

Carers Week 2023: Recognising and Supporting Carers in the Community

A carer is anyone who looks after a family member or friend who has a disability, mental or physical illness, or addiction, or who needs extra help as they grow older. Carers can be children, young people or adults. The impact of caring on all aspects of a carer's life can be significant. Caring without the right information and support can be tough.

Identification of carers enables assessment of their ability and willingness to provide care as well as to assess the support they need to maintain their own wellbeing. This is an important step to reduce the risk of harm both to carers and to the people they care for.

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5th-11th June 2023 is Carers Week 2023

Carers Week is an annual campaign to raise awareness of caring, highlight the challenges unpaid carers face and recognise the contribution they make to families and communities throughout the UK. It also helps people who don't think of themselves as having caring responsibilities to identify as carers and access much-needed support.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a monumental impact on unpaid carers' lives – not only because of the increased amount of care that many provided, but because of the far-reaching effect that providing this level of care has had on unpaid carers. Many people also took on new caring responsibilities for their relatives and friends who are disabled, ill or older and who need support.

And now, after three years caring through the pandemic, the cost of living crisis is causing further stress and hardship for carers, who were already dealing with the financial difficulties that often come with caring.

Carers need to be recognised for the difficulties they are experiencing, respected for all they are doing, provided with information, and given the support they need to care safely.



Carers Trust Hillingdon is a charity that operates support services for unpaid carers living or caring in the London Borough of Hillingdon. They provide support to adults and children caring for adults, and have a great range of support for children and young people who are caring in their formative years, as well as over 80 free services for adult carers. They also undertake assessments of carers' needs.

They have extensive expertise in supporting carers and can act as a source of guidance for professionals and support for carers.

Contact for advice and referrals: 01895 811206, office@carerstrusthillingdon.org

Young Carers: A Safeguarding Response

A young carer is child that provides or intends to provide **regular care** for another person. This could be a **family member** that has **disabilities, a long term illness, substance misuse or mental health problems**.

Many young carers are **unidentified** and may be **hidden** because **the child may not realise that they are caring for an adult**. Others may also be **scared or embarrassed to ask for help**. A young carer's **vulnerability increases when their responsibilities impact their education, physical, emotional and social development**. They may not be identified until things become a crisis.

Some **signs and indicators** that a child may be a young carer are:

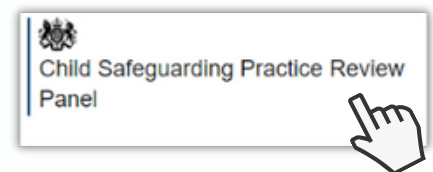
- Completing most domestic tasks (cleaning, cooking, shopping)
- Providing family members with medication regularly
- Managing finances
- Providing a lot of support to a sibling (disabilities/ illness)
- Interpreting on a daily basis
- Helping the adult with their self care and/or mobility
- Low school attendance or lateness with little explanation
- Limited information about the home life
- Concerns with diet and/ or hygiene
- Change in physical and emotional presentation
- Providing emotional support for their caregiver
- Lack of ability to socialise
- Change in behaviour – attention span, low motivation, disruptive, withdrawn
- Parent or carer often misses meetings, school events or is difficult to contact.

It is important to recognise signs that a child may be a carer at the **earliest stage** by completing an early help assessment and submitting it to the [Stronger Families Hub](#). They may be a **child in need of support** to achieve their full potential.

Think Family: When working with adults that have care and support needs, consider **who is supporting them** with their daily care, including **the impact of their needs on their child**.

Carers for Children with Disabilities

An independent national review focussed on safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs who resided in residential special schools, registered as children's homes. There were many allegations of abuse and neglect whilst residing in these settings. We know that children with complex needs and disabilities are at increased risk of abuse and neglect.



There were recommendations from the review for local safeguarding partners when children are placed away from home:

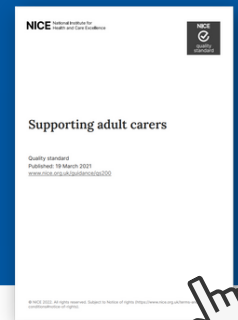
- Parents/carers, and family members should be supported to visit them regularly and see them alone.
- Parents/carers can help professionals understand a child's lived experiences (including their wishes and feelings) and communication methods.
- Parents/carers must be involved in decisions that impact the child.
- Good engagement with parents/carers can ensure that a child's diversity needs are recognised and met.
- Regular contact between child and parents/carers can mean changes in behaviour, which might indicate abuse or neglect or other welfare issues, can be picked up more quickly.

The review emphasises the importance of early support to enable parents and carers to provide their child with the right support at the right time to keep their child at home, wherever possible. This reduces the risk of abuse and neglect that arises in institutional care.

Identifying and Assessing Adult Carers: Are They Able and Willing to Care?

The NICE Guidance “Supporting Adult Carers” makes clear:

“It is important to identify carers at the earliest opportunity and to encourage them to recognise their role and rights. This will help ensure that they are recognised as partners in the care of the person they are supporting and can access any advice and support they may need.”



The responsibility to identify, assess and support carers is shared across health and social care services. Good assessment of, and communication with, carers promotes realistic care planning to ensure the cared for person's needs are met safely and that risks to the carer are identified and managed. Good assessment of carers also reduces the risk of neglect and abuse by informal carers.

