

# Fathers and fatherhood in young carers' families

## Top Tips

### For project workers

*'It was scary to start at the young carers club, scary but good... I found Young Carers Peterborough, as at that point I was very stressed about dad and starting secondary school' - Alex, 13, Peterborough*

1. **Don't assume dads aren't interested.** If you're in touch with a young carer and/or his/her mother, but not the father, don't make the assumption that he isn't around and/or isn't interested: investigate. There is very strong evidence that what dads do, or don't do, can profoundly affect children's health and safety; how they feel about themselves; how well they do at school; and their friendships and other relationships. Fathers' impact lasts lifetimes, and can be passed on through the generations. This provides ample justification for asking about a father's whereabouts and involvement.
2. **Help young carers in separated families stay in touch.** Some young carers live in separated families. This can prove tough, especially if parents are 'at war' and/or they misuse drugs or alcohol. The children may need space to share their feelings and fears, and help to understand that any conflict is something for which they themselves bear no responsibility. Where one parent (usually the father) has moved away, relationships can become strained and the young carer may need support to stay connected. Where the connection has been lost, it may be that it can be re-established. This calls for sensitive work with both the mother and father, and the young carer him or herself.
3. **Provide support where dads are truly absent.** You may be told (by a young person, another family member or a colleague) that a father is absent. Services often leave things there. But father absence is not to be taken lightly, even if your client is the young carer and he/she seems to be relaxed about it. Many children and young people need help to work through their grief if their father has died or is otherwise not around – it's common for children to demonise or idealise fathers with whom they have little or no contact, for example. Sometimes they will accept 'received wisdoms' about him and his actions, or will feel as if they need to present things in a certain way so as not to 'rock the boat' with their mum. Try to focus on supporting the young carer to retain or develop a positive relationship with his or her father and/or father-figures.

4. **Help dads who are being looked after.** In some cases the young carer will be looking after their father, which can be emotionally challenging for both parties. Dads can feel like they should be protecting the family, not being looked after. They may need added support to work through any negative feelings, and to understand what a huge positive impact they can have on their children. Often, services that may be in a position to help either don't 'see' men as fathers, or focus mainly or exclusively on mothers – so be assertive in pursuing effective support.
  
5. **Think creatively about supporting dads.** Men are less likely than women to seek help from, and be in touch with, services; many will also find it difficult to access services within standard 'office hours'. So you may need to be more imaginative when looking for ways to help fathers. Young carers may find themselves in a caring role when their father is out at work; some dads may lack confidence at hands-on caring, or need 'nudging' to understand how important they are in this respect. Some dads may need help and support to negotiate more flexible working hours.

Find out more by visiting The Fatherhood Institute's website: <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/> or the Makewaves platforms fatherhood pages: <https://www.makewav.es/ycif/c/youandyourdad>

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