



IHPE Position Statement: Young Carers and Young Adult Carers (UK focus)

KEY INFORMATION

Definition

A young carer is someone under the age of 18 who looks after a relative with an illness, mental health condition, disability, or a drug or alcohol problem. Young carers take on caring responsibilities not just occasionally but as part of their everyday lives, often over a long period of time. Young adult carers are those aged from 18-25.

What they do

The nature of the relative's caring needs will make a difference to what a young carer does and the roles they take on may be different for each person. There may be practical and/or emotional caring roles.

Key statistics

- There are around 1,000,000 young carers aged 17 or under in the UK and an additional 600,000 young adult carers aged 18-25.
- The economic value to the UK of unpaid carers aged over 18, as calculated for 2021-22, was £184 billion a year.
- Around two pupils in every classroom provide high or very high levels of care.
- 50,000 young carers are reported to be spending as many as 50 hours a week on their caring role.
- 25% of young carers report self-harm compared to 17% of non-carers, and with an increased risk of suicide.
- A 2023 census found that 32.9% of young people with caring responsibilities were not in education, employment, or training (NEET) compared to 5.3% who were not carers.
- Young carers are 1.5 times more likely than their peers to have a special educational need or disability.

Inequalities

Young carers are more likely to live in financially disadvantaged families. The rate of poverty among unpaid carers is 50% higher compared to non-carers, with 1 in 10 living in deep poverty.

An NHS approach, Core20PLUS5, aims to support the reduction of health inequalities for children and young people, with young carers a target group, focussing on '5'

clinical areas, including mental health. This builds on Core20PLUS5, with specific target areas for adults.

Isolation

Many children and young people are left to cope alone, often with little or no support. They may feel isolated and are at risk of falling behind their peers without caring responsibilities.

Providing dedicated spaces and activities for young carers is crucial to reducing isolation and ensuring they have opportunities to experience childhood, free from their caregiving roles.

Impacts on the young carer

Being a young carer can significantly impact a young person's education, employment, health and wellbeing, and can also greatly affect their future life chances compared to their peers.

Poor health is integrally linked to capacity to learn and function, and reduced opportunities to learn also adversely impact health.

Mental Health

There is considerable evidence that young carers and young adult carers are at increased risk of mental ill health compared to their non-caring peers. For example, young carers who self-harm are more than twice as likely to do so as a suicide attempt compared to non-carers (17% vs. 7%).

However, targeted interventions such as early identification, school and mental health support and respite services can mitigate these risks.

Musculoskeletal (MSK) risk

Young carers are at increased risk of MSK conditions due to performing high-risk tasks such as patient transfers, repositioning, and lifting, for which healthcare professionals typically receive training and ergonomic support.

MSK disorders are a leading cause of global disability.

Policy Context

The Children and Families Act (2014) and Care Act (2014) introduced new responsibilities for local government and requiring a 'whole-family', needs-based approach, that must include the 'wishes' of young carers.

As defined by this legislation, local authorities have clear statutory responsibilities to identify, assess, and support young carers, including their transition to adulthood, and in a timely manner.

Lack of identification and support

Many young carers are not being identified and, consequently, not being offered the support they need. The urgency of this issue has again been highlighted, following concern that 69% of schools still recorded zero young carers on their school census return in 2025.

Those from minority ethnic communities, younger young carers, and those caring for people because of mental illness or addiction are less likely to be identified and supported as carers.

Young Carers' Covenant

The Covenant was drawn up by young carers, supported by the national charity, Carers' Trust, with 10 outcomes identified to ensure:

'a fair future for all young carers and young adult carers.'

National governments, local authorities, schools, hospitals, businesses, charities and individuals are invited to sign up to show their commitment to acting on the recommendations.

STATEMENT

1. Every young carer deserves to be recognised, valued, and supported, to have good health and wellbeing, and achieve their full potential.
2. Voices of young carers and their families need to be central to national and local needs assessment. Experiences of services and recommendations for improvements need to be investigated.
3. A National Carers' Strategy is needed to ensure implementation of evidence-based interventions in line with existing legal frameworks and with accountability. The emphasis should be a needs-based, cross-sector, health-promoting approach to individualised care within a whole-family and wider community setting.
4. There needs to be early identification of young carers across education, health and social care and including those from under-represented backgrounds. There are vital roles for health visitors and school nurses. Additional needs due to neurodivergence should also be recognised and addressed.
5. Settings such as schools, medical centres, pharmacies, voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSE), are ideally positioned to identify carers and signpost to support. This may include supporting substance use and housing needs.
6. Public health and social care pathways should ensure seamless transition of young adult carers to ongoing support as they leave school, and with continuation when leaving paediatric services at 18.
7. Carers require a holistic approach to support their health and wellbeing, including protecting their musculoskeletal health. Training and advice should be provided on safe patient handling, with the provision of ergonomic aids and physiotherapy as appropriate. Access to the arts and the promotion of physical activity should form part of positive health interventions offered.
8. Statutory Young Carers' Needs Assessments, identifying levels of care deemed appropriate or excessive, should also consider the health needs of young carers, protecting wellbeing to enable access to education and learning, and for young

adult carers, higher education and employment. Financial support should be provided, including for young adult carers in full time education.

9. Accurate data for planning and support should incorporate a positive, preventive approach within public health.
10. Supportive environments, including crisis support, with opportunities to connect with other young carers and mentors should be resourced and respite options, such as residential opportunities, offered as appropriate.
11. Awareness raising campaigns are needed to help identify young carers and enable them to access support. These should be aimed at primary care, education, pharmacies, hospitals, and other community settings, and co-ordinated with national initiatives such as Young Carers' Action Days and the Young Carers in Schools award led by the Carers' Trust and Children's Society.
12. There should be further dissemination and implementation of the 10 outcomes listed in The Young Carers' Covenant.

Resources

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Young Carers and Young Adult Carers (2024). Children and Families Act and Care Act 2014– 10 years on for young carers and young adult carers.

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Carers UK and Centre for Care (2024). Valuing Carers 2021/22: the value of unpaid care in the UK.

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Public Health England (2021). Caring as a Social Determinant of Health Findings from a Rapid Review of Reviews and Analysis of the GP Patient Survey Report and Key Findings.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60547266d3bf7f2f14694965/Carin_g_as_a_social_determinant_report.pdf.

Public Health England (2022). Musculoskeletal Health: Applying All Our Health. GOV.UK.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/musculoskeletal-health-applying-all-our-health/musculoskeletal-health-applying-all-our-health>.

The Children’s Society (2025). Young Carers in Schools award.

<https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/information/professionals/young-carers/schools-award>.

Watson M C, Neil K E and Tilford S (2024). IHPE Position Statement: School Nursing. Altrincham: Institute of Health Promotion and Education.

<https://ihpe.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/IHPE-Position-Statement-School-Nursing-2024.pdf>.

Wong S (2017). Young carers in the NHS. British Journal of General Practice;67(664):527-528. DOI: 10.3399/bjgp17X693425.

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