

**Are you looking
after someone
unpaid?**

**Essential
information for
unpaid carers**

Headline supporter

The British Gas logo, featuring a stylized flame icon above the text "British Gas".

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What is Carers Week?



Carers Week was established by Carers UK over 25 years ago. It is an annual campaign to raise awareness of caring, offer support to carers and highlight the challenges they're facing.

This year, Carers Week is more important than ever. Caring can be hugely rewarding but it can also have an impact on all aspects of your life. Looking after someone without the right information and support can be tough.

Carers Week 2020 is brought to you by six charities working together to raise awareness of caring. Led by **Carers UK**, these charities are **Age UK, Carers Trust, Motor Neurone Disease (MND) Association, Oxfam GB and Rethink Mental Illness.**

You can find information about these charities at the end of this booklet.

Are you an unpaid carer?

A carer is someone who provides unpaid care and support to a family member or friend who has a disability, illness, mental health condition, or who needs extra help as they grow older. It isn't someone who volunteers to provide support.

Caring is often part and parcel of family life and close friendships, and even more so during the coronavirus outbreak.

Every day 6,000 people in the UK start looking after someone close to them, unpaid. For many, caring is something that happens gradually when someone becomes older, or has a progressive illness. For others, it arises suddenly, for example, as the result of an accident, stroke or because of coronavirus, leading to the need for a longer recovery and more support.

Caring is something that will affect each and every one of us, whether we become a carer or need care ourselves.

10 steps to help you

Whether you are new to caring or have been looking after someone for years, we hope that you will find this booklet useful.

Our 10 steps on the following pages should help you to think about the support you might need:

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Step 1. Make Caring Visible: ask questions and talk about caring

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Understand what caring means

The amount and type of support carers provide varies, but most caring remains hidden. You may spend a few hours a week picking up prescriptions and preparing meals for the person you care for. Or you could be providing emotional or personal care around the clock.

Think how caring affects you

It's important that you think about how taking on this role might affect you and those around you. Caring can have a significant impact on your health, work, relationships, and finances.

Start by talking to family and friends – do you have shared concerns and worries?

Get connected to support: If you suddenly find that you are now a carer, try to make the time to find out about local and national organisations and support groups that can help you.



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**Making
Caring
Visible**

Step 2: Look after your own health and wellbeing



At times it may seem that your own life is swallowed up by your role as a carer. It can be hard to find the time to look after your own mental and physical health when you're taking care of someone else, especially during recent months.

You may struggle to get a good night's sleep and you may have to handle many difficult decisions at once. Sometimes stress can creep up on us, and it's helpful to talk about how we feel rather than hoping the stress will go away. **Rethink Mental Illness** has resources on their website that can help you if you are worried about your own mental health.

Where possible, finding time to exercise is important. You can look at a collection of different resources here to keep fit even if you cannot go out and about: carersuk.org/help-and-advice/coronavirus-covid-19/keeping-active-and-well.

With the added demands of caring during the COVID-19 outbreak, you may feel particularly run down and in need of a break, especially if the usual respite services you use have closed temporarily.

If you don't have any friends or family to help provide care, you could contact your local council or trust (in Northern Ireland) to ask for some support. If friends or relatives do step in to provide care on your behalf, it is important that they follow the government guidelines. To seek more support, particularly in the long-term, you could also arrange a carer's assessment (see page 14).



Step 3. Talk to your employer



If you are balancing paid work with caring, it is worth checking out your company's policies and procedures with regard to caring responsibilities. Many will have changed since the start of the coronavirus outbreak and will offer more flexibility.

As a working carer, you are likely to need support at different times – such as being able to make a call during working hours to check on the person you care for.

You also have a right to request flexible working and time off to look after dependants in an emergency. During the coronavirus outbreak, furloughing rules can also apply to carers.

Carers UK and **Motor Neurone Disease Association** have lots of information on how to talk to your employer about caring and your rights at work.



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Step 4. Think about your finances



Caring can take its toll on your finances and it's often something that you're not prepared for. You might face extra costs. You might see a rise in your heating bills or have extra equipment to buy. You might also have to reduce your working hours or decide to give up work entirely.

