

Young Carers and Education during Covid

Minimizing impact and Maximizing outcomes



Rebecca Rolfe – Service Manager
The Children's Society
Include Service

January 2021

Young Carers - Definition

**Children and Families Act 2014
Section 96**

“... a person under 18 who provides or intends to provide care for another person (of any age, except where that care is provided for payment, pursuant to a contract or as voluntary work).”

Up to 800,000 young carers in the UK.
That's up to 1 in 5 in the classroom.



Before we start ... How confident or knowledgeable do you feel about young carers?

- Who has experience of young carers?
- Been a young carer or grew up in a family where there were significant caring duties?
- Through previous work experience, learned of the impact of being a young carer?
- Or previous study / research?

Entitled to Assessment of Need and Transition Assessment.

If a child is caring then there is an unmet need.

The Care Act 2014 and The Children and Families Act 2014 place duties upon the local authority to carry out both young carers needs assessments and young carers transition assessments before the young carer turns 18 years old and when it would be of “significant benefit” to the individual young people.

What do young carers do?

- Physical care such as lifting, helping a parent on stairs, physiotherapy
- Practical tasks such as cooking, housework, shopping
- Personal care such as dressing, washing, helping with toileting needs
- Giving medication
- Managing the family budget, collecting benefits and prescriptions
- Looking after younger siblings
- Emotional support
- Interpreting

Impacts of caring role

- Physical injury / illness / developmental delay
- Emotional – anxiety / behaviour problems / mental ill health
- Worry
- Social – isolation / bullying
- Educational – reduced attendance, lower attainment
- Future life chances
- Increased risk of CE and CSE



Young Carers and School



Impact of being a Young Carer

Evidence shows that being a young carer can impact on attendance, attainment, personal development and welfare:

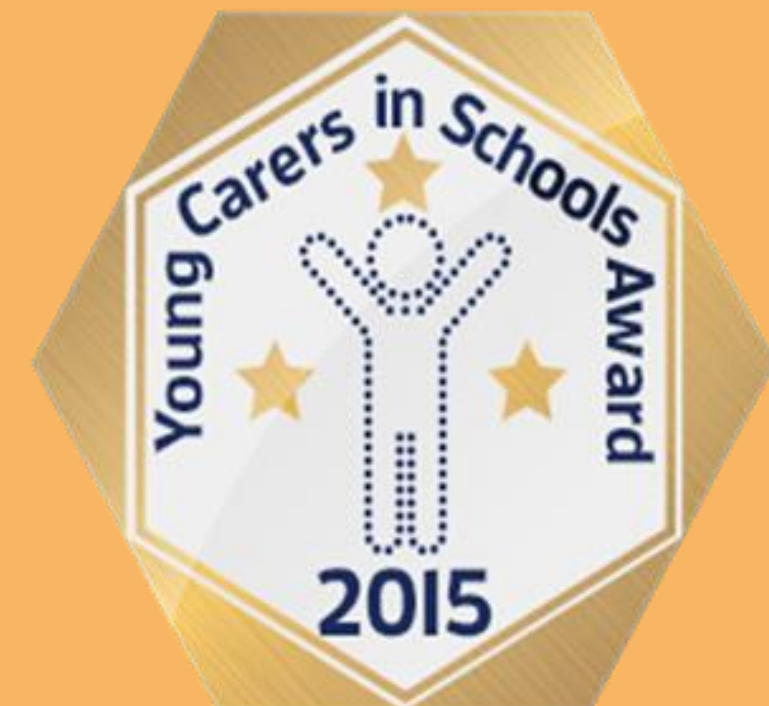
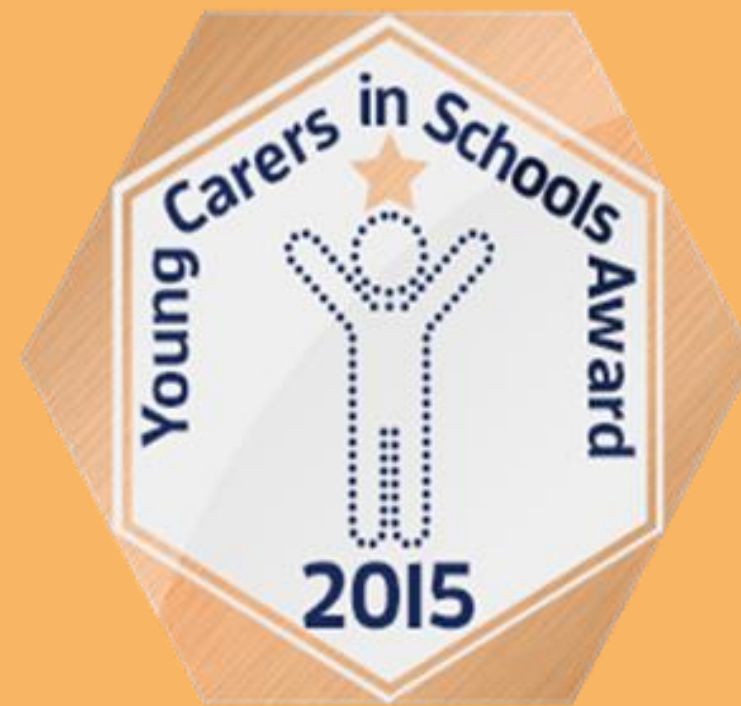
- Over 25% miss school regularly
- Significantly lower education attainment at GCSE level – an average one grade lower across all subjects
- On average young carers miss or cut short 48 school days a year
- 62% said they were bullied
- 42% say there is not a particular person at school who recognised them as a carer

