

**CARERS
TRUST**



MY FUTURE, MY FEELINGS, MY FAMILY

How Coronavirus is affecting young carers and young adult carers, and what they want you to do next

July 2020

Summary:

Caring day and night without a break. Worrying about keeping the people they care for safe. Coping with a mental health condition without support. Feeling lonely. Falling behind at school, college or university. Struggling to access food and medicines.

This is what the pandemic has meant for the thousands of young carers and young adult carers across the UK.

“ Before coronavirus I was living quite a normal life at university in another city, but I have now come back home where I care for my sister who has severe mental health issues and my mother who has mild ones. There is nowhere to get away to for a break as even when things aren't quite as bad all I feel like doing is resting/sleeping in bed. My biggest worries used to be exams and boyfriend troubles, now they are making sure everyone is alive this time tomorrow. ”

Young adult carer, aged 19



A call to action from the UK's young carers and young adult carers

In June 2020 Carers Trust asked children and young people aged between 12 and 25 about their experiences of caring during the pandemic. Even amongst everything else they have to do, 961 found the time to reply.

Amongst some positive reflections, most described feeling stressed, unable to cope and overwhelmed by the new and increased pressures they face. The young carers and young adult carers who shared their thoughts and experiences with us are clear about what needs to change so that they:

- Get support for their emotional wellbeing and mental health
- Have breaks and respite from their caring role
- Get help from specialist young carers and young adult carers services
- Can balance caring, so that they can succeed in education and employment
- Stay connected to friends and their communities
- Eat well and stay physically fit

There are no limits to what young carers and young adult carers can achieve in their lives, when they have the right support. However, when this group of children and young people don't receive the right support, this can have a lasting impact on their life chances, their physical and mental health and their income.

67% of young carers and 78% of young adult carers are more worried about their future since coronavirus.

“It has made it harder, before coronavirus I had a break while being at college and now I don't. I find it more stressful and that my mental health is suffering. I feel like we are being forgotten by the government. Before Coronavirus there wasn't enough support for us and now we don't have any... We can't carry on being trapped inside [our] homes.”

Young carer, aged 17

This report is a snapshot in time about the pressures young carers and young adult carers are facing, it also sets out what they need now more than ever as we live with and beyond a pandemic. Carers Trust is re-igniting the national conversation about how we can work together to ensure young carers and young adult carers get the recognition they deserve and the support they need to live the lives they want.

Carers Trust urges you to listen to young carers and young adult carers voices and join us to commit to action to address the pressures they can face every day. Carers Trust will continue to build on this research and work with young carers and young adult carers, our Network Partner members, decision-makers and professionals. Together, we will ensure that young carers and young adult carers get the right support, at the right time, in the right place.

Take action today. Get in touch to discuss how you can join us in making a difference for young carers and young adult carers. Email policy@carers.org or join the conversation online [@CarersTrust](https://www.carers.org).

Introduction:

Who are young carers and young adult carers? What do they do?

Young carers are children and young people under 18 years old who provide unpaid care to a family member who is disabled, physically or mentally ill, or misuses substances. Young adult carers are transitioning into adulthood and are aged 16-25.

Young carers and young adult carers undertake a range of tasks to support family members or friends who could not cope without their support. This might include shopping, cooking, cleaning, managing medicines or money, providing personal care, helping people get out of the house, keeping an eye on someone or giving emotional support.



Section 1:

What has caring been like for young carers and young adult carers during the pandemic?

Time spent caring

Young carers and young adult carers who responded to our survey have spent a worrying amount of time per week caring, for more people, during the pandemic:

58% of young carers and 64% of young adult carers felt that the amount of time they spend caring had increased since Coronavirus.

11% of young carers and 20% of young adult carers said the amount of time they spend caring per week increased by more than 30 hours. That is around 1 in 5 young adult carers.

A shocking 8% of young carers and 15% of young adult carers cared for over 90 hours per week during the pandemic.

30% of young carers and 31% young adult carers are now caring for more people.



Breaks and respite

A concerning amount of young carers and young adult carers are doing more, without a break, because of the pandemic. This means that they find it hard to stay well, achieve in education, and do the things that matter to them.

Only 3% of young carers and 2% of young adult carers have had a paid care worker or personal assistant (PA) provide support at home for the person they care for.

42% of young adult carers were unable to take a break from caring.

The lack of sustainable social care funding had already meant support and breaks was at a low level pre-pandemic. This was compounded during the pandemic. The lack of availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to the social care sector, as well as people with personal budgets being responsible - as employers - for sourcing their own PPE, left some social care providers facing difficulties with ensuring a safe working environment for their own staff, and some carers and disabled people suspending care packages due to concerns over transmission.

