in place and that the pupil is comfortable in accessing this framework (if they wish) is ideal.

Pupils who have already accessed low-level support are less likely to refuse further support should their caring role increase and their home situation worsens or becomes chaotic. Pupils who have met other young carers at peer support groups, for example, or those who have already talked with a member of staff, might feel more confident in seeking and accessing further support if and when their needs are greater. Moreover, preventative work, such as emotional literacy work and work around resilience, offered to young carers with low-level needs is valuable.
Pupils with parents affected by substance misuse

Young people who care for a parent affected by substance misuse (drug and/or alcohol) may undertake physical tasks, such as domestic chores, dealing with bills, or nursing a parent suffering from substance withdrawal, but it is often emotional support that is prevalent in their caring role. Due to stigma, fear of intervention from services and not wanting to ‘betray’ a parent, young carers of a parent affected by substance misuse can be even more reluctant to tell anyone about their family situation than those looking after someone with a physical disability.

Not all young people who live in families where there is substance misuse have a caring role or experience difficulties at home. The focus of this chapter is on parental substance misuse, but it is worth noting that some young people may be caring for a sibling affected by substance misuse.

Both research and practice have shown that children of parents who have a substance misuse problem can experience very chaotic lives lacking in routine. When in school, they may be worried about the safety of their parent and fear what or who they will find on returning home. They can be angry, confused, ashamed or even feel guilty. They can feel like their parent loves drugs and/or drink more than them. They may be embarrassed about the state of their home and feel unable to invite friends home. They may also have to deal with the aftermath of substance misuse. In addition, parents affected by substance misuse may experience impaired patterns of parental care. This in turn may lead to a higher risk of:

- Physical neglect or abuse.
- Threat of domestic abuse.
- Poor or limited diet.
- Missed health appointments, such as the dentist or vaccinations.

Like many young carers, this group of young carers may experience bullying, stigma and isolation and display behavioural difficulties. In addition, where children are caring for a relative with drug or alcohol problems, the incidence of missed school and educational difficulties is much more marked with 34% missing school and 40% in total missing school or having other indicators of educational difficulties.

Parents may worry about discrimination and the impact their substance dependency may have on their child. Issues surrounding their child’s schooling, such as problems with behaviour or attendance problems, can cause further stress.

Like many young carers, these children need someone to talk to and for their needs to be understood. They need to understand that they are not responsible for their parents’ choices and that it is not their fault. Early intervention is crucial.
Mental ill-health is often misunderstood; there is still great stigma associated with it. Research, guidance and practice highlights that children and young people who care for a parent or family member with mental ill-health are often more reluctant to tell anyone about their family than those caring for someone with a physical disability. The main focus of this section is on parental mental ill-health, however a young carer may also be looking after a sibling. It is also important to remember that not all children whose family members have mental ill-health will experience difficulties or be young carers.

Young carers looking after a parent with mental ill-health are often hidden because:

- There is no visible illness or disability.
- The illness may be episodic.
- The young carer and/or the family is reluctant to seek support.

Some young carers go to great lengths to conceal the mental ill-health within their families and make up excuses for their parent’s behaviour. They can also experience significant confusion and emotional upheaval due to the episodic nature of mental ill-health. Parents may worry about discrimination and the effect their illness has on their child. Issues surrounding their child’s schooling, such as behaviour or attendance problems, can add to stress which may further aggravate their illness. Parenting ability may also be impacted.

Young carers whose parents have severe mental ill-health can live under large psychological stress which, can affect their own emotional health and well-being. Unemployment, poverty, familial stress and a lack of support as the family may fear intervention can all affect the young carer negatively. The added emotional role is often the hardest for the child and can frequently result in a role-reversal between parent and child. In some cases, children can adopt paranoid or suspicious behaviour as they believe their parents delusions. The young carer can be further impacted if the parent has to spend time in hospital and the family is separated.

Providing young carers with information

A parent’s behaviour or even treatment is often not explained to the child or young person and this can lead to misunderstanding and confusion. Research indicates that age-appropriate information helps children to cope because:

- Children often imagine that things are worse than they are and so providing information therefore reduces fear.
- Understanding the illness can help the child empathise with and respect the person they care for.
- The child will realise it is not their fault.
Pupils caring for someone with a disability

Living with a person with disabilities, whether a parent or sibling or older relative, can be hard, since the attention in the family is often focused on the person with the disability. Young carers of people with a disability can experience feelings of embarrassment as the person they care for and their family may be seen as ‘different’ by their peer group. Being out ‘in public’ particularly if the disability is apparent can be an especially stressful time for some young carers.