“Without supportive teachers I wouldn't have continued my academic career in the way that I have ... I really do thank them.”

Young carer

Young Carers in Schools

The Award



Created and developed by Young Carers

Five key actions:

Schools

- **Understand** – is there a young carer lead to approach?
- **Inform** – raising awareness through both staff and students to reduce stigma
- **Identify** – can staff recognise indicators and action next steps?
- **Listen** – space to talk, or just rest
- **Support** – practical intervention, space to call home, homework support during school day, signposting/ referring to local Young Carers Service or EH or for assessments if necessary



The Impact of YCiS Award

73% of schools reported
young carers' **classroom
engagement** had
improved.



63% reported
improvements
in young carers'
achievements.



83% of young carers
demonstrated
increased happiness.



The Impact of YCiS Award

94% had a
better understanding
of the **support** required
for young carers.



“The Young Carers in Schools Programme has enabled us to ensure that the right support is in place for Young Carers. We are now more aware and more able to address their needs.”

Head teacher

"It is hard for YC to admit that they're struggling when they come back to school."

"... hidden YCs who are not on anyone's radar, the (mental) illness could have been exasperated."

"Year 11's have confessed that they feel robbed from everything including exams, proms, transition to college ... They are a very fragile group of people."

"Some don't want their child to be identified as a Young Carer."

Schools' Young Carer Lead Lockdown Experience

"We have spoken to the parents, the feedback is not necessarily the same as what the child would say if we could speak to them on their own."

"Managing the young people's emotions, it's 90% of the conversations we have, and it is hard to read body signals when it's over the phone"

"Some (YC) said that their family are more reliant on them so much now. Struggling to catch up on school work and the isolation and stress of the situation."

"We are worried about the TC becoming school refusers."

Young carers say lockdown has
affected their mental health – Channel
4 News

Young Carers' experience of lockdown

- 67% of Young Carers are more worried about the future since coronavirus
- 66% of young carers are feeling more stressed
- 59% of young adult carers say their mental health is worse
- 52% of young adult carers feel overwhelmed by the pressures they are facing now

Carers Trust 2020

Response to Covid 19

Covid Recovery Kit

In collaboration with Carers Trust

Includes:

- Staff briefing PowerPoint presentation. Simple no nonsense 6 slides.
- Top tips 2-sided – great poster guide

<https://youngcarersinschools.com/covid-19/>

In addition: Sheffield Young Carers plus 11 other YC Services brought together a panel of young carers.

[Top Tips](#)

[Young Carers Identification Guide](#)

6 slide staff presentation

AND

2 page guide

CARERS TRUST & **The Children's Society** No child should feel alone

What additional pressures is Covid-19 putting on young carers?

- Increase in caring responsibilities
- Isolation from peers and coping mechanisms
- Little free time for schoolwork and respite
- Health challenges
- Difficulty accessing schoolwork
- Anxiety about the future

© Carers Trust youngcarersinschools.com

CARERS TRUST



Young Carers in School

Guidance for Schools Covid-19 Recovery

With the staff briefing, this document explores the challenges young carers are facing during the Covid-19 crisis and offers practical guidance for school staff on how to identify and support young carers 'Back to School'.

