

# Top tips

## Young Carers on the School Census



Our Time

for children of parents  
with a mental illness



Young Carers  
Alliance

# 12 manageable steps

**It's important to recognise pupils who may be caring for a parent with a mental illness. Schools need to note these children as young carers and potential carers on the January 2023 census for the very first time.**

**Here are our top tips on how to approach this:**

## 1. Who should be counted?

Review the existing family information, including safeguarding and concern records - open and closed - where notes have been held about parents' mental health, however minor. It's important to have these children on the radar so that support can be provided quickly if needed.

## 2. Think beyond your school

Check with colleagues in feeder primary or secondary schools, so that you collect and share family information consistently.

## 3. Information capture

Consider how you will record the information. Will you use your safeguarding system, will you ask staff to note on the register or provide a specific simple form for staff and families?

## 4. Talking to staff

Every adult in school has a role to play, and your staff need to know how and why they will be helping. Help them to feel comfortable and equipped to deal with the issue. Many staff know children of parents with a mental illness but feel reluctant to recognise it for fear of hurting the families' feelings, or because they don't know what to do next. Encourage open sharing within the school so that you can review all information available and provide mental health support for staff. This way you are developing a whole-school approach.

## 5. Which children?

Look at 'How to identify children of parents with a mental illness' diagram below and share it with your staff. Consider children who have poor attendance, are late, appear tired in class, or have difficulty concentrating.. Look for children who are withdrawn and isolated, lacking friends, and may be bullied in the playground.



## 6. Talk to parents and families

Parents may be anxious about their children being labelled 'young carers'. Reassure them that capturing this information doesn't mean that social care will be notified or involved, it means that support can be given when it's needed. Sometimes parents are not well-connected with school and don't turn up to consultations or events. Be alert to those with whom you may have had a difficult interaction.





## 7. Which questions should you ask?

Think carefully about how you ask for information. Be sensitive to parents' reluctance to see themselves as being 'cared for' by their child. Many don't ask for help because they feel shame or have never spoken openly about mental illness within the family. Frame questions carefully: rather than asking parents "Is your child a young carer because you have a mental or physical illness?" ask "Does your child ever provide emotional or practical support for you or the family because of your mental health difficulties?" or "Might it have an impact on your child when your mental health isn't good?".

## 8. Stigma and shame

Talking openly about mental illness in the whole-school community tackles stigma, reduces the shame children feel and improves the likelihood of them asking for support. Develop professional curiosity, while being mindful and respectful of sensitivities and anxiety families may have.

## 9. School policies

Supporting these students works best if you develop policies that are based on what young people say they want and need. Sometimes a quiet space for homework or knowing there's someone at school to talk to can really help.

## 10. Working together for children

Make your communications general and positive. Remember: sometimes parents feel embarrassed, fear judgement, or worry their child will be bullied. Build an alliance with all parents, in which you share information and work together for the child's wellbeing and academic success.



## 11. When should I do this?

Start gathering your information soon, so that you have time to review and make adjustments before the collection deadline.

## 12. What if I have more questions?

If you're not sure what to do next go to:

Our partners at Caring Together to discover more resources

**[www.caringtogether.org/schoolcensus](http://www.caringtogether.org/schoolcensus)**

or contact [schools@ourtime.org.uk](mailto:schools@ourtime.org.uk) if you need more information and support.