Dealing with the prejudice and negative perceptions

Young carers helping to look after a sibling, a parent or an older relative with a disability can find it difficult to get space and time away from the family to study or just to be themselves. They 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 and/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 a disability. Older siblings may find themselves caring for younger non-disabled siblings as either parents’ resources are diverted to the person with the disability or it is the parent(s) who have the disability.

Those caring for parents or other adults with physical disabilities may undertake more practical tasks where as those caring for parents or other adults with a learning disability may assist more with 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.

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 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.
Pupils from migrant families

Young people from migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking families often face long waits for entry into school. If they have a caring role they may face additional issues specific to their family situation. This can impact upon their well-being and achievements in education, as well as their transition into the school and the community.

Not only may young migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking people have the responsibility of caring for someone in their family, but they have the added impact of coping with this responsibility in a strange culture and unfamiliar surroundings and in a new language, alongside the stigma of being a refugee.

Barriers to learning

Migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking children and young people who take on a caring role need support and understanding in managing these responsibilities and their education, because the additional burden of having to care for a family member who is mentally or physically unwell can be detrimental to their own integration into the school and community. Young carers from migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking families can experience:

- Racist bullying.
- Loss of identity.
- Loss of friends and family from the country they have come from.
- Concerns about the future, such as fear of returning to the home country.
- Lack of English skills and knowledge of systems, such as the education system, health system
- Stresses in the family, such as poverty or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- Disruption to education due to migration.

Child interpreters and translators

Following migration, children often acquire competence in the new language before their parents due to their young age, their integration in school or because they have been learning English in their home country. As a result, the role of interpreter or translator often falls to the child. Pupils may be absent from school as they attend appointments with their parents to take on the role of interpreter and/or translator.

Children should not be expected to interpret information that is inappropriate for their age or that the parent may want to be kept confidential and all services including schools need to be aware of this.
Assessment and monitoring

Young carers have a right to an assessment of their needs. Statutory services should ensure that young carers are not expected to carry out inappropriate levels of caring responsibilities.

There are various tools that your school can use to determine and monitor the extent of a pupil’s caring responsibilities. The outcomes of assessment and monitoring should inform any additional support. Remember to ensure that as much privacy as possible is provided for the young carer when they are completing any forms as they may find divulging personal information difficult. Consider asking pupils to fold forms, use envelopes or a secure box.

Additional online resources:

► **Barriers to learning: a checklist to use with pupils**

The aim of this checklist is to aid assessment and highlight any specific barriers a young carer might be facing in order to inform what support needs to be put in place and what should be included in a personalised plan.

**Manual for Measures of Caring Activities & Outcomes for Children & Young People**

This manual contains a range of tools relevant for assessment and evaluation work with young carers to complement what is already known about a young person and their family, including existing information gathered in the course of more formal assessment processes.

► **Young carers support options**

► **Confidentiality agreement**

► **Family support: a questionnaire**
Supporting learning: a personalised approach

Even though young carers may share many specific barriers to their learning and achievement, each pupil’s situation will be different. Personalised plans, devised by the school in conjunction with the young carer and their family should recognise the pupil’s specific needs as a young carer and take into account the family’s situation and how it impacts on the young person’s education.

Greater sensitivity to the individual

Most young carers say that when forced to choose between staying at home to look after a loved one and going to school, caring comes first. It is vital that schools balance taking a supportive, flexible approach with giving the pupil a consistent message that their education is important. A personalised approach to education and support can work particularly well for a young carer.

A good assessment of a young carer’s needs is necessary to inform a personal support plan. Personal support plans should include:

- Flexibility around deadlines and extra support, for example when caring roles increase.
- An assigned member of staff to talk to.
- Provision in place so that young carers can access after school clubs and activities.
- Additional support which is needed to overcome barriers to learning. Tutors and schools should draw support from other in-school professionals and wider groups of practitioners.
- A review of support in the home for any pupil whose education is affected by caring responsibilities.
- A crisis or emergency plan which for some young carers may form an important part of a personal support plan.

This plan, together with a tutor’s regular communication with parents, will ensure that young carers are less likely to fall behind and schools will be able to respond more quickly if any problems emerge. It should also address any barriers that parents face which prevent them from becoming fully engaged in their child’s education.