Who are young carers?

A 'young carer' is defined in section 96 of the Children and Families Act 2014 as: '... a person under 18 who provides or intends to provide care for another person ... This relates to care for any family member who is physically or mentally ill, frail elderly, disabled or misuses alcohol or substances.'

They are often hidden and are particularly vulnerable during the Covid-19 crisis. Many have experienced an increase in their caring responsibilities or are caring for the first time. There are likely to be young carers in your classes, as research shows that as many as one in five pupils in secondary schools are young carers¹.

Safeguarding and identifying young carers

Young carers are recognised as a vulnerable group in need of early help. However, they are often only identified after a crisis. Many do not know that they are young carers or may not identify with the label. Young carers are no more likely than their peers to encounter support services. They often remain unsupported, taking on inappropriate caring roles which adversely impact their educational attendance, attainment and wellbeing².

What you can do:

- Consider any assumptions that you may have about young carers and learn more about them.
- Identify a named lead staff member for young carers and communicate this to students.
- Use welfare calls as an opportunity to identify young carers. Some key questions to help identify them are included in the staff briefing.
- Work with other agencies to offer coordinated support for the whole family.
- Where appropriate, signpost to your local carer service or local authority.

Contact your nearest young carer support service

carers.org/help-and-info/carer-services-near-you
www.childrenssociety.org.uk/youngcarer/young-carers-services

Young carers' attendance

Young carers' attendance at school can be affected by their caring responsibilities with an average of 48 school days missed or cut short per year³. Young carers are telling us that, due to Coronavirus, many are not feeling confident to return to school. At home, young carers may not have access to technology, or are sharing laptops and tablets with siblings, so are unable to access online classes or complete their schoolwork.

Identifying and Supporting Young Carers in Education during the Covid-19 Crisis

Young carers are a particularly vulnerable group during lockdown and many of us are disadvantaged by home learning due to family illness/disability and additional pressures at home. Some young people may also become carers as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown, due to increases in ill health and substance misuse, and lack of access to services and support. Education staff can make a really big difference though. Here's some simple ways you can help!

Our Top Tips

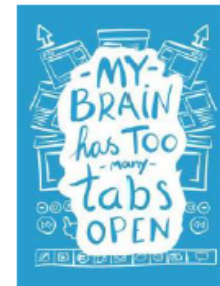
Top Tip 1 – Wellbeing

Caring is hard and can go really up and down, especially in lockdown! We need **someone to talk to regularly** who we can trust and who understands about our caring. Ask our tutor or another person we know **to call us each week** to see how we are coping, not just to talk to us about work.

And **please make appointments** to talk to us – don't just ring out of the blue. We need time to prepare and find a space that is private so we can really tell you how we are.

When you call, please **talk to us, not just our parents**. They might say everything is fine because they're worried what you'll think.

And having a **specific email address that students can contact** if they're struggling at this time could really help too!



Top Tip 2 – Home learning

Many of us don't have the equipment or internet access we need to study at home. We also don't have quiet space and our families are often too ill to help us with studying. It can be really hard to focus too, especially when we have siblings with special needs. **Check with us what support and equipment we need** to help us do our best at home and help us get it, especially if we have disabilities/learning needs and need specialist equipment to be able to learn.

Please turn over...

Young carers are children and young people who provide care for family members who have physical or mental illnesses, disabilities or substance misuse issues. 1 in 12 young people are young carers.

Thanks to all the young carers from these organisations who created these tips (June 2020)



Top Tip 3 – Workloads

The amount of work we're being sent can feel **overwhelming** but we feel embarrassed and worried to ask for help. And in lockdown, we have to prioritise our family's needs over school work. Please always **clearly tell us what work we HAVE to do** and when the deadlines are but also **offer understanding and extra help** if we're getting behind.

And if it isn't safe for us to go back when other students do, please give us extra help – **we shouldn't have to fall behind** because of our caring.

Recording online lessons would really help too so we can watch them at a different time if we have to leave our computers suddenly due to our caring.

And please **understand if we have to be quiet** during online classes – our family might be ill and asleep so we can't always talk loud.



Top Tip 4 – Returning to school/college

Some of us have found balancing caring and learning easier at home, and for others, our families have become more reliant on us over lockdown. Many of our families are high risk too, so we're worried about going back to school/college. We need **lots of information and notice** to help us and our families prepare and feel safe about going back.