Age UK, **Carers UK** and other Carers Week supporter charities can help explain the impact caring might have on your finances and where you can access support – including a benefits check.

MND has a benefits advice service with a chat facility: mndassociation.org/support-and-information/our-services/benefits-advice.

You can also get in touch with Citizens Advice. You may be eligible for financial assistance through a variety of benefits.

Carers UK's information and advice web pages are regularly updated with any changes as a result of the coronavirus outbreak and can also help point you in the right direction.

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Step 5: Use technology to support your caring activities



Since the coronavirus outbreak, most of us have had to rely on technology more, connecting online with friends, family and now GPs and pharmacies. There's also technology available to make the home safer and your life as a carer easier.

Whilst technology can never replace being with others, simple devices and apps can help people connect and manage care on a day-to-day basis. They may also help someone live independently for longer and give you peace of mind when you cannot be around.

Carers UK has lots of information about how technology can help with caring.

Connecting with other carers through online forums can also provide you with emotional support. Increasingly, these are being run by national and local groups, especially since the coronavirus outbreak.

If you are unsure about using the internet, local **Age UKs** can help older people to get online.



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Step 6: Find out about available support



The right support can change your life. Your local council (or Health and Social Care Trust in Northern Ireland) can tell you about local support groups and services available in your area. They can also tell you what rights you have. For example, by arranging a carer's assessment, you can explore what your needs are and what different types of support are available, from emotional assistance to practical help – such as support with care workers in the home.

Councils and local organisations also have information about how to get help if you cannot access food or medication including how volunteers can help.

Many of the Carers Week supporter charities provide guidance, including **Age UK**, who offer support for older people, and **Carers Trust**, who have a network of local services providing support to carers. They also have a grants programme that can provide one off payments for support.

Carers UK also has a directory of local carers organisations and a forum for carers.

Volunteer schemes are also available to help carers – there are contacts at the end of this leaflet, or take a look at the website of your local council or health and social care trust (in Northern Ireland).



Step 7. Plan for the unexpected



It's important to think about what you could do if something goes wrong or your situation changes suddenly. This has been at the top of carers' minds during the coronavirus crisis.

Could family and friends help you? Do you have contact details handy to get in touch with people in an emergency? Some areas have been running emergency card schemes for carers for a while. They are often set up by the local council (or trust) or your local carers' organisation.

Try to keep up to date records covering key information about the person you care for and keep these details safe and in the same place. They could include treatment records, medication changes, admissions to hospital, and so on.

Talking to sources of support such as your local carers' service, local **Age UK**, local **Rethink Mental Illness** or local **MND group** may be helpful.

Carers UK also has information on contingency planning [here](#).

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Step 8. Connect with other carers



It's common to feel lonely or isolated as a carer, especially as friends and family might not understand how tough it can be. It may have been especially hard over the last few months.

Many find that meeting other carers, chatting online and getting support from those in a similar situation can help. All the supporter charities involved in Carers Week provide opportunities to get in touch, through online forums and social networks, helplines and local support groups. **Carers Trust** and **Carers UK** have online directories where you can find out about services near you.

Find out what activities are happening throughout this year's Carers Week at carersweek.org

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Step 9. Find out more about the condition(s)



There may be at least one condition affecting the person you're looking after and you may find that condition changes over time.

Try talking to health professionals like a GP or consultant in the first instance, as they can help you understand what to expect. Pharmacists can also explain the different types of medication the person you're caring for is taking and make you aware of any side effects. Don't be worried about repeating questions or asking for clarification.

There might also be an organisation specific to the condition of the person you care for. Charities such as **Motor Neurone Disease (MND) Association** and **Rethink Mental Illness** offer specialist information for particular conditions and provide support to help families and friends.



Don't be worried about repeating questions or asking for clarification



10. Be prepared for change



The needs of the person you care for may change over time, or unforeseen events, such as the loss of someone close to you or the coronavirus outbreak, may change the support you have or have changed your plans and the way you live your life.

