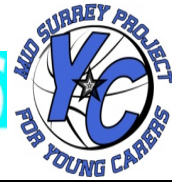




Surrey and Borders Partnership

NHS Trust



# Working with Young Carers



A Guide for Health and Social Care Professionals

## **Why a Guide for Health and Social Care Professionals?**

Many professionals, as part of their normal working life, will come into contact with children and young people who are carers. This may be particularly true of those working in health, education and social care, but it is important for professionals, from whatever sphere they are employed in, to work together or individually to help young carers. A first step towards achieving this is to develop an understanding of who young carers are, what they do and the issues raised by their lifestyle and needs. This understanding can help to identify both existing and potential young carers.

In many instances, it is not always apparent that a young person has a caring role, with often only the extreme cases coming to the attention of professionals. Therefore, any action on the part of professionals to identify and help these children and young people at an early stage is vital.

## **Who is a Young Carer?**

A young carer is anyone under the age of 18 whose life is in some way restricted because of the need to take responsibility for the care of a person who is ill, has a disability, is experiencing mental ill health or is affected by substance misuse.

A young carer may be caring for a parent, brother, sister, relative or friend. Excluded from this definition are young people caring for someone with a short term illness, eg. flu, or young people caring for non-disabled siblings while non-disabled parents are absent. It is the lack of choice in caring for someone that distinguishes a young carer from other young people.

The 2001 census showed there are at least 175,000 young people in the UK under 18 years of age who have caring responsibilities. About 3,000 of these young people may live in Surrey. However, research conducted for the BBC in 2010 among over 4,000 schoolchildren, showed that one in 12 had caring responsibilities, equating to some 700,000 young carers in the UK – four times the number identified in the 2001 census. This means between 10,000 and 12,000 young carers may live in Surrey.

## **Young Carers May Not Want to Identify Themselves**

This apparent disparity may be explained by research conducted by the Young Carers Research Group at Loughborough University, which showed that it is often the case that young carers do not want to be identified, and highlighted a number of reasons why.

Young carers may prefer to remain silent about their role out of a fear of coming to the attention of professionals and being separated from their families, either by the institutionalisation of the care recipient or by the instigation of care proceedings. Parents may collude with this silence for these same reasons, and also because of guilt, pride, and a desire to 'keep it in the family'. Children and young people who care may well be living in constant fear of being taken into care or that the person they are caring for will be hospitalised.

Young carers may be worried about being stigmatised as ‘different’ as they do not experience the same type of childhood as other children, and that their parents are in some way perceived as different. They may be concerned about being bullied at school as a consequence of their caring role.

*“I was bullied a lot at school, I used to be given a time out card when I didn’t know what to do. I did not know what to do with the bullying, I chose to ignore it hoping that they would get bored. It did get worse for a while, I did have access to counselling and time out. I did not really socialise, I felt different”.*  
(male young carer aged 17 Woking)

## **What Does a Young Carer Do?**

Young carers may perform a range of caring tasks (often comparable to those of an adult carer) including:

- Domestic chores such as washing and ironing clothes or cooking evening meals for the whole family
- Administering medication, lifting or helping someone get out of bed or walk
- Emotional support to calm down the person they care for, or to listen to their problems
- Intimate personal care involving bathing, dressing or toileting the person they care for
- Looking after brothers and sisters who may be disabled themselves, or to help an ill or disabled parent

*“I do 2-3 hours a day, helping with tidying up and helping my Mum feel good about herself, I do not sleep well. I get extremely worried about my parents”*  
(Female Young carer aged 14 Horley)

## **Factors That May Indicate a Young Person has a Caring Role**

As mentioned, for a number of reasons a young carer may not want to be identified, chiefly out of fear of being taken into care or the person they care for being institutionalised, or for being seen as somehow different. It is important for professionals to acknowledge these fears and work with the young carers to identify and help them.

The factors that may indicate that a young person is caring include:

- The presence of illness or disability in the family
- Difficulties in school attendance
- Being persistently unwell, tired, stressed or depressed
- Academic performance not reaching potential
- Isolation and lack of interaction with friends
- False maturity. Appearing very responsible and mature but ‘letting go’ and behaving immaturely when in a safe environment

*“My fear is that they will take us into care, if the people we care for get worse, this could happen. I would not want to phone them if we had a crisis.”* (Quote from young carer focus group)

## **The Effects of Caring on a Young Person**

Growing up with someone with a disability or illness will inevitably have an impact on a young person. The nature and extent of the effects will be dependent on a number of factors:

- The services and support offered to the family
- The structure and dynamic of the family
- The nature of the disability or illness
- The personality of the child

Frequent effects seen in young people who are carers include:

