

What is a Young Carer?

A young carer is a young person aged 18 or under who looks after a mum, dad, brother, sister or other relative who is disabled, ill, has mental ill health or a drug or alcohol problem, providing help with tasks usually done by an adult.

HOW CARING CAN AFFECT CHILDREN

Children who are in caring situations do not usually know they are Young Carers. They care because of their love for the person who needs help. They often say nothing about their caring role as they are worried about being taken away from their family. However nowadays everything is done to keep families together and having Carers Lewisham services can help others see that the Young Carer is being supported. Below are some of the affects and difficulties Young Carers can face but with your support as a parent/guardian we can help give them time to be children doing the things that children should be doing. The 2001 Census discovered that there are nearly 200,000 Young Carers in Britain, the revised estimated number from research in schools is closer to 1,000,000 (1million), so your child is not alone!

Mental Health Problems

When a parent has a serious mental health problem such as schizophrenia or depression, particularly in single parent families, the young carer may find themselves in an adult role emotionally supporting their parent, watching and worrying about a relapse, running the home, making sure the parent takes their medication, caring for any siblings and spending periods of crisis at a friend's or relative's or in foster care. Because of the stigma of mental illness the young carer may become isolated in their community or through their parents or their own choice.

Drug or Alcohol Problems

At Carers Lewisham we appreciate that it is difficult to admit having a problem with drugs or alcohol, but we are not here to judge, simply to help children deal with their living situation. Sometimes a parent has not realised that they themselves have a problem and may be sensitive to accepting help for themselves or their child. However the affects of addiction can leave children in the family in the role of young carers taking on adult responsibilities. This can be upsetting and can sometimes put the child at risk. Often when there is a problem with drugs or alcohol there can be additional problems, for example depression. Young Carers may not only have to deal with the parent's emotional problems but also practical and outside responsibilities, which cause embarrassment and isolation for everyone involved.

Physical Illness/Disability

This is often the most easily identifiable of all situations that young carers find themselves in although in the past it would sometimes be overlooked that a child might be the one providing personal care to a parent with a physical condition as well as doing domestic tasks.

Caring for a disabled or ill sibling

There are a significant number of children who find that having a sibling with Autism, ADHD, a serious or life threatening illness or disability, dominates family life, leaving little time or attention for themselves. They may spend a lot of time looking out for their sibling who could be very destructive, violent, vulnerable or embarrassing in the outside world. The young carer can become emotionally disturbed and depressed about their situation, sometimes believing that their brother or sister is faking it for the attention.

HOW CARERS LEWISHAM CAN HELP

Tashira, aged 13, cares for her mother who is a single parent with Schizophrenia. When her mum is admitted to hospital Tashira and her brother Zeon, aged 10, are put into foster care which is very upsetting and unsettling for them. Tashira has usually managed to stay in school but after a recent relapse in her mother's illness she missed the best part of a month because she had to make sure her mother took her medicine, do the shopping, cleaning, cooking and look out for her brother who has been acting out his feelings at school and is at risk of exclusion.

Since the family was referred to Carers Lewisham we have advocated on the children's behalf with both schools to make them aware of the family situation and to involve them in the joint planning for the family's future. Both children have been on day trips to have a break from their home situation and have met other Young Carers in similar situations. We have also worked with Social Services to ensure there is a regular foster parent in future to prevent the upheaval of the past. The children are now keen to join the Saturday Club and have showed signs of better self esteem and confidence. In the future we will help them apply for funds to have a family holiday and further counselling support has been offered to the children. Carers Lewisham has also sorted out a problem their mother was having with her disability benefits.

Young Carers Lewisham, The Princess Royal Trust,
Lewisham Carers Centre,

Waldram Place, Forest Hill, London SE23 2LB

Tel: 020 8699 8686 Fax: 020 8699 0634

Email: info@carerslewisham.org.uk www.carerslewisham.org.uk

