

The information in this leaflet is correct at the time of writing (January 2007) and applies to England and Wales. The information contained in this leaflet is not an authoritative statement of the law.



How do I get help?

Carer's assessments made clear



Every carer needs help with practical tasks. Your local council has a responsibility to help disabled people and people who look after them – unpaid carers.

They can help with things like:

- Changes to the home and equipment to help you
- Someone to help with personal care (e.g. bathing)
- A meal delivered to the person you care for
- A few hours break for yourself on a regular basis
- A few weeks break once in a while
- A discussion about permanent residential care
- Counselling/talking to someone
- To be put in touch with other carers
- Information about what is available and the costs
- Information about benefits and other financial help

The way that disabled people and carers get help is through an assessment – a community care assessment for the disabled person and a carers assessment for you.



WHAT?

What is a carer's assessment?

Carer's assessments are a way of identifying your needs as a carer. A carer's assessment looks at your role as a carer: how being a carer affects you, how much caring you can realistically do (while still allowing you to be involved in other activities outside caring) and any help you may need to fulfil this role.

A social worker will carry out the assessment and then let you know what help they can offer.

How is a carers assessment different to a community care assessment?

Community care assessments are for people who feel they need help because of a disability/health issue/old age. This assessment looks at the help they need to be able to live independently, or if they need full time care in a residential setting.

The role and views of the disabled person's carer should be taken into account during this assessment, but will not be the focus. The carer's needs are unlikely to be looked into in any detail, this will happen in the carer's assessment.

WHO?

Who can have a carer's assessment?

The law says that anyone who cares for someone for 'a substantial amount of time on a regular basis' can have a carer's assessment. No definition of 'substantial' is given, so if you feel you devote a lot of time to caring for someone and you do this regularly, you can have a carers assessment. It is not linked to Carer's Allowance.

This includes carers who:

- Live with the person they care for
- Live away from the person they care for
- Care for someone full time
- Care for someone as well as working full or part time

I am thinking of giving up work to care full time - can I ask for a carer's assessment now?

Yes. It's up to you when you ask for a carer's assessment. You could ask before you give up work so that you have a chance to discuss your options and find out about the help that may be available once you stop work, or you can wait until you are caring full time and discuss your situation then.

If you ask for an assessment before you leave work, you can still ask for a re-assessment of your needs if your circumstances change, or if your situation as a full time carer is not as you had planned/expected.





I left work to care for my mum full time, but I now want to return to work/studying – can I ask for a carer’s assessment?

Yes. The assessment must look at your wish to start work or study and the help that you may need to be able to do this e.g. someone to look after your mum while you are at work/college.

My brother and sister and I care for my mother throughout the week; can we all have a carers assessment?

Yes; as long as you are all providing ‘substantial and regular’ care (see above), you are all carers and so can all have a carer’s assessment.

I live 30 miles away from my mum, in a different district, but I still drive over to help out several times a week. Can I still have a carers assessment?

Yes, you are still a carer, so you have the right to a carer’s assessment. Usually, the carer’s assessment would be done by the social work team in the area your mother lives.

Does the person I care for have to have a social worker for me to have a carer’s assessment?

No. Even if the person you care for has been offered and refused a community care assessment about their needs, you still have the right to a carer’s assessment to look at your needs.

I was asked if I wanted a carer’s assessment when I started caring, but refused it. I am now finding it hard to cope. Can I ask for a carer’s assessment now?

Yes. People’s situations change for many reasons, and along with this their capacity to care and their need for support, so your right to a carer’s assessment continues throughout your caring role and you can ask for an assessment at any time.

I live at the other end of the country to my mother so I can’t offer regular care, will my views still be taken into account?

Yes, although you may not be able to get a carer’s assessment as you are not providing regular and substantial care, your views should still be taken into account in your mother’s community care assessment. Make sure your mother’s social worker knows about your role in your mother’s care so that you are invited to meetings etc.

HOW?

How do I arrange a carer’s assessment? Who do I ask?