- 1 in 5 young carers of compulsory school age miss school because of their caring responsibilities
- 1 in 3 young carers at secondary school experience some kind of educational difficulty requiring additional support from Education Welfare Services
- The physical nature of many caring tasks, disturbed sleep patterns and the worry about the person being cared for, can all contribute to poor concentration and lack of attention in school
- Lack of educational qualifications and ongoing caring responsibilities can result in young carers being excluded from further education and developing a career
- Social difficulties can arise because other children see young carers and their families as different. Young carers may not want to invite friends around because of the behaviour of the care receiver, and may be at risk of bullying due to the stigma associated with some illnesses and disabilities
- Increased likelihood of poverty, associated with the loss of parental income and the costs associated with long-term illness or disability. The social security system does not accommodate young carers: although they perform an adult role as carers, they are still legally children and so not entitled to benefits until they reach 16
- Increased likelihood of social isolation, where a caring role can effectively place a curfew on children, restricting the time available for friendships, leisure and hobbies.

*“My caring role has affected my education, I sometimes arrived late and I was asked why I was late, but I had so much work to do, I think I overextended myself.. now I am at college the staff are more understanding with essays...”*  
(male young carer aged 17 Woking)

*“When you are a carer you can’t always get cover, you can’t see your friends. If there is any family stuff going on you have to take up the reins. Transport is sometimes an issue, I have only recently got a bus pass with the help of Surrey Young Carers which is brilliant.”* (young carer aged 17)

## **Responsibilities as a Professional**

Professionals have a number of responsibilities towards a young carer, depending on the sector they work in. These include:

- Identifying young carers and guiding them to appropriate support

- Acknowledging their contribution
- Offering young carers someone to talk to
- Listen, respect and believe young carers and respond with sensitivity
- Recognise different cultural, racial and religious needs
- Provide young carers with age appropriate information and know what is available locally to meet young carers needs
- Responding to calls and maintaining good communication
- Being sensitive to the concerns of young carers, especially around fears of the family being broken up
- Assessing their needs separately from those of care recipients (Carers Assessments)
- Assessing their needs in accordance with the Framework for the assessment of Children in Need and their Families, to ensure inappropriate levels of caring are not taking place
- Enable their development by offering choices, including the choice to stop caring
- Work in partnership with parents and support them in accessing, for example, parents evenings
- Agencies and professionals to work in partnership to support young carers and their families

*“They think because you are younger than everyone they talk to, that you are not old enough to have a valid opinion. They talk at you rather than to you. They think your opinion doesn’t matter.” (Quote from young carer focus group)*

### **Ways a Professional can Help**

The key to professionals helping a young carer, from whatever sector they work in, is to have an understanding of who young carers are, what they do and the issues raised by their lifestyles and needs. This will help in the proactive identification of existing and potential young carers.

Working to deliver the responsibilities outlined above will contribute to helping young carers. In addition, and depending on the sector worked in, there may be a number of other opportunities to provide help, for example:

- Offering young carers the use of a telephone, in private
- Having a link person for young carers within schools to raise awareness of young carers issues and enable appropriate support to be offered to young carers
- Introduce disability, mental health, drug and alcohol issues into the school curriculum to raise awareness and prevent stigmatisation
- Where visits by professionals are required to either care receivers and/or young carers, ensuring appointments are made out of school hours mean the views of young carers can be gathered and assessed
- Ensure young carers are as fully engaged as their age and circumstances allow in discussions about need, and the development and delivery of support services

*“I don’t remember being asked about my Mum’s plan. I think that they are aware of young carers in general terms but not really the situations that young carers find themselves in. They don’t really know what goes on with young*

*carers, they would take more action otherwise". (Quote from young carer focus group)*

## **Help from Social Care**

Local authorities are responsible for providing social care support for families so that children and young people do not have to undertake unreasonable levels of caring responsibilities. This is most likely to be achieved when the Adult Social Care Services work together with the Children's Service, taking a whole family approach. To help achieve this, Surrey County Council has developed a joint protocol to ensure liaison and joint working between the two services.

To enquire about help that may be available, please call the Surrey County Council Contact Centre on 03456 009 009.

## **Benefits for Young Carers**

16 is the earliest age at which a young person can claim benefit in their own right as a carer. Benefits include Carers Allowance and Income Support, and young carers would not normally be expected to be available for work if they have caring responsibilities. Further information on benefits can be found on the Carersnet website [www.carersnet.org.uk](http://www.carersnet.org.uk)

## **Legislation and Guidance Relating to Young Carers**

- **The Children Act 1989**

This Act places a duty on social services to provide services to children who are 'in need'. A child is 'in need' under the act if they are unlikely to achieve or maintain, or have the opportunity to achieve or maintain, a reasonable standard of health and development. Young carers whose caring responsibilities are significantly impacting on their health and development therefore have rights to services.