“ I have no break at all. I used to spend every weekend with my partner ... I've not had that since the week before lockdown. I've seen him twice since the restrictions have been lifted - keeping to the two metre social distance but the drive is one hour each way so it's tiring just to get some sort of break... I'm also spending more time providing emotional support to my parents who I care for as they are struggling to adjust to the changes and understand the changes. Keeping them both occupied around my uni work is a challenge. ”

Young adult carer, aged 24

This lack of respite and breaks is inevitably having a significant impact on their education, mental and physical health and wellbeing (see next sections).

19% of young carers and 21% of young adult carers told us that time away from the person they care for was an important coping mechanism during lockdown.

Money, getting food and medicine

Many young carers and young adult carers live in low-income households, some are living in poverty. Young adult carers who are working often use their wages to top up household income or pay for things completely.

This has been a contributing factor to young carers' stress, as well as impacting on the time they spend caring. Caring for people who are shielding, changes to supermarkets, and the availability of food and medicine have all had an impact.

50% of young adult carers are spending more money due to Coronavirus.

“Money is always a worry because of the huge delay in any payments and only getting 80% [of their salary due to being furloughed], things were tight before, they are worse now. We use more food and utilities but there is no help for this.”

Young adult carer, aged 19

11% of young carers and 20% of young adult carers said they found it hard to access food and medicines.

“““

I went to the pharmacy, and they said that they didn't have all of the medicine that my nan needed. [I said] 'I'm worried that she might get more sick without it', the pharmacist [replied] 'We don't have enough, there's not a lot we can do'. I found the experience difficult.

Young carer, aged 13

I feel a lot more pressure to keep my family safe and well as they are shielding due to health issues. I am still working and the only one able to get shopping and medication for my family and my grandparents who live down the road.

Young adult carer, aged 22

...Shopping is now solely my responsibility as neither [of my] parents can go out and get little bits as and when they want. I'm spending much more time doing the shopping, what used to take an hour or so takes longer as we wipe everything down for safety...

Young adult carer, aged 24



Section 2:

How have young carers and young adult carers been feeling during the pandemic?

Being a young carer or young adult carer has already been shown to be a risk factor for poorer mental health. The pandemic has made this worse. Since the pandemic began:

52% of young adult carers are feeling overwhelmed by the pressures they are facing now.

2/3 of young carers and almost ¾ young adult carers are feeling more stressed.

40% of young carers and 59% of young adult carers say their mental health is worse.

I'm at home 24/7 other than to walk the dog which is the only time I get away from my caring role. I used to be able to do breaks on the weekend and visit friends or places and do exciting, fun things but I cannot do that now. My mental health is suffering. Some days it doesn't seem worth getting up as each day is the same.



Young adult carer, aged 21

All the anxiety I had previously let go of after years of therapy returned...worrying for the safety of the person I care for. My worry and ingrained responsibility put a massive strain on my mental health and our relationship because if they caught the virus they would die, and it's been incredibly difficult to live with that.

Young adult carer, aged 24

Coronavirus has meant I'm stuck at home ... caring for my mum ... Sometimes feeling that I have no other way out than suicide as I feel I'll never be able to get out. I love my mum with all my heart but I never chose this life - I got pushed into it and coronavirus has trapped me here just as I was hopeful to start focusing on my own life.

Young adult carer, aged 24

Carers Trust has previously identified mental health as a priority area for support. However, there is still low awareness amongst service providers and commissioners. It is vital that mental health services and schools supporting a child or young person with their mental health ask about caring responsibilities and support that child or young person to get support with caring. Young carers services frequently report a lack of mental health support for this group, beyond what they can provide as a service. This support gap is strongly indicated here:

30% of young carers and half of young adult carers want mental health support.

Over 1/4 of young carers and 37% of young adult carers are struggling to get emotional support.

12% of young carers and 24% of young adult carers want someone to talk to over the phone; 9% of young carers and 17% of young adult carers want someone to talk to on video.

19% of young adult carers are drinking more alcohol and 4% are using illegal drugs to help them cope.

Only 6% of young carers and 9% of young adult carers currently access remote counselling or therapies.

1/3 of young carers and nearly half of young adult carers have struggled to look after themselves (this includes eating well, sleep and exercise)

Mental health services and education providers must support young carers and young adult carers as we enter into a new phase of the pandemic, including return to face to face education.

What has helped young carers and young adult carers? What help would they like?

Despite the pressures they face, young carers and young adult carers have found activities to help them cope. Service providers and commissioners should consider adding these activities to what they provide or commission, and consider how support packages can meet assessed needs – to enable and empower young carers and young adult carers to carry on with the activities they enjoy.