- Professionals who become aware of carers should assess their willingness and ability to do the caring role that professionals are expecting of them.
- Family dynamics and attitudes of the carer and the cared for adult, as well as the potential complexity of the needs of the cared for adult, should be considered.
- Carers should be explicitly informed of the caring responsibilities and risk management activities that professionals expect them to be doing and check that these are realistic and manageable.
- Be realistic and think critically when determining what a carer can or can't do for the cared for person.
- If the cared for person has difficulties making decisions, make sure that the carer understands the potential risks and how to seek help and advice around mental capacity issues.
- Identify and explore risks associated with caring - for example the emotional and sometimes physical challenges of caring for a person with dementia or with high physical care needs.
- Identify and explore risks that you expect the carer to be managing and establish a shared understanding with the carer.
- Agree clear contingency plans with carers - what will they do if things change or deteriorate.
- Make sure carers know where to get support.

If you are concerned that a carer is unsafe in anyway or is struggling to meet the needs of the cared for person contact Adult Social Care on 01895 556633

Legal Obligations to Adult Carers

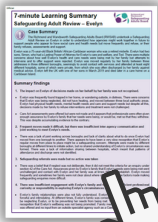
Section 10 of the Care Act 2014 sets out a positive duty on local authorities to assess carers needs, including the impact of caring on their wellbeing and their ability and willingness to provide care.

Whilst carers can refuse a carers assessment to look at their own needs, there is a legal obligation on the local authority to offer the assessment. NB. Even if a cared for person refuses an assessment, it is still an obligation to assess and support the informal carer.

What We Have Learnt from Serious Adult Cases

Recognition and engagement with adult carers can be an important safeguarding intervention. Local and national serious cases highlight that missed opportunities to engage meaningfully with informal carers can mean serious risks are not picked up including severe neglect and domestic abuse.

In the serious adult cases below there were missed opportunities to engage informal carers effectively. There was a failure to fulfil the legal duty to proactively assess their willingness and ability to provide the care that they were either believed to be providing. And in most cases the carers' views on their caring role or the needs of the cared for person were not sought or given adequate weight.

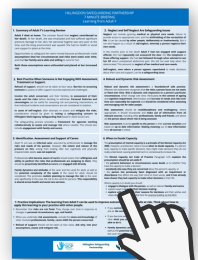


Evelyn: There was insufficient engagement with Evelyn's family and there was insufficient professional curiosity about, and responsibility for, exploring Evelyn's circumstances

The impact on Evelyn of decisions made by her carer, who was also her Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA), were not recognised or explored. The decisions were not challenged even when they appeared contrary to her best interests

Adult F: She died at home following a period of neglect. She and her husband were both dependent on their son for care, but it became clear at the time of her death that he was not capable of meeting their needs.

Her family were assumed to be able to care for her, despite no carer's assessment or carers' support being offered to her. Their ability and willingness to provide care had not been explored.



"O": A Domestic Homicide Review was undertaken after an elderly woman was murdered, in 2018, by her adult son who was also her carer. She was dependent on him day to day despite a history of serious conflict and safeguarding concerns.

She had declined an assessment of her needs but her reasons and the impact of their past conflict on her safety were not explored by any involved professional.



A serious case in Birmingham illustrates that carers can also face risk from the person they care for.

There was domestic abuse identified between an older adult in their 90's who was cared for by their family member who was in their 60's. They both lived in the same house and many professionals were involved including paid carers. The review identified that whilst the older adult was experiencing domestic abuse, the carer was also experiencing domestic abuse.

Carers assessments need to be thorough and consider the carer's wellbeing as well as the cared for person's. Domestic abuse can exist within a carer-cared for relationship. Older people experience domestic abuse too.



Engaging Intimidating or Resistant Carers

If an informal carer or family member refuses your involvement or that of other services, be curious about why.

- What are they worried about? Ask questions, explore their reasoning and concerns
- Is there another specialist organisation, such as the Carers Trust, you could go to for support, or which the family might be more responsive to?
- Consider whether they may have mental health problems or drug and alcohol issues or might be hiding something, eg domestic abuse/financial abuse
- If you have reason to believe the adult might have care and support needs, do not walk away until you are confident that they are receiving the support they need
- Always discuss family/informal carer refusal in supervision. It can indicate safeguarding concerns
- Beware disguised compliance - sometimes people have reasons for misleading professionals and sometimes this indicates significant risk of abuse

There is substantial transferable learning from serious child safeguarding cases about 'disguised compliance' by carers and family members. [Click here](#) for an NSPCC briefing to support all safeguarding practice



If an informal carer or family member is resistant, forceful or intimidating towards you or other professionals:

- Think about what it might feel like for the adult with care needs, or children, to live with or depend on that carer/family member. Intimidating or forceful behaviour can indicate that they may be perpetrating coercion and control or other forms of domestic abuse
- It is normal for professionals to feel uncomfortable when working with intimidating or hostile families. This can impair professional judgement, so supervision, support and critical reflection are vital
- Gather information from other agencies and share your concerns - this aids risk assessment
- Consider methods of safe engagement, such as visiting jointly with colleagues
- Managers should consider the most appropriate staff to allocate work to - not all practitioners have the same level of skill in managing conflict, and it is crucial to ensure that children or vulnerable adults in need of support are not side-lined because of intimidation of professionals by family members and informal carers