- **The Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995**

This act gives greater recognition to the needs of carers. It entitles a carer of any age, who provides or intends to provide a regular and substantial amount of caring, the right to an assessment of their own needs, if the person being cared for is being assessed.

- **The Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004**

This act builds on existing legislation and support for carers of any age by placing a duty on local authorities to ensure that all carers know that they are entitled to an assessment of their needs. It also places a duty on councils to consider a carer's outside interests (work, study or leisure) when carrying out an assessment. The act also aims to promote better joint working between councils and the health service to ensure support for carers is delivered in a coherent manner.

- **The Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000**

Gives carers over 16 years old the right to an assessment of their own needs even if the person being cared for has refused one

- **The Equality Act 2010**

This act aims to protect all carers against discrimination or harassment because of their caring responsibilities. This is because carers are considered to be 'associated' with someone (i.e. the person they are caring for) who is protected by the law because of their age or disability.

- **Framework for the Assessment of Children and their Families**

Provides a systematic way of analysing, understanding, and recording what is happening to children and young people within their families and the wider context of the communities in which they live.

- **The National Service Framework for Mental Health (DoH)**

Standard 6 acknowledges the vital role played by carers who look after a mental health service user. It provides a model to ensure the needs of carers, including young carers, are taken into account within a care plan and recognises that services to support the carer will not only have a positive impact on the carer but will help the person with the mental illness.

- **Teachernet.gov.uk – Guidance on Young Carers and Schools**

Provides advice on how schools can recognise and support young carers, including recommending a member of the school staff be designated to have responsibility for young carers

## **Young Carers Support Services**

Independent young carer services provide free support to young carers throughout Surrey up to 18 years old. Surrey Young Carers is a service managed by Action for Carers (Surrey) and works with young carers in the Boroughs of Elmbridge, Guildford, Reigate/Redhill/Banstead, Runnymede, Spelthorne, Surrey Heath, Tandridge and Waverley.

Mid Surrey Young Carers is managed by Surrey Clubs for Young People and works with young carers in the Boroughs of Epsom/Ewell and Mole Valley.

Both services aim to work for and with young carers to enable them to achieve their full potential as young people. They also work in school helping young carers to come to terms with their situation and deal with their worries. They do this either through one to one support or group work, where young people learn to draw strength from each other. The Young Carers services also raise awareness of young carers with school staff to encourage understanding and support in the schools setting, using a range of specialist curriculum and training materials that have been developed. They also provide opportunities for young carers to talk and do activities outside of school.

The services they offer continue to develop to meet the needs of young carers and their families and emphasis is placed on raising awareness with professionals.

Each service provides:

- Support for young carers (up to the age of 18) in both an individual and group setting around issues of caring
- An advocacy service for young carers

- Work with young carers to enable them to achieve their full potential as young people
- Raise awareness and promote the needs of young carers within a multi-agency setting
- Offer free impartial information and support to young carers.

A range of services for young carers:

- A holistic approach to identify the needs of individual young carers, which includes discussion on interests and aspirations (this does not replace the statutory Young Carers Assessment)
- An individual agreed action plan for each young carer
- Young Carers Groups
- Information and advice on an individual and family basis
- A chance to meet other young carers
- Short term breaks for the young carer, often in school holidays, such as days out, outdoor pursuits and residential breaks
- Issue based workshops
- An Education Support Service - which works within primary and secondary schools providing input to assemblies, PSHE lessons, teacher training, individual and group sessions with other young carers. Education Advisors work closely with Early Years and local colleges in Surrey.
- Individual grants to enable young carers to try activities they are otherwise unable to try
- A young carer's magazine and website.  
[www.surrey-youngcarers.org.uk](http://www.surrey-youngcarers.org.uk)
- A Young Carers Forum group
- Awareness raising sessions with both statutory and voluntary agencies
- Pen Pals service

*“They (young carer services) help you so much, they know the full extent of the situation, it is a specialised service. They know everything, if they don't know, they will do their research. They will go out of their way to help” (Quote from young carer focus group)*

Further information and advice for young carers can be found online at:

[www.youngcarers.net](http://www.youngcarers.net)

[www.surrey-youngcarers.org.uk](http://www.surrey-youngcarers.org.uk)

Both websites also have sections providing information to professionals.

If you would like to know more about Young Carers Services or have suggestions of ways of developing services for young carers, please contact:

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Coniers Way  
New Inn Lane  
Guildford  
GU4 7HL  
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