You must request a carer’s assessment, but the Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004 says that all local authorities/councils must inform carers of their right to an assessment so you may be offered an assessment once social services are aware that you are a carer.

The best way to request a carer’s assessment is to write to the social worker responsible for the person you care for (see the example letter overleaf). If the person you care for doesn’t have a (named) social worker, you can write to the duty social work team at your local social services department and they should allocate your case to a social worker to carry out.

You could also request a carer’s assessment by phone, but it is a good idea to follow up this request with a letter.

What can I do if social services refuse to carry out a carer’s assessment?

Social services cannot refuse to carry out an assessment if you are providing regular and substantial care for someone (see p1). In the first instance, complain to your local social services department, quoting your right to an assessment under the Carers & Disabled Children Act 2000. If they still refuse you should seek further advice about taking them to court.

Who will carry out the carer’s assessment?

The carer’s assessment will be done by a social worker or another professional nominated by social services. In some areas, social services ask local voluntary organisations to carry out the assessment, but arrangements should still be made through social services. Your social services department should explain who will carry out the assessment.

Where will the assessment take place?

The assessment should be carried out in a convenient and private place. For example, this could be at social services’ office or at your home. Assessments can be done over the phone if this is the best way for you (e.g. fits in with your routine or offers more privacy). The social worker carrying out the assessment should discuss this with you beforehand.



Is the carer's assessment part of the community care assessment the person I care for has?

No. Your role as carer will be discussed in the community care assessment of the person you care for, but only to look at the help the person you care for needs and gets. The two assessments can become confused so it is important that the carer's assessment is done separately and focuses on your needs as a carer i.e. the help you need to enable you to care.

Does the person I care for have to be present when I have my carer's assessment?

No, the carer's assessment is about you and your needs, and you can ask for it to be done without the person you care for being present. This is something the social worker should ask about when arrangements are made about where and when the assessment will be done.

Will I have to fill in a lot of forms during the assessment?

There may be some forms to fill in (especially when you first contact social services), but you can ask for help to complete these if you need it. During the carers assessment meeting, the social worker should complete any necessary forms.

What kind of questions will I be asked during the carers assessment?

The areas your carer's assessment should look at include:

- Your housing situation
- Your health (and if there is any impact from caring)
- What kind and how much care you provide
- How you feel about your caring role
- Any work, study or leisure activities you do or would like to do. This is specified in the Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004.

Example letter

Your name

Your address

Your telephone number

Date

Social services address

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing to request a carers assessment under the **Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000**.

I have been caring for [name and address of the person you care for] since [date].

OR

I will be caring for [name of the person you will soon start caring for] from [date].

S/he is my [mother/husband/son/friend etc.].

[Name of person you care for] needs help because [outline the disabilities the person you care for has e.g. she is 90, has arthritis and is becoming frail]. The main things s/he needs help with are [e.g. having a bath, dressing etc.].

The main difficulties I have are [list the things you need e.g. a break from caring].

Please contact me at the above address/on the above phone number [NB. state how you prefer to be contacted and, if by phone, if there is a good time to contact you] to let me know when you will be able to carry out my assessment.

Yours faithfully

[your name]

For more information about the areas your carer's assessment should cover, see opposite.

It is important that you give as complete a picture as you can about your caring role and are as honest as you can about the care that you provide and how you feel about being a carer. Remember, this is your chance to talk about your needs and how you feel, so use it!

Can someone else come along to my carer's assessment with me (e.g. my husband)?

Yes, you can bring a friend or relative with you to your assessment – it can be very helpful to have someone else there to help you to remember what was said, or to make sure that you ask all the questions you want to ask.



CARERS ASSESSMENTS – what you might be asked

Your carers assessment should cover the following areas. Even if you are not asked questions about these issues, you can raise them in the assessment meeting.

By answering the following questions, you should get a much clearer idea of your needs and can then discuss with your social worker the services that might be most helpful to you.

Work/study/leisure

Do you work? If so, for how many hours a week? Does your employer know that you are a carer – do they know about your rights, e.g. to time off in an emergency? Do you feel you can manage to work and provide care? What would make working/caring easier for you?

