

young carers

A 'young carer' is someone **aged 18 or under** whose life is affected by looking after someone with a long-term illness or disability. The person being cared for could be a parent, a brother or sister, another family member or a friend, and will not necessarily live in the same house as the young carer.

The young carer may help with **personal care** – such as washing, dressing and feeding; **medical care** – giving someone medicine or injections; **emotional support** – providing a shoulder to cry on; or **domestic responsibilities** – for example cleaning, shopping, budgeting and cooking.

Caring can be a positive experience for a young carer. It may make a family particularly close, strong and loving. Caring for someone may enhance a young person's self confidence, give them a feeling of worth, and equip them with practical and **life skills**.

However, there can also be negative effects. Young carers are usually concerned about those they are caring for and what might happen to them. They sometimes hide their caring roles because they are worried they may become isolated from their peers, that the person they care for may be moved to residential care, or that they themselves may be taken into care, although this is usually an **unnecessary worry**.

This factsheet looks at young carers' needs and how they can be met, and includes information about sources of practical, financial and emotional support.



Young carers' needs

Young carers may experience mental ill health or physical ill health and a range of emotional and social problems, such as:

- Difficulties at school, with attendance, completing homework and in getting qualifications
- Lack of time for play, sport or leisure activities
- Tiredness, stress, irritability, depression, frequent bouts of illness and poor concentration
- Conflict between the needs of the person they care for and their own needs, leading to feelings of guilt and resentment
- Feeling there is nobody there for them, that professionals do not listen to them and are working only with the adult
- Lack of recognition or respect for their contribution
- Feeling they are different from other young people and unable to be part of a group
- Feeling no one else understands their experience
- Having a 'parenting' role for a sibling and other responsibilities not usual for their age, for example young carers from minority ethnic groups may be expected to take responsibility for interpreting, regardless of whether they understand the issue
- Combining 'over maturity' and immaturity
- Problems moving into adulthood, especially with finding work, their own home and relationships.

Young carers therefore need understanding, recognition, practical and emotional support and information. Individual needs will differ, but include:

- Someone to talk to, who will listen and try and understand their feelings
- Acknowledgement of their role
- Information about specific illnesses and disabilities
- Opportunities to have a social life and develop friendships outside the caring role
- Practical assistance
- Financial information and advice
- Information about services available from statutory authorities and voluntary organisations
- Someone to help when dealing with professionals
- Someone to interpret for the cared-for person
- A break from caring
- Contact with other young people in a similar situation.



Support from professionals

The needs of the whole family should be taken into account by both the statutory and voluntary sectors.

Individual young carers' needs should be provided in a holistic way, with liaison between education, health and social services professionals, and young carers should not be expected to carry inappropriate levels of caring responsibility.

There are also legal obligations. In particular, under the Children Act 1989 and the Carers Act 1995 young carers can receive support from local and health authorities. **Young carers should be aware of their legal rights and feel safe to ask questions and request help whenever they need it.**

The **Department for Education and Skills** has responsibility for policy development of young carers, including promoting awareness of young carers' needs. For details see www.dfes.gov.uk/exclusions/related_policies/young_carers.cfm

TEACHERS

In May 2006 all Brent schools were issued with the document *Guidance to Support Young Carers in Brent Schools*.

School staff can be one of the prime sources of support for young carers and should be aware of the signs of caring. Young carers should feel comfortable about asking for support from a range of school staff, including their form teacher, pastoral care teacher, school nurse and education welfare officer. Schools can help by:

- Designating a staff member for young carers and making this person known to other staff within the school, parents and pupils
- Offering young carers the use of a private telephone or allowing them to use their mobile phone at break and lunch times so they can check on the person for whom they care

- Making young carers feel comfortable talking to staff about their personal situation if they want to
- Being flexible about homework, course work and time keeping if a young carer is experiencing a crisis at home
- Providing a quiet place to do homework during the day
- Helping young carers catch up on missed work
- Challenging bullying or isolation of young carers
- Supporting parents with mobility problems or other needs when visiting the school.

School staff who do not currently have access to the guidance document may contact Julie Cahill on 020 8937 3363 or Julie-cahill@brent.gov.uk.