Coping mechanisms and activities		
	Young carers	Young adult carers
Listening to music	71%	73%
Talking to friends and family	55%	43%
Exercising	39%	41%
Computer games	36%	28%
Reading books	29%	26%
Local carers services (including online and remote)	24%	20%

The sector has responded creatively and flexibly to be able to support young carers and young adult carers at this time. In a separate question, **71% of young carers and 53% of young adult carers agreed their respective carers support services are giving them the support they need.**

They have also clearly identified what they don't have but feel they need, which we must act upon, especially if there are future restrictions to social distancing or further advice to those who are shielding. Existing support may also need to be better publicised and referrals improved, including young carers services and young adult carers services. In addition to the mental health and emotional support and breaks (described above) and education (described below) they would value:

Over half of young carers and 43% of young adult carers want ideas of things to do at home.

Over ¼ of young carers and over 1/3 of young adult carers want support to stay healthy.

18% of young carers and 27% of young adult carers would like more information and practical advice or tips to help them cope.

10% of young carers and 19% of young adult carers want help to plan for an emergency.

17% of young carers and ¼ of young adult carers want virtual peer support from other young carers and young adult carers.

15% of young carers and 21% of young adult carers would like practical support such as shopping.



Section 3:

Education

Most young carers and young adult carers are juggling their caring roles alongside school, college, university or work. Like other children and young people, they have goals and aspirations. Without the right support, young carers and young adult carers are at risk of lower exam results, and spending less time in education. This has consequences for their higher and further education, and employment.

24% of young carers and 23% of young adult carers said studying is a coping mechanism – indicating that this has a dual role in their lives.

56% of young carers and 39% of young adult carers said their education is suffering.

44% of young carers and 30% of young adult carers would like more support with their education.

41% of young carers said they didn't have enough time to spend on schoolwork.

Programmes such as **Young Carers in Schools**, led in England by Carers Trust and The Children's Society, as well as other nation initiatives in primary-tertiary education (nation specific briefings available), show that the right support in education can make a real difference to young carers. We have produced materials for schools, as they re-open, to help them support young carers as they re-engage in learning.

15% of young carers said that support from school or an individual teacher has helped them to cope with life since the pandemic.

Carers Trust Count Me In! campaign calls on compulsory education providers to do more to proactively identify young carers and to ensure that they receive the recognition and support they deserve. We also want local authorities to have the funding to improve the assessment and support they provide to young carers and young adult carers.

“ I feel like I have no break, school and education was my escape, my safe haven. I feel lost and forgotten by the government and school. I fear that my A' Level results will suffer greatly due to increased caring and my mental health has got worse. I hope that university will take this into account but I don't think they will because when you care for someone you are often forgotten. ”

Young adult carer, aged 19

Section 4:

Friendships

Young carers and young adult carers have often found it hard – without adequate support for the person they care for – to maintain friendships. During lockdown, and a reduction in time in education and with support services, it is clear that this has become even harder for young carers and young adult carers.

2/3 young carers and 71% of young adult carers are less able to stay in touch with friends.

This has contributed to many feeling lonely and isolated, and impacting their mental health.

69% of both young carers and young adult carers say they feel less connected to others than they did before the pandemic.

Feel more alone ... I used to have one night a week at my bestie's house to catch up and have some time out but I obviously can't [now].

“”

Young adult carer, aged 24

...I'm struggling to get all the schoolwork done, as there is a lot. I miss going to young carers group; I miss my friends there and speaking to people like the youth workers to get support, advice or help with things.

Young carer, aged 15



Section 5:

Amongst the struggles of this time, some positives have occurred.

42% of young carers and 25% of young adult carers have built a stronger relationship with the person they care for.

40% of young carers and 28% of young adult carers have learnt a new skill, such as cooking, during this time.

As I have to shield due to the person I care for's health, I have felt fairly isolated. Having just moved away to uni and being able to be more independent with no one particularly relying on my for once in my life, coming back home and back into the caring stress has been not the best experience, especially since I literally can't go somewhere else to get away from it. However, I have had the opportunity to get closer to the person I care for, due to spending so much time together.

“”

Young adult carer, aged 19

I am able to spend more time with the person I care for, we are able to build up our relationship so we can become a lot closer together and becoming closer as a family.

Young carer, aged 17

Thank you:

- The 961 young carers and young adult carers who gave their time to complete our survey.
- The young carers and young adult carers who guide and inform our work.
- The committed and skilled young carers and young adult carers support workers within our Network Partners and in the wider sector who continue to provide invaluable support.
- Our partners and colleagues in government, arm's length bodies, local authorities, local health boards and trusts, education consortia, research bodies and third sector organisations who supported so many young carers and young adult carers to have their say.
- Carers Trust survey project team.

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