If a pupil is struggling to keep up with their work due to their caring role, the answer should not immediately be for them to drop a subject. Letting a young carer reduce their timetable does not provide equal access to education as their peers. However, for some pupils this may be precisely what will make the difference between succeeding with other subjects and failing at several. The decision should be carefully considered and long-term implications need to be explained to the pupil and their parents in order for them to be able to make a well informed choice.
Greater sensitivity to the family

Caring and family responsibilities are extremely variable. For some, family circumstances can often move from one crisis to another, whilst for others, situations may be stable for a long time with some periods of uncertainty and instability. As such, particular sensitivity should be shown to the family as a whole, in order to support parents’ engagement with the school and their child’s learning. Schools need to be understanding of a parent’s disability and how it affects them, for example they may require frequent hospital visits, or have difficulties visiting the school.

Whatever a young carer’s situation may be, it is also sensible for schools, together with the young carer, and preferably their parents, to develop a crisis plan to support pupils further (if and when young carers need extra help during a family emergency) and avoid any unnecessary school absence (see page 38).

A young carer card

Schools might want to consider introducing a ‘young carer’s card’. This could be credit card sized and display the pupil’s name and signature of an appropriate member of staff.

A young carer’s card offers the following benefits:

- Pupils will no longer have to repeat their family situation to staff.
- It will set out any agreed situations where a young carer requires some flexibility due to their situation.

There are many situations whereby a pupil may need some flexibility, such as:

- Homework and coursework deadlines.
- Needing to call a parent during break times so they are not worrying about them.
- Not being able to attend after school detentions.

The young carer’s card should be reissued annually along with frequent reviews of the young carer’s needs. Schools should be aware that in the event a card is lost or stolen, a pupil’s personal details may be compromised and therefore consider carefully how this scheme is implemented.
Crisis and emergency plans

Drawing up an emergency plan for a young carer may help mitigate impacts if a young carers’ situation at home becomes more difficult or if there is an emergency. If a family member needs to go into hospital or if their condition deteriorates having a plan in place can help to reduce the risk that a young carer may suffer in attendance, attainment and emotional health and wellbeing. For some pupils, their situation can become more difficult over time and for others, situations can vary between periods of stability and chaos.

The deterioration in health of a family member or the admission of a parent to hospital can put great stress on a family. As well as transport to school, other school routines such as completing homework on time, attending after school clubs or communications between the family and the school, such as important deadlines or paying school dinner monies, can suffer. In these situations, young carers and their families can need increased support.

It is therefore advisable to draw up a plan in advance of a crisis or emergency, or the increase of a caring role, alongside other agencies involved with the family, including adults’ services, the school and the young carer. Crisis plans are most effective if your school adopts a multi-agency approach and any contingency plans that may have been drawn up with other professionals or agencies should ideally be linked to the school plan. Remember pupils (and their families) are the experts in how their caring role and their family situation changes, and how these affect their schooling so they must be involved in the formulation of any such plans. Knowing that there is a plan in place can significantly reduce the worry for both pupils and parents.

When developing your crisis or emergency plan, consider:

➜ What other agencies need to be involved, when they need to be involved and how to refer.
➜ An assessment or review of the pupil’s and the family’s needs.
➜ How the school will communicate with parents.
➜ What additional support is required from the school and when.
➜ Transport to and from school.
➜ Ensuring continued attendance.
➜ Flexibility with coursework deadlines and how this will be implemented.

In a genuine crisis schools might want to consider approving absence for a child to care for a relative until other arrangements can be made. The school could set a time limit for the absence and set some school work so the pupil does not fall far behind while at home. It may also be appropriate for a pupil whose close relative is in the final stages of terminal illness to take time off school to be with them.
Working in partnership with young carers’ services

Working in partnership with a young carers’ service can greatly enhance school support for young carers and can often help facilitate identification of young carers.

Service provision varies between areas, but most support children and young people aged between 8 and 18 through activity sessions, one to one meetings and the provision of short breaks.

Services may provide emotional support through the young carers support worker and when required, more specialised support. Young carers’ workers can be catalysts for positive change in young carers’ lives, and are often someone that they can depend on.

Young carers can relax in these settings, without having to explain why their lives are different, or make excuses for not being able to go out and do the things other young people take for granted.

Young carers’ services can often offer support through school based programmes. Although dependant on available funding this can include:

- Individual or group work with young carers.
- Support with PSE lessons.
- Training and awareness-raising amongst school staff.