CONNEXIONS

Connexions is the government's support service for young people aged 13 to 19. The service aims to provide integrated advice, guidance and access to personal development opportunities for this group and to help them make a smooth transition to adulthood and working life.

Any young person is entitled to a **personal advisor**, who can give information, advice and practical help on anything affecting someone's school, college, work, personal or family life. For details see www.connexions-londonwest.com or contact **Brent Connexions Centre** (020 8438 1650, brentcc@prospects.co.uk)

The website **Connexions Direct** (www.connexions-direct.com) offers access to information and advice on a wide range of topics. It is also possible to speak to an advisor by telephone (080 800 13 2 19) or text message (07766 4 13 2 19) or through e-mail or webchat, via the website. Advisors are available 8am-2am, seven days a week.

HEALTH SERVICE STAFF

GPs and other primary care staff are likely to be in regular contact with the person receiving care, and can provide valuable, sensitive support to young carers and their families.

Young carers should feel confident in asking questions and know they are not wasting professionals' time in so doing. In particular they should:

- Receive clear, child-friendly information on the relevant medical condition or illness
- Be kept informed about the cared-for person's progress
- Have their physical and mental health checked regularly
- Know what to do in an emergency.

The whole family should be offered advice and support.

No young person should be expected to interpret or translate for a family member – a professional interpreter service should be used.

SOCIAL WORKERS

Social services must ensure that both young carers and their families are aware of their rights to assessments.

Under the Children Act 1989 young carers have a right to receive support and help from social services.

Social workers should:

- Recognise and acknowledge young carers
- Respond to young carers' individual needs
- Help and advise them on a range of personal and practical problems and help the young carer and family obtain the services they need
- Inform them of their right to ask for a carer's assessment.

Under the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 a young carer aged 16 or over has the right to ask social services for a **carer's assessment**, even if the person cared for has refused an assessment. Under the Children Act, social services must consider the welfare of the young carer as well as the person they care for.

Further information about the assessment process is given in the factsheet *Social services*.

If a young carer does not ask for an assessment social services should still consider whether there is a need to help the young person, either by providing community care services for the cared-for person, or through services to promote the young person's welfare.

Organisations for young people

Brent Youth Service (020 8937 3680) **manages youth centres and youth projects all over the borough; there are many others owned and run by voluntary organisations, providing a range of activities and support for young people.**

Brent Centre for Young People (020 7328 0918, clinicaladmin@brentcentre.org.uk, www.brentcentre.org.uk) offers a range of services for young people aged 14 to 21. Areas covered include consultation and therapy, drugs and alcohol, education and sexual health.

Libraries have details of other local voluntary organisations for young people.

Brent Young Carers Project

This project, run by Brent Carers Centre, works specifically with young carers. The workers can help young carers in the following ways.

- Being someone to talk to who will listen and try to understand their feelings.
- Supporting them and the person they care for and working with the whole family.
- Providing information about specific illnesses and disabilities that they can understand.
- Producing a quarterly newsletter, which young carers help to write.
- Giving them the opportunity to take part in a wide range of leisure and recreational activities.
- Organising regular meetings to find out young carers' views on the services they and their families receive.
- Enabling them to meet other young people in the same situation, who understand how they feel, but also want some fun.

For further information telephone 020 8795 6249.

Money matters

Looking after the family's finances is a particularly heavy responsibility for young people, and if at all possible is one that should be taken off their hands.

If this cannot be avoided it is essential to ensure the young carer is aware of what benefits and other financial assistance they and their family may be entitled to, where they can go for support and advice and what to do if the family has financial problems or goes into debt. Further information about specific benefits and other financial support is given in the factsheet *Money matters*.

Councils have the power to make **direct payments** to 16 and 17 year old carers to meet their assessed needs. For further information contact Brent Young Carers Project (020 8795 6249).

BENEFITS

Young carers and the person they care for may be entitled to a number of social security benefits.

Child benefit

Child benefit should be paid for people bringing up someone who is:

- under 16
- 16 years old (benefit is paid until 31 August following their 16th birthday)
- aged 16, 17 or 18, in full-time education, or participating in a programme of 'approved training'.
- aged 16 or 17 and registered for with Connexions or the Careers Service for work, further education or training
- aged 19 and in full-time education or approved training that started before their 19th birthday.

If the young carer is still studying, the Child Benefit Office should be made aware of this.