Would you like to start work/study?

Are there things that you find enjoyable and relaxing that you can't do any more because of your caring responsibilities? (e.g. a hobby, visiting friends, going to the cinema)

When was the last time you had a whole day to yourself to do as you pleased?

Health

Does the person you care for have any health problems you find hard to deal with? Describe them as fully as you can.

Do you have any health problems? If so, are they made worse by your caring role? Describe as fully as you can.

Are you getting enough sleep?

Do you feel you are suffering from stress or depression?

Time

How many hours a week do you provide care? Include all the time you spend with the person you care for, the things you do for them and how long they take you – the answer may surprise you!

Do you have to help with:

- Housework?
- Shopping?
- Bathing?
- Toileting?
- Cooking?
- Other personal care?
- Keeping an eye on them?
- Dealing with money (e.g. cashing pension)?
- Laundry?

Do you have to help during the day or night, or both?

Does anyone else help? If so, for how long?

Would you like some help (or extra help) with these jobs? List the tasks you would like help with (putting the most important first).

Feelings and choices about caring role

Do you feel that you don't have a choice about providing care? If you feel that you cannot carry on at all, or can only carry on if you reduce the amount of caring you do, tell the social worker. It is not unusual to feel this way and it is important they know how you really feel.

What would you like to change most about your situation?

Housing

Do you live with the person you care for? Is the arrangement satisfactory? If not, why not?

Does the person you care for have any difficulties moving around their home? (e.g. can they climb the stairs, or have a bath on their own?) Do you have to help them? If so, are you able to do this safely and without causing yourself any pain or injury? Special equipment could make life easier for the person you look after and caring easier for you.



WHAT NEXT?

How will I be told the outcome of my carer's assessment?

Following the assessment meeting, the social worker should draw up a care plan of your needs as a carer. You should be given a copy of this.

If the person you care for had a community care assessment, they should have their own care plan; if you were also involved in their assessment, you can ask for a copy of the care plan too.

As your carer's assessment can also affect the community care assessment of the person you look after, some of your assessed needs may be reflected in the community care assessment of the person you care for, and services could be provided for them instead of directly to you e.g. your need for a break may be met by providing alternative care for the person you care for.

What kind of help/services could I be offered in my own right?

The help you can be offered varies from person to person and from one local authority to another, but the things that social services may consider include transport, gardening equipment, a telephone, driving lessons, details of local support available, etc.

The carer's assessment may also show that you need alternative care for the person you care for in order to give you the break you need from caring. If the person you care for has also been assessed by social services, it may be that the need for break services is included in their care plan rather than yours, so check carefully.

When you have a carer's assessment, it should also include planning for emergencies e.g. to make sure your mum would be looked after if you were taken ill and had to go into hospital. Some areas have a Carer Emergency Scheme, through this scheme you can contact a scheme operator who will have access to your emergency plan and will put it into action. Your social worker should be able to tell you more about what they can do to help you plan for an emergency.

For more information about planning for emergencies, and to find out if there is a Carer Emergency Scheme in your area, see Carers UK's 'Back Me Up' campaign at www.carersuk.org/Newsandcampaigns/BackMeUp or call CarersLine on 0808 808 7777.

Do I have to accept all the help/services I am offered?

No. If you do not feel the help you are offered is necessary/appropriate, you can refuse it. Please think very carefully before doing this – it may be that by talking it through with your social worker, more suitable arrangements can be made.





How will the services offered be provided?

Social services can provide the help/services outlined in your care plan (e.g. arrange alternative care to give you a break), or you can ask for Direct Payments instead. If you choose to get Direct Payments, you will get the money to the value of the services that you would otherwise be provided with, and you would then have to arrange your own services with this money.

Can social services charge me (or the person I care for) for the services they provide?

You can be charged by social services for the help they give you; whether you are charged and how much depends on your local authority/council. You can only be charged for services provided directly for you (through your carer's assessment); if services are provided for the person you care for, they can be charged separately for this. Local authorities have the discretion to charge or not, but if they do choose to charge their customers, they must follow statutory guidelines.