When embarking on work with the service, schools should have a clear understanding of the aims and scope of the service. Other procedural issues and ways to support the service working within the school should be addressed beforehand and perhaps set out in a protocol or agreement.

Schools are encouraged to explore what can be delivered to complement the local young carers’ service. A support group, for example, managed jointly by school staff and staff from a young carers’ service can be very effective.

► Effective partnership with young carers services: a checklist
Transition from Primary to Secondary school

As with all pupils, transition from one educational stage to another requires particular care. This is even more vital with young carers as there are particular issues if acknowledged and addressed that can make a crucial difference. It is good practice to build strong links and communication between staff leading on young carers from establishments feeding into each other in order to provide support during the transition process. Indeed, further value is added with multi-agency work, for example with additional support from a young carers’ service.

Providing opportunities for families to inform the secondary school that a pupil has caring responsibilities before they start is valuable so that support can commence from the outset. Primary schools may also be in a position to encourage the pupil and their family to advise the new school of their family situation or to set up a meeting with the secondary school’s carers lead.

Hertfordshire Young Carers Project has developed a transfer plan to support young carers as they move from primary to secondary schools and suggest that primary schools should:

- Make available to the secondary school and the parent(s)/guardian(s) an outline of the support currently being received by the pupil, such as that by a family worker, school nurse or other agency, as well as any additional support offered by the primary school.
- Organise an additional visit to the secondary school with parent(s)/guardian(s) to discuss family circumstances and give the young carer the opportunity to explain what it is like for them. (The young carer could have this information written down if preferred)
- Introduce the young carer to the link worker or named person in the secondary school.

The secondary school also has a role to play during this transition and it is useful if:

- The school has a relevant member of staff to liaise with feeder schools (primary and junior high) and ascertain whether there are young carers transferring to secondary school.
- The school lead is aware of the caring circumstances and the support the young carer has received during their time at primary school.
- The school lead or guidance teacher meets with the young carer while they are still at primary school to explain how they support young carers.
- The school lead or guidance teacher makes contact with the parent(s)/guardian(s) to explain the support that is available prior to the young carer joining the secondary school in September.
- A relevant member of staff offers a home visit where this is appropriate, as in some cases parents are unable to attend open evenings and parents evenings.

“...My dream is to go to university and it has always been in my head that I wouldn’t go to university too close to home because it was my way of gaining independence. However, I am not sure I can go because it means leaving home and there isn’t the support there for everyone else if I go.”
Higher and further education

Moving from primary to secondary school is a difficult stage for any pupil. Particular care needs to be put in to support pupils like young carers who have extra needs to ensure that pastoral support is continued and not lost.

As with the transition from primary to secondary school, further education colleges should also be made aware of any young carer moving up from secondary school. Schools are encouraged to pass on any relevant information as appropriate or encourage and support young carers and their families to volunteer this information.

Young carers may need more intense support when moving on from school into further education or the workplace or with living on their own and establishing relationships. The majority of young carers’ services offer support to young carers up to the age of at least 18 and some offer specific programmes around transition issues.

Schools and colleges should also ensure extra support is available, or that the young carer is linked into other service providers, such as health, careers, benefits agency, adult social care or adult carers’ services (at age 18) to support them at this potentially difficult period. A young carer moving away from home, perhaps to college or university, should trigger a review of the care needed for the person who needs care.

Thinking about the future

Although many young carers have acquired specific skills from their caring role, careers advice should not hastily encourage young carers into pursuing a career related to caring. It is likely that young carers need additional support in realising the breadth of options available to them and broadening their horizons. It is important for someone to be available to listen to possible concerns a young carer may have about their future, moving away from home and their aspirations.

Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)

EMA is a weekly payment for eligible learners attending a valid learning programme. It is paid directly to the young person and can help with the day-to-day costs of staying in learning.
Building a Healthy School Environment
Bullying experienced by young carers can sometimes be the result of the stigma associated with some disabilities, mental and physical ill-health and substance misuse. Raising awareness of young carers’ issues amongst pupils in school will help young carers to gain understanding and support from their peers.

Young carers themselves have suggested that young carer issues and information on disabilities be included in PSE lessons, assemblies and other relevant parts of the curriculum.