For further information contact the **Child Benefit Office** (0845 302 1444, textphone 0845 302 1474, www.hmrc.gov.uk/childbenefit). It is possible to make claims online.

Carers under 16

Young people aged under 16 are not entitled to claim any social security benefits themselves. For details of benefits available to the person being cared for see the factsheet *Money matters*.

If the cared-for person is on Income Support, the young carer is entitled to free school meals and may be able to get help with the cost of school uniforms. The school office should be able to give further information.

Carers aged 16 or 17 who have left school

Most 16 and 17 year olds are not entitled to claim benefits but young carers may be able to get a reduced amount of **Jobseeker's Allowance** under the hardship provision. For further information contact the local Jobcentre (see the factsheet *Useful contacts*).

A young carer who spends at least 35 hours a week caring for someone who receives benefits may be able to claim **Carer's Allowance**. For further information contact the CA Unit (01253 856 123, textphone 01772 899 489), or claim online at www.direct.gov.uk/carers.

Carers aged 18 who have left school

Young carers aged 18 can claim the same benefits as any other adult. Carers who are not eligible for Carer's Allowance may be able to receive Income Support. Alternatively they may be able to claim Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), but this involves being available for work and it is difficult for someone with caring responsibilities to satisfy the JSA rules. It is essential to get expert advice on this. For further information telephone the **Benefits Enquiry Line** (0800 88 22 00).

Sources of further information and support

Careline (0845 1228 622, www.careline.org) provides confidential telephone counselling for children and young people. Available Monday-Friday 10am-1pm and 7pm-10pm.

Carers UK (020 7490 8818) offers help to all carers, and operates the **CarersLine** (0808 808 7777: 10am-noon and 2pm-4pm, Wednesday and Thursday).

The **Child Bereavement Trust** (0845 357 1000, www.childbereavement.org.uk) can provide support for a child who has experienced the death of a mother, father, brother or sister.

Childline (0800 1111, www.childline.org.uk) is a free 24-hour national telephone helpline that offers confidential counselling to any child or young person with any problem.

The **Children's Legal Centre** (*Young people's free phone number: 0800 783 2187, Child Law Advice Line: 0845 120 2948, clc@essex.ac.uk, www.childrenslegalcentre.com) provides legal advice on law and policy affecting children and young people.*

Cruse Bereavement Care's young person's helpline (0808 808 1677, info@rd4u.org.uk) provides counselling, support, information and advice.

The **National Youth Advocacy Service** (0800 616101: 8am-8pm Monday-Friday, help@nyas.net, www.nyas.net) may be able to help a young carer who has a specific problem, for example accessing a particular service, or getting information about benefits.

The **Princess Royal Trust for Carers** young carers' site (www.youngcarers.net) includes sections for young carers, parents of young carers, and professionals, and has a chat room and bulletin boards.

RD4U (www.rd4u.org.uk), part of Cruse Bereavement Care's youth involvement project, is a website designed for young people by young people. It includes information and advice about coping with bereavement, a message board and an email link to trained volunteers.

The Samaritans provide 24-hour telephone counselling on 08457 90 90 90 (local call rate) every day of the year. It is also possible to email jo@samaritans.org. For details of how to obtain an anonymous email address see www.samaritans.org.uk. **Brent Samaritans** (020 8961 6181) also offers face to face counselling; telephone to make an appointment.

Sibs (01535 645453, info@sibs.org.uk, www.sibs.org.uk) provides support and information for brothers and sisters of people with special needs.

The website **Young Carers** (www.youngcarer.com) is run by the Children's Society for young carers, their families and supporters. It includes a news section on events and developments and links to other useful sites, including the Young Carers Initiative (see below).

The **Young Carers Initiative** (01962 711511, mf@childrensociety.org.uk), run by the Children's Society, works to create a national focus for people who work to support young carers and their families.

Young Carers UK! – a video documentary made by young carers – covers what a young carer is, what they do, how they get on at school, make and keep friends, what support they get, what would help them and what young carers projects do. Also available as an MP3 audio version. Details from www.bubblycrew.org.uk/ycuk.html or 020 8563 8014.

Remember that other factsheets in this pack may also include information useful to you



The Princess Royal Trust **Brent Carers Centre**
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