Even if you don't know stuff yet, please tell us you don't know... waiting with no information makes us and our families even more anxious!

It would help us to have **photos/videos** of what ALL rooms and areas will look like so we can prepare. We also might need help to get new **uniform** if we've outgrown ours and to know there will be **flexibility** once we go back (a safe space to go if we feel overwhelmed, phased returns or reduced timetables, and flexibility if our families are ill could all really help). We'd also like **PPE** if this is available to help keep us and our families safe.

Top Tip 5 - Transition

If we are moving up to your school, college or university this September, **get in touch** with us to let us know if/when we will be starting and **what support will be on offer for carers** when we get there (pastoral, financial etc).

Virtual tours or meetings with staff could help us feel more at ease too.

Top Tip 6 -Transport

Many of us have family members at high risk from Covid19 so feel anxious about travelling on public transport to school/college.

Find out if you can offer any **other transport options** to get us there more safely.

Top Tip 7- Hidden and New Young Carers

Lots of young carers aren't known to their schools or colleges. Send out **monthly wellbeing surveys** or use other ways to **contact all students and families** acknowledging the impact of lockdown and asking if anyone at home is struggling with mental or physical ill-health, disability or drugs/alcohol. This could make people feel less alone and help them know that support is available. Again, having a **specific email address that students can contact** if they're caring and struggling could really help too!





Things to remember though!

- If there is an information session or assembly, make sure there's a follow up as some young carers won't identify themselves in large groups.
- It might be harder for young people to speak openly over the phone or for you to pick up on their feelings if you aren't seeing them face-to-face.
- If you do add questions to forms, ask these regularly so it's not just a one-off tick box exercise. And make sure there is some follow up – if people let you know they're a young carer on a form, they need to be acknowledged and offered support.

How to use this tool – IMPORTANT!

- We recommend these questions are asked by **someone who the young person knows and feels comfortable with**
- This is **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 skills, experiences and knowledge of the young people in your school/college
- Think about the **right time and place** to have this conversation so people aren't rushed and feel safe and comfortable to talk
- It's also important to be aware that lots of people might **feel worried** about being open about what is happening in their family or that social care might get involved. Explain this is a **confidential conversation** and you will only share what you talk about if you're worried anyone is at risk of harm or to try and get extra help for them and their family.

Signs someone might have caring responsibilities:

- Regular lateness
- Low attendance
- Not completing homework
- Tiredness
- Low attention span
- Lack motivation
- Low mood/mental ill-health
- Anxious
- Parent/guardian 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.

Young Carer Identification Questions

The questions in **blue** are for you to use/adapt in your conversations using your skills, experiences and knowledge of the young person.

The text in **black** below each question is to help you understand more about young carers, not to be read out to them.

A list of just the questions can also be found on P.6 for you to type or write on.

1. I wanted to have a quick chat to ask how you are. I've noticed you've *[see signs listed above etc]*. I just wanted to check if you're OK or if there's anything we can do

Explain again that this is a confidential conversation and you will only share what you talk about if you're worried anyone is at risk of harm or to try and get extra help for them and their family.

2. Sometimes when things are happening at home it can affect how we 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 disabilities, or because of drugs or alcohol?

If the answer is YES – this person could be a young carer or young adult carer. Continue with the rest of the questions

3. 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]*? *[If yes]* What kind of things do you do?

This might be practical things like cooking or cleaning, looking after siblings, self-care, providing emotional support, managing finances, personal care (washing/toileting etc), giving medicines, or providing emergency help or first aid.

4. Is there anyone else at home who helps out? Or anyone who doesn't live at home who helps with looking after your family?

Explore this with them. If this young person is the sole carer, or is taking on a lot of caring, they might be very isolated, struggle with their emotions, or need help or support. They might get some support already from services or family/friends who live nearby though, so it's important to ask what they think and feel they need, perhaps offering or referring for a Young Carers Assessment if they want this *[look for information online about Young Carers Assessments in your area]*.

5. 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?

- They might worry they might fall, not take medication, not eat, harm themselves, drink too much alcohol, take drugs, not care for their siblings properly etc.
- This could make the young person anxious, stressed and/or unable to concentrate at school/college.
- It might also mean they are really tired, can't pay attention, are always be checking their phone, or aren't able to meet deadlines with homework.

