

Teachers... Young Carers need YOU!

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Children and Young People's Services promotes equality and celebrates diversity.



Children and Young People's Services

For many teachers, there is enough to think about in day to day teaching, marking, planning, the national curriculum.....

There are enough pupils who obviously need extra help and support, without worrying about the quiet ones, the ones who have odd days off, but do their best to catch up. There is enough to do advising those parents who come to parents' evening, without worrying about the ones who never seem to get there.



**But these children may need your help.
They may be young carers.**

Who are young carers?

Young carers are children and young people who provide care for a sick or disabled relative at home. The person they care for is often a parent, but it could be a grandparent or a brother or sister.

Young carers are **usually** in lone parent families and may come from any social or cultural background. The parent may have a physical disability or a mental health problem, or dependence on drugs or alcohol.



What do they do?



The young carer may be doing tasks like shopping, cooking or housework or they may be feeding, toileting and bathing their relative or providing emotional support.

They may be getting lots of help, or they may be doing all of the caring alone, having never spoken to anyone about what they are doing. Their friends may not realise that they are a young carer, let alone their teachers. This is particularly likely if their relative has an illness about which others may be prejudiced and hostile, such as mental ill health or HIV/AIDS.

Are there any young carers in my school?

It is difficult to know how many young carers there are because they are hidden from view, often afraid to ask for help. It is estimated that there are at least 175,000 young carers nationally (2001 Census).

Almost every school, primary and secondary, will have pupils who are young carers.



How can we identify young carers?

You may be able to find some young carers through the information already held in school records – for example, information about parents' special needs or disability. Or you may become alerted to a problem because a particular pupil is often tired during the day, or misses school without explanation.

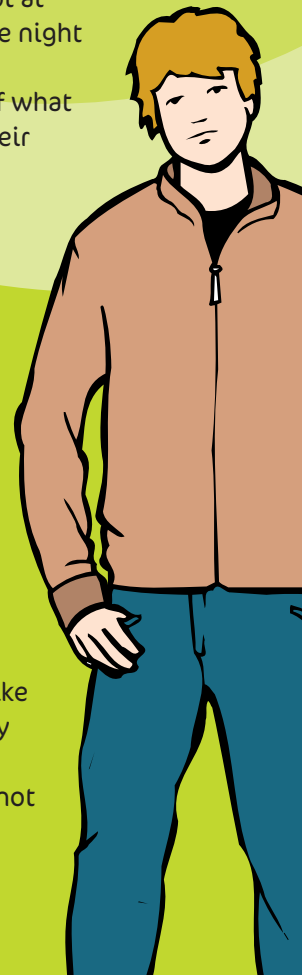
Their achievement in school may be adversely affected – their homework may be handed in late or not at all and they may find it difficult to concentrate. Young carers have been described as 'permanently worried' children. Some children who care may be withdrawn whilst others may have behavioural problems.

Of course, there are many young carers who are very adept at disguising the problems that they face – who get up in the night to finish homework in order to avoid being singled out as different or failing. This may be because they are afraid of what might happen if they are identified. They may fear that their parent will be 'put into care'.

They may also be anxious that they will be shunned or teased by their peers if they are open about their home situation. For some young carers, school may be the only place where they can participate in ordinary children's activities. They may work extra hard so as not to draw attention to themselves and their situation.

The important thing is that staff are aware of young carers and they use their existing skills to talk to children and young people in a sensitive way and encourage them to open up about any difficulties at home.

In the same way that schools usually deal with subjects like drug awareness or personal health and development, they could raise disability issues, which might lead to young carers identifying themselves and realising that they are not alone. Knowing that staff have some awareness may lead them to seek help, particularly if there is a named person that they can talk to.



Practical steps your school can take to help young carers

Many young carers would like to have access to a phone if their relative is feeling particularly unwell one day, so that they can phone and check on them at lunch time. Can young carers use the office phone, in some privacy, at lunch time for this purpose? This may mean that they have the confidence to come to school rather than be tempted to stay at home.



