

How to identify young carers in an education setting

Who are young carers?

A young carer is a child between the age of 5 to 18 who provides care for another person in their family. Young carers could provide care for their parent, both parents, a brother, a sister, or grandparent.

Reasons for caring:

- Age
- Illness
- Physical disabilities
- SEN
- **Mental health**
- **Substance misuse**

Why it is important to identify young carers:

There are an estimated 700,000 young carers in the UK (*BBC & University of Nottingham, 2010*) but many are hidden in society either because they are unaware they are a young carer, or because they are too worried or embarrassed to ask for help. Research from the Carers Trust conducted in 2013 revealed that, on average, young carers miss 48 days of school per year, achieve less GCSEs than their peers and are more likely to become NEET (not in education, employment, or training). Identifying young carers means that they can receive the support they need to remain safe and also to achieve their potential in education and beyond.

Signs someone may have caring responsibilities:

- Regular lateness
- Low attendance
- Not completing homework
- Tiredness
- Short attention span
- Lack of motivation
- Low mood/mental ill-health including anxiety
- Parent/guardian who uses disabled parking space
- Lack of parent/guardian attending parents' evening/other school events
- On pupil premium/free school meals
- Change in hygiene/appearance
- Change in behaviour – becoming aggressive or angry, withdrawn or quieter.
- Secrecy about their home life.
- Feelings of embarrassment associated with their home life or when a family member comes to school/college.
- Playing a caring role with younger children and in contrast may be confident with adults.
- Being isolated or a victim of bullying, either because of the situation in the family, or because they lack social skills when they are around their peers.
- Showing anxiety or concern over an ill or disabled relative
- Desire to be in constant touch with home.
- Not attending extra-curricular activities.
- Back pain or other related pain due to heavy lifting from their caring role.
- Outbursts or disproportionate response to events due to the emotional strain they may be under.

Why it's important to ask questions:

As previously mentioned, many young carers are hidden to their schools and colleges because they may not know that they are young carers. It is important to make young people aware that whatever tasks they are doing, if they are spending time and energy supporting someone to meet their needs than they are a carer. Additionally, if young people care for someone with a mental health or substance misuse problem, they might feel embarrassed or fear the consequences of confiding in someone. As a result, good communication about the different options available and who to turn to for help is vital.

Staff in education settings have a key role in identifying and supporting young carers, as you know your students best. We know that it can be difficult to approach these conversations if you do not feel as if you have the training or experience and don't want to upset your students. However, giving the students the space to open up about their worries and ask for support can make a huge difference.

Questions to ask:

The questions below are not meant to be read out as a full script. These are ideas for you to work into your everyday conversations with students using your professional judgement, skills, experiences, and knowledge of the young people in your school/college.

Think about the right time and place to have this conversation so students do not feel rushed but feel safe and comfortable to talk. Please make sure there is some follow up – if people let you know they're a young carer, they need to be recognised and offered support.

1. How are you?
2. I've noticed you've [mention signs listed above]. I just wanted to check if you're okay or if there's anything we can do to support you?
3. What did you do before you came to school this morning?
4. What did you do when you got home yesterday evening?
5. Sometimes when things are happening at home it can affect how we act/feel at school/college. So, I wondered if there's anyone in your family who needs extra support because of physical or mental illnesses, or any physical or learning disabilities, or because of drugs or alcohol?
6. Do you do anything to help them or look after them? Or to help anyone else in your family because of their [illness/disability/drug or alcohol use]?
7. What kind of things do you do at home to support your family?
8. Is there anyone else at home who helps out? Or anyone who doesn't live at home who helps with looking after your family?
9. Do you often think about or worry about your family when you're not with them?
[If yes] Does it distract you or make it hard to concentrate?
[If yes] Is this on your mind all the time or just when you're away from home?
[If yes] What kind of things do you worry about?
10. Do you get time to yourself to relax, see friends or do any hobbies on your own away from the people you care for? Does looking after someone ever take up too much time and stop you doing things you want to do? What kind of things?
11. Does caring have any impact on your own physical or mental health?
12. How does caring impact school/college for you?