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Derbyshire All Age Carers Support Service



SPOTTING AND SUPPORTING YOUNG CARERS: FIRST STEPS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STAFF

In every secondary school, there are students balancing education with caring responsibilities at home.

Many are highly capable. Many are determined to succeed. Many remain unnoticed.

With the right support, young carers can stay engaged with learning and feel confident about their future. Young carers have the Right to Dream.

This short guide provides practical steps to support students who may be caring for someone at home.

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Seen. Supported. Succeeding.

Understanding Young Carers in Secondary School



Who is a young carer?

A young carer is a student who helps support a family member due to illness, disability, mental health needs, or other long-term challenges.

At secondary age, caring may include:

- practical household responsibilities
- emotional support
- helping with medication routines
- supporting siblings
- helping manage appointments
- translating or communicating
- supervising to keep someone safe
- balancing caring alongside school demands

Students may feel proud of their role but may also experience pressure, worry or reduced time for study and social opportunities. Many young carers do not talk about their situation unless asked.

Signs a pupil may be helping someone at home

Young carers are individuals, and experiences vary. Possible indicators may include:

- tiredness or difficulty concentrating
- anxiety about family members
- limited time for homework or revision
- missing enrichment activities
- frequent lateness or absence
- carrying responsibilities beyond their age
- difficulty staying after school
- needing to check messages from home
- reluctance to talk about home circumstances

Some students manage very well academically and may not be immediately identifiable. A culture of understanding helps young carers feel safe to share when ready.

Starting a supportive conversation

A supportive conversation can reduce isolation and build trust. Young carers often worry about being seen differently or causing concern for their family.

Helpful conversation approaches:

- choose a private, calm space
- use open questions
- listen without judgement
- avoid assumptions
- focus on what may help in school

You might ask:

- “How are things outside school at the moment?”
- “Do you have responsibilities at home that affect your time?”
- “Is there anything school could do to support you?”
- “What helps when things feel overwhelming?”
- “Who do you feel comfortable talking to in school?”

Students may choose to share gradually. Respect their pace and acknowledge their strengths.



Support that can make a difference

Support should be proportionate and responsive to individual need.

Examples may include:

- flexibility with deadlines where appropriate
- access to homework support in school
- understanding around punctuality in agreed circumstances
- access to a quiet space
- check-ins with a trusted member of staff
- support to maintain enrichment opportunities
- consideration during exam periods
- signposting to additional support where helpful

Small adjustments can reduce pressure and help students remain focused on their goals.

Partnership with families



Families may not always identify caring roles in the same way as professionals. A supportive approach can help build trust and understanding. Discussions may focus on:

- the student's experience of balancing responsibilities
- identifying helpful support in school
- maintaining aspirations and future pathways
- ensuring the student feels confident and included

Where communication with parents is limited, schools may still identify a student as a young carer based on professional knowledge of their circumstances.

Recording young carers

Schools can record young carers through internal systems and the school census.

Recording helps ensure young carers are recognised within education data and can access appropriate support.

Identification supports a clearer understanding of barriers to learning and helps schools respond effectively.

Keep the focus on potential

Young carers are ambitious, capable and resilient. With the right understanding, they can:

- achieve qualifications
- maintain friendships
- develop confidence
- progress to further education, employment or training

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Dream.