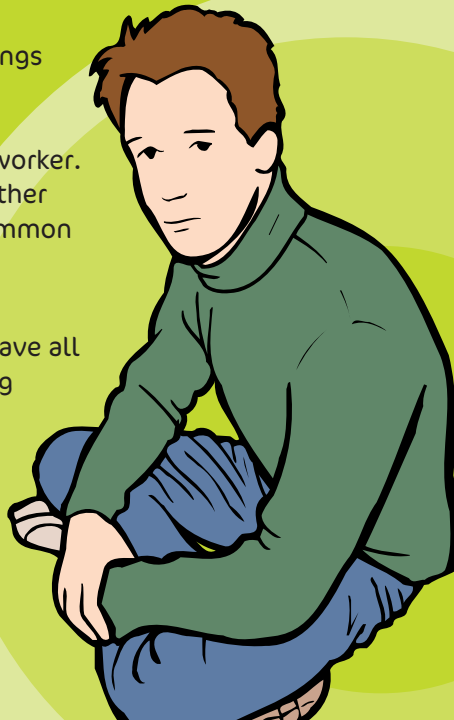
Provide the opportunity for a young carer to discuss their personal situation with you, if that is their wish.

Can you be flexible about homework if there is a real crisis?

Can you introduce disability and illness awareness into the curriculum? Alternatively, invite young carers workers to do a presentation and workshops.

Mention young carers in any liaison meetings that you already have with your local education welfare officer, Connexions personal adviser, social worker or health worker. Can you set up a referral procedure with other professionals? Or, think about doing a common assessment framework.

And finally, remember that young carers have all the problems to deal with that other young people will be facing, as well as their caring situation. It is possible that their relative may not be able to discuss these problems with the young carer. Be prepared to help with other enquiries too.



How can teachers help young carers?

Emotional support for the young person

For many young carers, just having **someone to talk to** may be all that they need or want. Just knowing that they can sound off to you **without being judged** may make their situation better.

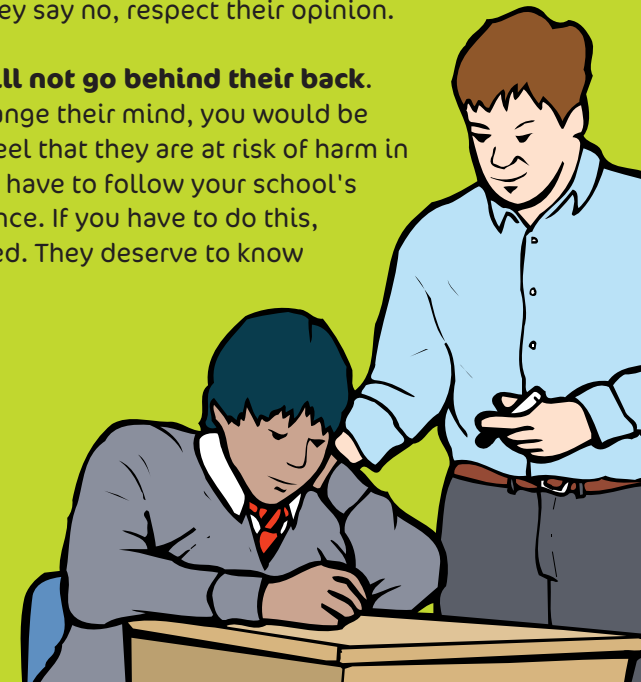
Just having **someone there to listen** to them, to hear their opinions and understand how they may be feeling, without interfering or offering advice may be enough.

Many carers say that no one ever asks how they are. It's always 'How's mum?' **Ask how the young carer is.**

Once a relationship is built up, you could ask the young carer if they would like you to get them some more information or find out about local support. But if they say no, respect their opinion.

Reassure them that you will not go behind their back.

You could say that if they change their mind, you would be quite happy to help. (If you feel that they are at risk of harm in their situation, then you may have to follow your school's policy on breaking a confidence. If you have to do this, keep the young carer informed. They deserve to know what is happening.)