6. How does this make you feel?

- Allow time for this question – it might take young people time to open up and understand how they feel if they've not talked about this before. They might also get upset so make sure they don't have to go straight back to lessons if that happens.
- You could use feelings cards, picture cards, ask people to draw or use other interactive activities to help them understand and share their feelings. Adapt these activities to the age and interests of the young person you're talking to.
- They might not realise that they are a young carer or think what they do is 'normal' and that everyone does it. They might also have been caring a really long time and so feel indifferent to it as it's how life has always been.
- They might feel worried that talking about this might get them or their family in trouble.
- They may feel they have no choice but to care and that nothing can help.
- Sometimes young carers can feel very alone - that feel no-one asks how they are or how they feel about caring. The focus is on the person they care for.
- Sometimes people feel very positive about their caring and feel they can manage it really well. But sometimes caring can make people feel lonely, left out, misunderstood or not listened to.
- It is important to recognise and celebrate what an amazing thing young people are doing as carers. If they don't mention any, you might want to ask them if there are any positive feelings, things they're good at as a carer or things they're proud of about what they do. Celebrate the positives with them as well as letting them know they can get support for the things that are hard.



7. 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?

Caring responsibilities can mean young people can't always get time for themselves to attend after-school activities, go out with friends, have friends over or have a hobby, leading to isolation and stress.

8. Does caring have any effects on your own health? [physical and/or emotional]

- Caring can sometimes cause health problems like back strain, headaches, difficulty sleeping, eating disorders, self-harming, depression, anxiety, and panic attacks
- The 2017 GP Patient Survey found that 39% of young adult carers reported experience of anxiety or depression compared with 28% of young people without a caring responsibility
- If they say yes, think about advising them to see their GP or offer emotional well-being support when talking through Q10 below.

9. How are things going at school/college? How does caring affect school/college for you?

- For some young carers, school/college is a break from home and they do really well (although stressful periods like transitions, exams or things getting worse at home can affect this)
- For others though, school/college can be hard. They might not be able to attend all the time or be late because of their caring. Some find it hard to concentrate, they might not be able to complete homework on time, or they may get upset/angry which can get them into trouble
- Education can suffer and, on average, young carers GCSE grades are 9 grades lower than non-carers. Support, understanding and flexibility at school/college can make all the difference though.

10. Do you have anyone you already talk to about your caring? You're not alone and there is support out there if you want any [more] support.

- **In school / college we can offer young carers**
Tell them about all types of support available – e.g. someone to talk to, flexibility about homework, not asking questions when you're late, a weekly group for young carers, funding to help you get a break or manage with essentials etc
- **Would any of this be helpful for you? Agree a support plan with the young person**
- **Is there anyone you'd like me to talk to who you've already spoken to about this?**
- **There is also support outside school/college from...**
Talk through local support agencies and what they offer e.g. your local young carers organisation or city council support.
- **Would you like any more information about this? If yes, signpost or make referrals if they want this**

Remember this might have been a hard conversation. Ask them if they need anything now and let them know what will happen next. And remember to check how they are again soon – they might feel worried about what they have shared with you afterwards.



Indicators:

- Late or missing days or weeks off school for no reason, or struggling to complete homework
- Often tired, anxious or withdrawn
- Having problems socially, and may get on better with adults displaying mature behaviour
- 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

continued

Indicators (continued)

- Having difficulty in joining in extra-curricular activities or hobbies
- Isolated because of their family situation or because they lack social skills with their peers (and yet they are confident with adults)
- 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 physical neglect or poor diet
- Child in Need, Child Protection plan, or CLA, where parental ill health or addition issues are involved

See Hear Respond

Children and young people will get help in one or more of four ways:

- an online hub of support and information
- Online counselling and therapy
- Face-to-face support for those most affected and at risk
- Helping children and young people reintegrate back into school

Currently offering mental health and well-being sessions and reintegration into education support. To enquire about sessions please email

Michelle.Gregory@childrenssociety.org.uk

Further information:

<https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/youngcarer/home>

<https://youngcarersinschools.com/covid-19/>

Email:

YCiS@childrenssociety.org.uk

Rebecca.Rolfe@childrenssociety.org.uk

Michelle.Gregory@childrenssociety.org.uk

SHR referrals:

Refer any child you are worried about, and who is not already supported by a statutory agency. You can call **0800 157 7015** to make a referral from 9am to 9pm Monday to Friday, and 10am – 6pm at weekends, or go to barnardos.org.uk/see-hear-respond to use our secure referral form.