Specialist organisations like **MND Association** or **Rethink Mental Illness** can provide information about changes in conditions and how to manage them. Try to make plans but keep your options open and be ready to revise those plans as things change.

Use the advice and information services of organisations to keep up to date and make plans for the present and short-term to look forward to as well as thinking further ahead.



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Your entitlements

Arranging a carer's assessment

You are entitled to a carer's assessment (or Adult Carer Support Plan in Scotland) if you provide care for someone who has a disability, serious illness or needs support as they grow older.*

A carer's assessment (or Adult Carer Support Plan) is a way of identifying your needs rather than your abilities as a carer. You can ask for one from the local council's social services department or your local Health and Social Care Trust in Northern Ireland. They will then give you more information about how to prepare for your assessment or support plan.

It's important to arrange one when you start caring as it helps you understand how caring may affect you, how much caring you can realistically do and what help may be available. Some councils have online assessments for carers on their websites you can access at any time. Your caring situation may change over time – so it's a good idea to get reassessed.

Your options may seem more limited because of the impact of the coronavirus, but this should be temporary. It's worth checking with your local council/Trust, local carers' organisation or local Age UK/NI what the situation is. If you or the person you care for needs help, continue to persist and seek the support you're entitled to.

* Carers aged 16+ can request a carer's assessment in NI. In Scotland if you are under 18, you can request a young carer statement and in Wales, you would need to contact the children's services department in their local council. In England you can request an assessment if you're 18+.

Further information

Every year Carers Week is brought to you by charities with different specialisms and a shared goal of helping you get the information and support you need in your caring role.

This year's charities are:

Age UK

ageuk.org.uk



Age UK is here for every older person. If you need information or advice on anything from money and benefits to health, care or housing you can call our advice line for free on **0800 678 1602**. It's open every day from 8am-7pm.

Carers Trust

carers.org



Carers Trust works to improve support, services and recognition for anyone living with the challenges of caring, unpaid, for a family member or friend who is ill, frail, disabled or has mental health or addiction problems. Email: info@carers.org

Carers UK

carersuk.org



Carers UK is here to make sure that no matter how complicated your query or your experience, you don't have to care alone. Our telephone helpline is available on **0808 808 7777** from Monday to Friday, 9am – 6pm or you can contact us by email on advice@carersuk.org.

We provide information and guidance to unpaid carers on a range of subjects.

MND Association mndassociation.org



The **Motor Neurone Disease Association** is the only national charity in England, Wales and Northern Ireland focused on improving access to care, research and campaigning for those people living with or affected by motor neurone disease (MND).

You can call MND Association on **0808 802 6262**.

Helpline open Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm and 7pm–10:30pm.

Email: mndconnect@mndassociation.org

Oxfam GB oxfam.org.uk



Oxfam GB is campaigning for better conditions for carers. By carers, they mean anyone who provides care, including parents of children, care workers and unpaid carers. You can find out about their campaign **here**.

Rethink Mental Illness rethink.org



Rethink Mental Illness believe a better life is possible for millions of people affected by mental illness. The Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service offers practical help on issues such as the Mental Health Act, community care, welfare benefits, debt and carers' rights.

You can call their information service on **0300 5000 927**. The line is open from 9:30am–4pm Monday to Friday. For general enquiries, email info@rethink.org

Volunteer schemes

There are voluntary schemes available to support people at higher risk from COVID-19.

They can help with practical matters such as collecting prescriptions and delivering shopping. Your local council or trust's website will have details of local arrangements.

England

Contact the NHS Responder Scheme. Call 0808 196 3646.

Wales

Contact your local authority for support.

Scotland

Contact the national helpline on 0800 111 4000.

Northern Ireland

Call the COVID-19 Community Helpline on 0808 802 0020.





8 – 14 June 2020

Get involved

What can you do to Make Caring Visible?

Join others by Adding Your Voice for Carers Week on our website and encourage others to do the same.

carersweek.org/AddYourVoice

Find out more carersweek.org

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Also supported by



#carersweek

Carers Week has been made possible by Carers UK working with five other national charities.

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