What if the assessment says that my house needs adapting; can I get any help to pay for this?

There are some grants that can be paid to help with the costs of aids and adaptations to the home, for more information contact the Disabled Living Foundation on 0845 130 9177.

What is the Carers Grant? Can I apply for this to pay for the services I need?

A 'Special Grant for Carers' [Carers Grant] is paid to each local authority to help them to provide services to enable carers to take a break. Unfortunately, the Carers Grant is not a pot of money that you can apply for. Different local authorities spend the money in different ways; your local authority should be able to tell you more about how they are spending their grant.

Will my carer's assessment and the services I get be reviewed?

Yes, you can ask for a re-assessment at any time if your circumstances change. If you don't request a re-assessment, social services should organise a review; it is recommended that reviews are carried out at least once a year – they will contact you about this.

NOT HAPPY?

What can I do if I'm not happy with the way the assessment was carried out or with the care plan drawn up for me?

If you are not happy with the way you have been treated, or with the outcome of an assessment, you can complain to social services. All social services departments should have a complaints procedure that you can follow – ask your social worker for a copy.

If you are not happy with the outcome of your complaint, you may be able to take a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Your social services department should be able to give you more information about this.

If social services have acted unlawfully (e.g. have refused to carry out a carer's assessment without good reason), you may be able to take them to court ('judicial review') – if this is the case, seek legal advice.

What can I do if I'm not happy with the services provided after the assessment?

If you are not happy with the services provided, you can complain to social services. If care is provided by an agency or care home, you may also be able to complain directly to them through their own complaints procedure.





GLOSSARY

Social services – The department in your local council responsible for providing support for old/disabled people and their families and carers

Social worker – Someone who works for social services to assess the needs of, and arrange support for old/disabled people and their families and carers. In some areas social workers are known as care managers

Care plan – A summary of a person's needs and how they will be met i.e. what services and support will be provided, sent out following an assessment by social services

Ombudsman – The government official responsible for dealing with complaints about state services

LEGAL REFERENCES

The carers rights outlined in this factsheet are all contained in the following legislation:

- The Disabled Person's (Services, Consultation & Representation) Act 1986
- The Carers (Recognition & Services) Act 1995
- The Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000
- The Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004
- Carers and Disabled Children Act Practice Guidance (2000) / Carers And Disabled Children Act 2000 and Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004 Combined Policy Guidance (2005)

MORE HELP

CarersLine 0808 808 7777 (Wednesdays & Thursdays 10am-12noon and 2-4pm) www.carersuk.org

Your local **Citizen's Advice Bureau** – to find details, check your local phone book or go to www.adviceguide.org.uk

Disability Law Service www.dls.org.uk – to make an appointment to speak to a case worker, phone 020 7791 9800

Community Legal Service Direct – to find out about local legal services phone 0845 345 4 345 or www.clsdirect.org.uk

CARERS UK

the voice of carers

Carers provide unpaid care by looking after an ill, frail or disabled family member, friend or partner. Carers give so much to society yet as a consequence of caring, they experience ill health, poverty and discrimination.

Carers UK is an organisation of carers fighting to end this injustice. We will not stop until people recognise the true value of carers' contribution to society and carers get the practical, financial and emotional support they need.

Carers UK is here to improve carers' lives.

- We make sure carers understand their rights and know how to get support.
- We gather hard evidence about what needs to change.
- We mobilise carers and supporters to influence decision-makers.
- We transform the understanding of caring so that carers are valued and not discriminated against.

JOIN CARERS UK TODAY

Carers UK welcomes carers, former carers and others who support our aims, to become members. By joining Carers UK your support will help us keep on campaigning. Adding your voice will strengthen our power to make a difference for the UK's six million carers. As a member you will receive information about your rights, a free copy of our magazine *Caring*, along with regular updates on our work.

www.carersuk.org

info@carersuk.org

Membership line: 020 7566 7602

CarersLine: 0808 808 7777

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