

# Top Ten Tips

## Supporting young adult carers in post-16 education

Young adult carers are young people aged 16-24 who provide unpaid care to someone, usually a member of their family, on a regular basis. Young adult carers gain many transferable skills from their caring role, but they also experience challenges which may impact on their educational achievement and have implications for how you support them. When young adult carers enter post-16 provision, they may have already fallen behind their peers. On average, they achieve nine lower GCSE grades than their peers. They are more likely to miss education because they need to come in late, leave at short notice or take time off. They may also sometimes feel tired, frustrated and anxious.

According to the 2011 census, there are more than 314,000 known young adult carers in England and Wales. This is the equivalent of 1 in 20 young people and the number is set to increase. Between the 2001 and 2011 census the number of children caring in the UK rose by 83% in 5-7 year olds, 55% in 8-9 year olds and 15% in 11-14 year olds. This means that in five to ten years, post-16 providers can expect more young adult carers to be accessing their provision.

These Top Ten Tips can help your organisation provide effective support to young adult carers so that they can achieve their full potential in education and training:

- 1 Be Positive.** While young adult carers do have responsibilities that present challenges to their success in learning, it is important not to focus on the problems associated with being a young adult carer. Many young adult carers are proud to be carers and see it as a positive part of their lives. Through their caring role, many young adult carers acquire skills that their peers do not have, such as communication skills, time management, negotiating and dealing with agencies, money management, inter-personal skills and a sense of responsibility. While it is important not to define a young person by their caring role, it is important to recognise and celebrate what they do and achieve, the transferable nature of their skills and how their skills can be applied in a learning and work situation.



**2 Know who your young adult carers are.** Many providers do not systematically count how many young adult carers they have in their organisations. Knowing how many of your learners have caring responsibilities across all your provision is the first step to supporting them in their learning. It also helps you to identify the resources you need to commit to them. As you develop this area of work, it is likely that the numbers of young adult carers you know about will increase.



**3**



**Support declaration.** It is likely that you have more young adult carers in your organisation than you realise. Some young adult carers may not feel able to declare their caring roles for a number of reasons; for example, lack of confidence, concerns about discrimination or lack of awareness of the support you can provide. Whatever the reason, it is important to enable young adult carers to feel that it is safe to talk about their caring responsibilities, when and how they want to. This might be at application stage if you include a tick box for young people to disclose caring responsibilities on your application form. It can be at enrolment or at induction if staff carrying out interviews or processes are aware of how best to ask about caring responsibilities. It is also important to provide opportunities through the academic year for a young adult carer to declare. This might be during tutorial time, so tutors will need to be trained on signs to look out for, such as lateness or attendance problems, that may indicate a young person is a carer. It is important to make the support you provide visible by putting up posters, putting information on leaflets or the intranet, and by organising activities during Carers Week, as this can encourage learners to come forward.

**4 Listen to your young adult carers.** When you have identified young adult carers, you need to listen to what will help them in education. This could include financial support, agreements on later start times, plans in place in case of a crisis at home or to be able to have their mobile phone on during lessons. Though trickier to do because of study timetables as well as caring commitments, it can be really helpful to meet with your young adult carers as a group so that you listen to what they have to say about their experiences in learning and how you are doing as a provider to meet the needs of carers in general.



**5 Take a team approach.** Identifying a member of staff to lead on support for young adult carers in your organisation will mean that students and staff know who to go to for advice and support. However, this needs to be complemented by a whole organisation approach to establish consistent and sustained support for young adult carers. Build a team that includes someone with a managerial role to ensure that policies and procedures meet the needs of young adult carers, and that your team has the responsibility and clout to require all curriculum staff to take up training and provide effective support. Senior leadership support will raise the profile of this development work across your organisation and help to ensure it gets the resource it needs. Lastly, appoint a link governor (possibly the person who leads on Equality & Diversity) to monitor your data on young adult carer success rates and hold your organisation to account.



**Provide staff training.** Make sure that as many staff as possible are aware of the particular needs of young adult carers, how to spot signs that a young person might have caring responsibilities and how to ask the right questions to enable young adult carers to talk about their situation. Training could be provided by your local carers service, or your internal lead on young adult carers. There is also plenty of free information that can be made available to staff so they can access it when they need it.

**7 Collect Data.** Once you start supporting declaration and promoting the support you offer to young adult carers, it is likely that you will identify more students with caring responsibilities. It is important to collect data on these learners, so you can identify any trends and think about resource implications. It is important to examine the data for attendance and retention, success and achievement, and data across curriculum areas, types of courses and also by other protected grounds. Are male young adult carers doing as well as females? Do you have any young adult carers with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities? Are there any achievement gaps that might indicate that support is needed?



**8 Review policies and procedures.** Many of your organisational policies, such as E&D, safeguarding, bullying and harassment, mental health and wellbeing, will cover young adult carers but you might want to consider mentioning them explicitly to ensure that their needs are brought to the fore. You should check whether some policies and procedures are inadvertently disadvantaging young adult carers, such as policies on use of mobile phones in lessons, or participation on study trips and work experience. You should also consider introducing some procedures specifically for young adult carers, such as crisis plans and what to do if a young adult carer has to leave suddenly when the person they care for is in need.



**9 Offer funding and bursaries.** Young adult carers are likely to be in low income households because the person or persons they care for cannot work. Some young adult carers may have additional expenses, such as travel costs to take younger siblings to school. Ensuring that bursaries are available to support them is crucial. Some young adult carers may become carers during the year or may have higher levels of financial need at different times so making bursaries flexible and available all year is important; allocating all available funds at the beginning of year may make meeting this need difficult.



**10 Build Partnerships.** Do not expect to provide all the support necessary for your young adult carers. Build partnerships with your local carers organisations so that you can refer a young adult carer to them if they need specialist support which you cannot provide; for example, respite support or support during any breaks from learning. Carers services may also be able to provide training for your organisation, while you might be able to reciprocate by building their awareness of the options and support available to young adult carers in post-16 education, so that they can refer young people to you. Carers services may also have a good idea of how many young adult carers are in their last year of school and help you to improve their transition into post-16 provision.



**To follow up on the ideas in this list of top ten tips, find out more information and access free resources, go to L&W's Learn, Work, Care website**

 [learnworkcare.org.uk](https://learnworkcare.org.uk).