



We provide fun, challenge and adventure to over 400,000 girls and boys across the UK

Young carers

“I didn’t want my childhood to change because of my caring role.”

Who is a young carer?

Young carers are young people who often take on practical and/or emotional caring responsibilities expected of an adult. They may be caring for a friend or family member who has an illness, drug addiction to drugs or alcohol.

Research by the BBC in 2010 pointed to a figure of 700,000 young carers in the UK and found that 1 in 10 pupils interviewed had caring responsibilities.

Young adult carers (aged 16–24) may be particularly difficult to engage and be juggling demanding responsibilities and challenges that are common to others their age.

What are the problems associated with young carers?

Young carers are at risk of educational problems, family breakdown issues and physical and mental health problems.

- Isolation and bullying, which may arise from the restrictions on their social life and simply not being able to do things that other young people do.
- Stress, anxiety and worrying about the person they care for and juggling responsibilities.
- Undertaking physical caring roles.
- Disturbed sleep in order to care during the night.
- Chaotic home lives and learnt behaviour when parents have mental health or substance misuse problems.
- Bereavement.
- Lack of exercise and unhealthy diets, as many are responsible for the household meals and shopping.

Remarkably, young carers rarely say that they want to give up caring altogether, but they do want to take part in the activities, such as Scouting, that they see other young people enjoying.

Identifying young carers in your Scout Group

You may already know young people who are carers, but young carers often keep their role a secret. Many families are scared that their children will be taken away if someone finds out. Young carers may not even realise that they are in fact carers.

Young carers are often bullied and will sometimes drop out of Scouting when they start to take part less frequently without telling anyone the reason why. Other young carers will not even tell anyone they are carers.

All children and young people will react individually to their situation and as such, some young carers will be withdrawn, whereas others may become angry and resentful of their caring roles and this may affect their behaviour. Young carers often seem

very mature to adults but you might notice them struggling socially with their peers or being

Helping young carers

Firstly, as with any child, if you are concerned about their welfare, refer to the usual yellow card

Young carers often say that they would like more support for the person they care for. Support agencies who will be able to support them can be helpful. This may be a young carers service, GP or another voluntary agency.

Sometimes just knowing that someone understands their situation can make the difference between your activities and a young carer not feeling able to take part. Ensure that they are clear about what is private and who you might need to share information with in order to help them.

Practical tips for supporting young carers

- Make links with your local young carers service.
 - By working with them and being a familiar face, young carers they are in touch with their Scout Group.
 - They may be able to offer you and other leaders training.
 - They should also be able to help a family access further support. Some may need this support in activities or nights away experiences.
- Always approach young people privately when asking them how things are going whilst talking about the yellow card.
- Look out for young people who start to drop out for no obvious reason and speak with them about it, especially if you are aware of disability, illness or alcohol or substance misuse problems in the family.
- Ask the question at promotional events and in your literature, 'Might you find it difficult to take on these responsibilities?'
- Ensure that events that involve parents are accessible to disabled parents, ideally offering support.
- Allow young carers access to a phone when on activities, so that they can check that their family is safe rather than feeling they have to stay home to keep an eye on them.
- Make sure the environment is positive about disability. For example, a young carer with a disability may be teased by other young people using inappropriate terms when describing people with disabilities.
- If a good relationship has been built up with parents, signposting them into additional support.

Factsheet written by Carers Trust (<http://www.carers.org>) - Carers Trust is the largest provider of support reaching more than 443,000 carers, including more than 34,000 young carers, through a unique network of managed carers' centres, 76 schemes, 112 young carers' services and interactive websites.