

Introduction

Defining and identifying young carers is essential for providing the appropriate support and safeguarding needed to ensure their wellbeing. However, there is often a lack of clarity and guidance on how to identify a young carer and what constitutes inappropriate or excessive care. This can hinder young carers and their families from receiving the necessary support. This practice guidance is for professionals working with children and their families across South Gloucestershire, including education workers, health workers and children's services workers, to help them in identifying and supporting young carers appropriately.

Importance of Supporting Young Carers

Children who care for family members need support both as children and as carers. Young carers should have access to a comprehensive range of health, social care, and educational support services. Many young carers do not acknowledge or disclose their caregiving responsibilities, and families may not identify their children as carers due to fear, shame, stigma or because caregiving has become a normative part of family life. There are quotes from young carers included throughout this practice guidance which highlight their lived experiences and the importance of supporting them effectively.

"Caring should be a choice not a given."

"It is hard for people to tell if you're a young carer; you might look at someone and not know it."

Defining Inappropriate (Not Right) and Excessive (Too Much) Care

Young carers often undertake a variety of tasks and responsibilities, sometimes from a very young age. Many have normalised these tasks and may not recognise themselves as young carers unless someone explicitly points it out.

"Caring is ok but should not affect your health and wellbeing."

"When someone's got used to it for so long, you don't really realise that you're a young carer, unless someone says, 'you're a young carer'."

To date, legislation has failed to adequately define what constitutes 'excessive' and 'inappropriate' caring by children. This guidance aims to provide ethical boundaries and provisional indicators to identify these forms of care.

Indicators of Inappropriate Caring Responsibilities

- **Acting Like a Parent** – A child acting in a parenting role towards the cared-for person, siblings, or other family members.

"I check in on my mum every night, I'll go into her room and be like 'I'll come and check on you in a bit, but do you need anything for now?'"

"Having a sibling to get up and being responsible to take them to school does not feel right; we should not be relied on to do this all the time."

"My mum sometimes feels scared or down about what my sister's doing; she normally asks me to stay in her bed with her for a night, so I do that sometimes."

"Being responsible, with no choice, to do the shopping and cooking is not right. If we did not do it then it would not get done. We should be given the choice."

- **Keeping Your Own Emotions in Check** – A child keeping their own emotions in check, tolerating parental anger, violence, or excessive mental stress.

"It may be easier to talk to others that know what we are going through; so easier to talk to other young carers than speak to someone at school."

"I find it hard to show emotion to my parent as I'm worried about the impact this may have on them."

"I try to keep my emotions in but sometimes my emotions come out in other places or situations."

- **Personal Care** – Tasks such as bathing and handling.

"I help with bathing and it's really not ok."

"It is not right that I should be responsible for the personal care of my brother all of the time."

- **Heavy Physical Tasks** – Tasks involving lifting, shopping (heavy bags), and assisting the cared-for person.

"I help with shopping because they don't leave the house, but it is heavy to carry."

"This depends on your age and physical ability. I would say this is ok for someone who is 10 and over if physically fit and is not detrimental to your health."

- **Managing Medication** – Collecting and administering medication, including giving medication when the cared-for person does not want to take it.

"It is ok to collect from the chemist if you're old enough although sometimes there are issues because of my age."

"I give medication to the person I care for but if they don't want it, I don't like forcing them."

"I should not be expected to administer drugs via an injection; I'm not a nurse."

- **Handling Money** – Managing family budget, paying bills, and worrying about finances.

"It doesn't feel right to have to deal with budgets and bills."

"Having to complete forms such as housing benefits, PIP or applying for grants is hard as I don't know what to say."

- **Managing Other People's Emotions** – Providing emotional support such as cheering them up, checking on them at night and lifting their mood.

"This is hard because this is what we do all the time. It comes back to being the only one who can provide this but it can impact on your own mental health and wellbeing."

Indicators of Excessive Caring Responsibilities

Young carers often provide care beyond what is reasonable for their age and capacity. National research indicates that 1 in 12 young carers provide care for more than 15 hours a week. The following quotes by young carers are indicators of excessive caring responsibilities:

- **Being the Only Carer**

"You want to do so many things to help but you only have two hands."

"I have no time to socialise or do my assignments."

- **Caring for a Long Time**

"Me and my sister have a disability, and we are both carers; I worry how my younger sister would cope if I was not there to help."

"I don't know if this is bad, but sometimes I think about having my own house and living by myself and being able to do stuff that I can't do at mum and dad's. I don't know if it's spiteful, ungrateful or anything."

"I feel I can't plan for my future as I don't have a choice."

- **Caring All the Time**

"I don't sleep a lot but I still keep moving."

"I don't have time to rest when I go to bed, I am unable to switch off and when I wake up, I am caring again."

- **Caring at Night/ Sleep Deprivation**

"I randomly wake up and panic if I hear someone snoring, thinking my sister is having a seizure and needs to go to hospital. I don't like this, it is hard."