Steps to take before hand

It is strongly recommended that a whole school support system is already in place before your school actively begins to identify young carers and raise awareness of young carers amongst pupils. Raising awareness may encourage some pupils to consider issues relating directly to themselves for the first time and so it is important for them to see that support is already available before they speak to an adult. This should include:

- A named person within the school that pupils can talk to following the assembly or lesson.
- Establishing ground rules with the class to provide a safe environment should a young person identify themselves within the lesson.
- Sensitivity around case studies or materials you use, ensuring they reflect positive images of disability and the reality of being a young carer.

Challenging stereotypes

Teaching all pupils about disabilities, mental and physical ill-health substance misuse, the issues surrounding a caring role (in a non sensationalist way) and providing an opportunity to challenge stereotypes will help them to understand that a caring responsibility in the home is a way of life for some people and that anyone could become a young carer. It is beneficial to teach pupils that young carers are no different to other young people and that they have the same hopes, dreams and pressures as all young people, but with the added pressures of a caring role.

Raising awareness of carers, disabilities, mental and physical ill-health and substance misuse can help create more empathy towards young carers and more understanding as to why they may sometimes seem unsociable, stressed, worried or angry. It will also help pupils acknowledge and value the complicated responsibilities that young carers can have and may explain why they can’t attend clubs or why they have to rush
off after school. Not only will this help remove the stigma associated with certain disabilities and illness, thus help prevent bullying, but it will also help young carers to talk about their responsibilities with their peers.

By embedding these issues within the curriculum, it is likely that a more accepting and understanding environment will be built over the long term, one where young carers feel safe and confident to share their stories and where they are accepted for who they are and supported by their peers.

How to raise awareness amongst pupils

- Use relevant parts of the curriculum, such as PSE/health & well being lessons, to inform pupils of the issues.
- Use assemblies to provide opportunities to promote knowledge and understanding of disabilities, mental and physical ill-health and substance misuse and the issues surrounding a caring role.
- Invite relevant local services to make presentations about topics, such as mental ill-health.
- Provide information about sources of support on notice boards.
- Train peer mentors within the school on the specific issues surrounding young carers.
- Make books and films available in your school library.
- Ensure that parents with ill-health or disabilities feel able to be part of the school community.
Lesson and assembly planning

► Raising awareness in schools

There are a range of materials available to help you plan assemblies and PSE/health and wellbeing lessons in both primary and secondary schools. The local young carers service should also be able to help you.

→ A1: Young carer case studies
→ A2: Case study response
→ A3: A day in the life of a young carer
→ A4: Challenges map
→ A5: Best friend letter of support
→ A6: Young carer letter to a best friend
→ A7: What’s the answer?
→ B: Role play for an assembly or drama lesson
→ C: Top ten tips for peers
→ D: Building your library
→ E: Useful websites
→ F: Educational film for staff
It is vital that both pupils and families have information about the support services available in school. Information for young carers and their families is central to the whole school approach and is essential for support. Demonstrating what support is in place clearly will not only help shape the ethos of the school, but should also encourage pupils and families to come forward and seek support.

Young carers often do not wish to self-identify. This may be because they see no benefit of going through the difficult task of doing so. Or it may be, simply, because they are not aware that they are young carers.

It is therefore important to provide clear, accessible, and up to date information explaining the role of a young carer along with what support is available to them and their families. Pupils need to know how to access this support and be encouraged to do so.

Information must be permanent since anyone can become a young carer at any time and available in different settings across school. It is also useful to display photos and names of key support staff.

Methods of information

- School notice board
- School intranet/internet page
- School diary
- Newsletters
- Assemblies
- Books and film
- Events, for example Carers Week (www.carersweek.org)

- How your school supports young carers: a template
- Information and contacts for young carers: a template
- Information and contacts for parents: a template
Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge a huge thanks to the Princess Royal Trust for Carers for permission to use and adapt the contents of a previous addition of Supporting Young Carers: A resource for schools. The following are a list of those who contributed to the original document.

The Children’s Society
Applemore College
   Cath Baker
Connexions
Drew Lindon
Gill Winter
Harrop Fold High School
Hertfordshire Young Carers
   John Zealander
Llanfyllin High School
   Katie Chen
National Young Carers’ Forum
Newry & Mourne Carers’ Centre
   Paul McCormack
Powys Young Carers’ Service
Salford Young Carers
   Sally Dace
St. Josephs High School Crossmaglen
Winchester & District Young Carers
   Celia McInnes

We would also like to acknowledge our funders, the Scottish Government

And finally a huge thank you to all those who have helped in the development stages of this resource.