



Young Carers

Manual handling and health and safety briefing

healthwatch
Windsor, Ascot and
Maidenhead

About young carers

A young carer is someone under 18 who helps to look after a relative with a disability, illness, mental health condition, or drug or alcohol addiction.

Young carers in RBWM

It is estimated that there are 4527 young carers in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and as many as 1 in 5 secondary school pupils may be a young carer. (Source Family Action Young Carers)

Although many young carers find their role rewarding, they are more likely to struggle with education, social inclusion and health.

Family Action Young Carers support young carers in Windsor and Maidenhead providing carers assessment, individualised support and training for professionals.

Introduction

Family Action Young Carers raised the issue of young carers sustaining injury or long-term mobility issues as a result of their caring responsibilities with Healthwatch.

Research by [Tseliou et al \(2018\)](#) found that although young carers are less likely to report chronic mobility problems, they are at higher risk of poor health outcomes. This indicates that young carers may not wish to complicate their situation by drawing attention to their physical health needs.

During the process of a young carers assessment Family Action Young Carers provides information about manual handling from the NHS website. They felt that more comprehensive, personalised guidance was necessary to ensure the long-term health and wellbeing of young carers.

Healthwatch Windsor, Ascot and Maidenhead spoke to two local families where the young carer was providing a relatively intense level of care that may put them at risk of manual handling injury and/ or mobility issues. Both young carers are primary school age children who provide care for a parent.

What is it like to be a young person who provides a relatively intense level of care?

The young carers in the families we spoke to were managing household tasks. One young carer told us about the chores they do on a regular basis,

“I help by emptying the bins, taking the bins out, tidying up, unpacking the shopping and putting it away, sweeping the patio and cleaning the patio furniture, vacuuming. ”

The adult they are caring for described their discomfort at the level of help their young carer had to provide

“I hate having to ask him to do things that I'm not physically capable of. I often do too much because I don't want to put too much on him.”

Although the young carer was aware that this help was needed, they found the tasks tiring and at times painful

“I don't always want to do them (household tasks). Sweeping can hurt my back and arms, it's tiring.” (Young carer, age 9)

A family member told us that caring for a person with high support needs meant that their young carer had been injured in the past.

“Previously, there were occasions where our young carer sustained minor injuries (grazes / bumps) due to being accidentally dragged down when the person requiring care fell over and reached to grab her for balance.”

What do young carers need?

Training to support mobility safely. Young carers who care for someone with limited movement often help the cared for person to be mobile within the house or on trips out. For example, this could involve safely navigating stairs, assisting the cared for person to use mobility aids or personal care. These tasks require use of manual handling principles as well as ensuring the young carer has sufficient strength to keep themselves and the person they are caring for safe.

The NHS advises that any carer who is providing this type of support receives training, ideally by a healthcare professional ‘Lifting someone incorrectly can also cause injuries to them, damage fragile skin or cause bruising or cuts. If you regularly lift or move someone, it's important to get training or have a healthcare professional demonstrate the correct techniques.’

“In due course, my young carer will need some advice and training on techniques, options and equipment available. The person requiring care is still relatively mobile right now, but their mobility and coordination is

deteriorating quite quickly, and they are reluctant to accept any professional help.”

Knowing how to safely lift a person during emergency care is vital in protecting young carers physical health. This will be especially important for primary school age young carers due to their smaller stature and strength.

More help in the home. Many people who require care also need help with keeping on top of day-to-day household chores.

Knowing how to do everyday tasks around the home may seem like common sense but for young carers who have less experience and are physically developing, the repetitive movements can lead to strains and exhaustion.

Carers First reported that performing household tasks is one of the aspects of care that young carers find most difficult and feel least supported in.

Additionally, some household tasks require use of equipment that could cause injury such as a stove or iron. Young Carers need support to maintain their own health and safety. This support needs to be delivered in an age-appropriate way, considering the level of care being provided.

What help and support with manual handling tasks or health and safety has been provided to young carers in RBWM?

We asked the families what support they had received

“We have had no formal support other than the help and guidance provided by the Family Action Young Carers team.”

“I have shown him some techniques to do things efficiently.” (parent)

When asked about specialist equipment, “No - we did not know that this was an option.”

“Mum has shown me how to do some things.”

What are the plans to provide enhanced support to young carers?

Windsor and Maidenhead Primary Care Networks are planning to offer young carers wellbeing checks. They plan to reach out twice a year to perform a check, signposting onto further support from the wider services within their GP practices, for example social prescribing or health coaching.

This is a new service aiming to provide holistic support to young carers and their families. The practical skills young carers will learn, will support them in their role and protect their long-term health.

There are two elements plan to offer:

- **Wellbeing checks;** an invitation to speak with someone to support their personal health and development in order to access timely support
- **Carers training;** First aid and manual handling. However, they are struggling to find someone who is able to take responsibility for providing manual handling training to young carers. RBWM council social workers, occupational therapy and Achieving for Children have been approached.

Next steps

We acknowledge that young people are taking on physical caring tasks and need to be helped to do this safely. Every young carer in Windsor, Ascot and Maidenhead should be supported to maintain and enhance their health and wellbeing by

1. Having access to good quality, individualised health and safety training that is age appropriate.
2. Health and social care services working in partnership to prioritise the needs of young carers, even where this may be outside of their statutory remit, ensuring there is '**no wrong door**' for young carers. (National Memorandum of Understanding between Health and Social Care, Statutory Services and community support. This MoU has been localised for RBWM, and is currently under review by all named services prior to publishing)
3. Services working with families to provide practical support for young carers who are responsible for household tasks.

'Many young carers supported by Family Action Young Carers provide practical and personal care which have the potential to impact their own physical health. Many families were approached to participate in this research however felt uncomfortable talking about the extent of physical tasks being taken on by their children.

A greater emphasis needs to be placed on Health and Social Care services to recognise when a person is being supported by a child and ensure that suitable support is put in place to prevent the development of long-term physical health conditions or risk of injury to either the child or the person they care for.

Children will naturally want to help their family however it must not be assumed that they are managing with their caring role or know how to ask for help if they need it. There needs to be a greater acceptance that care is provided by children and support must be proactive to ensure the greatest outcomes for young carers and their families.' – **Family Action Young Carers**



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