"My younger brother who has autism wakes me up in the middle of the night and I don't sleep."

- **Physical and Emotional Responsibility**

"Yeah I think doing practical things, like cleaning or cooking, it's not a big deal, well for me it's not, but then having to worry all the time, that just gets on your nerves to be fair."

"I do all the housework, I don't like to do it, but it stops her from hurting herself."

"When I'm not with them, I worry."

- **Feeling Responsible All the Time**

"Caring through the night is particularly challenging, as it involves constant worry about the safety and wellbeing of my mum."

"The disturbed nights and lack of sleep impacts my health and wellbeing, and my capacity to manage school, college, work and daytime caring responsibilities."

South Gloucestershire's Young Carers Pathway

Identifying young carers and understanding the scope of their responsibilities is crucial for providing the support they need. Education, health, and social care/ children's services workers (plus other professionals across South Gloucestershire who come into contact with children in their roles) should be vigilant in recognising the signs of both inappropriate and excessive caring responsibilities. By doing so, it is possible to ensure that young carers receive the support necessary to thrive both as children and as carers.

Supporting young carers involves a multi-tiered approach to ensure they receive the right level of assistance at the right time.

- **Universal** pathways offer general services such as education and health care, accessible to all young carers.
- **Universal plus** pathways build on this by providing additional support, such as school-based counselling and peer support groups.
- **Targeted** pathways are designed for those needing more focused interventions, such as respite care and tailored educational support.
- **Specialist** pathways cater to the most complex cases, involving intensive therapeutic services and specialised health/ social care.

Adopting a "no wrong door" policy ensures that young carers are directed to the appropriate support regardless of their initial point of contact with services. This means that any professional they encounter will help navigate them through the system, ensuring they receive the necessary care and assistance without being turned away or redirected.

The key points for professionals to remember, to ensure that young carers are identified and offered assessment/ support are:

- Any professional who comes into contact with a child who resides in South Gloucestershire, who they suspect may be a young carer should use the multi-agency [Young Carers Assessment Tool](#) to explore the extent of the caring responsibilities. The completed tool should accompany any referral to Access and Response Team (ART) for a child where the worries relate to them being a young carer. The tool can be revisited/ reviewed at different points as part of ongoing interventions as this will help to ensure that any input is supporting the young carer and where relevant, decreasing their caring responsibilities.
- If Adult Social Care are known to be involved for instance, they are undertaking a Care Act assessment and there are children in the home, any caring responsibilities should be assessed using the Young Carers Assessment Tool (as linked above) to explore how any needs linked to these caring responsibilities can be met effectively. To this end, a conversation with Access and Response Team (ART) should take place to help determine whether a S17 assessment is required.
- If Children's Services are undertaking an assessment or a child is already known to Children's Services, where caring responsibilities are suspected or identified, the Young Carers Assessment Tool (as linked above) should be used to help better understand the level of care being provided. Where it is the case that caring responsibilities are deemed to be 'excessive' or 'inappropriate, a referral should be made to Adult Social Care to request a Care Act assessment if the person who the child has caring responsibilities for is an adult. This should be completed alongside any other input required to meet the child's needs.

Please note: for full indicators of Early Help, Child in Need and Child Protection please refer to the ["Right Help, Right Time, Right Place"](#) document.

Young Carers Entitlement to a Transition Assessment

As a young carer approaches turning 18, their life may be starting to look very different. They may be thinking about their future and their needs will be changing.

There is an information leaflet which can be shared with young carers from Year 9 and above, to help them to understand their entitlement to a transition assessment and to make an informed decision about whether they would like to receive one in order to evaluate their needs as they approach adulthood.

Resources for Professionals

Title/ Link	Description
Leaflet – Could You Be a Young Carer?	Leaflet provided by South Gloucestershire Council and the Children’s Partnership to help professionals talk to children about what it means to be a young carer.
Leaflet – Young Carers Entitlement to a Transition Assessment	Leaflet provided by South Gloucestershire Council and the Children’s Partnership to help make young carers aware of their right to a transition assessment from Year 9 onwards.
Young Carers Charter	Bristol and South Gloucestershire’s Young Carers Charter designed by the local Young Carers Support and setting out how young carers should be treated.
Young Carers Assessment Tool	Developed by Young Carers Support together with young carers. For use by professionals with children and their families, to help identify to what extent a child may be a young carer. For an editable version of the Young Carers Assessment Tool click here .
Young Carers Blog: How to identify a young carer	Various useful resources by Carers First.
Resources for professionals working with young carers	These resources by The Children’s Society offer guidance and support to professionals working with young carers and their families.
Young Carers in Schools (YCiS) Programme	A program by Carers Trust and The Children’s Society that helps schools support young carers effectively through tailored policies and resources.
Young Carers Support	Young Carers Support provides help and support to children aged 8-18 in South Gloucestershire, their families and professionals.
South Glos LIFE	Information, guidance and services relevant for young carers provided on the South Glos LIFE website.