Obtaining relevant information

The young carer may need information about their relative's disability or illness. There are associations covering most illnesses and disabilities. You may find the information at the front of the phone book or Thompson directory, or the young carer could go to see their doctor, or maybe the school nurse could get some information for them.

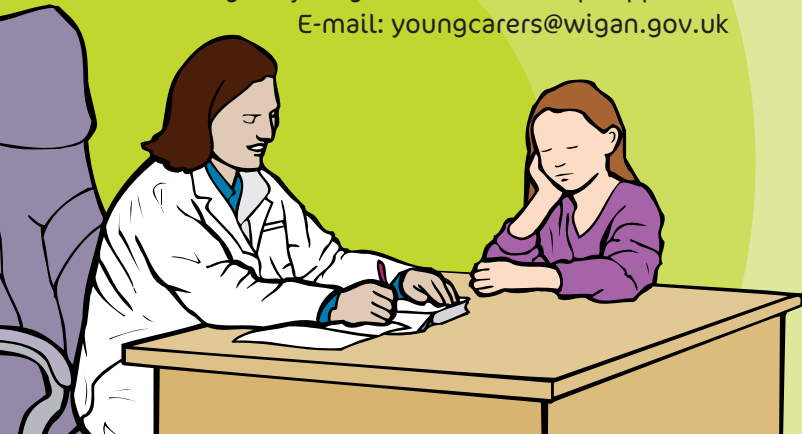
Young carers, when identified, should be referred to Children and Young People's Services via the Children in Need Duty Team for an assessment of their and their family's needs. There are nominated social workers in the family assessment and support team who will work with the family to find out about their situation, the support they need and the agencies best placed to provide it.

The young carer may want information about support groups for young carers, where they could meet other young people in a similar situation. For further information contact the groupwork co-ordinator on **01942 705963**.

The befriending scheme offers a service of high level individual support on a one to one basis. Befriending can help to increase the young carer's self-confidence and social skills and can go some way in reducing their sense of isolation. For further information contact the befrienders co-ordinator on **01942 705962**.

The young carers workers offer advice, information and support to young carers and their families, and work across the borough to promote knowledge of young carers and develop support and services.

E-mail: youngcarers@wigan.gov.uk



Case study

A twelve year old girl is looking after her mother who has multiple sclerosis; her father left the family about two years ago. Before she goes to school, she helps dress her mother, combs her hair and makes breakfast.

Some days she has to come home from school to prepare her mother's lunch. She tells her friends that she is going to feed the dog because she does not want anyone to know about her mother's disability. When she comes home in the evening there is always something to do around the house. She wants to do well at school but is worried about her mum. She often does not have time for her school work and then gets in trouble with her teacher. Her mother is concerned about her education, but is afraid to ask for help from the council.

Her teacher noticed that she sometimes appears tired and on occasions has not attended school. At a convenient time the teacher encouraged her to discuss her situation and, with her permission, visited her home to talk to mum.

Mother and daughter were reassured by the teacher, who then arranged with the education welfare officer for Children and Young People's Services to make an assessment of their needs.

They are now receiving home care and meals on wheels at a time that is appropriate to the young carer. Now she can participate more fully in school activities and concentrate on her work.



Useful contacts



Young carers groupwork co-ordinator:

Tel. **01942-705963**

Young carers befriending co-ordinator:

Tel. **01942-705962**

Or write to them at:

Hyndelle Lodge,
King Street,
Hindley,
Wigan,
WN2 3AW



E-mail: young_carers@wigan.gov.uk

Carers helpline - tel. **01942 606086**

Children in Need Duty Team - tel. **01942 828300**

What now? Leisure Information - tel. **0800 511111**

Connexions Service:

Tel. **01942 768055** (Wigan)

Tel. **01942 705800** (Leigh)

Friends of Young Carers website - www.friendsatwlyc.org

Notes