

A carer is anyone, including children and adults, who provides care and support to a family member, partner or friend who needs help because of their illness, frailty, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction and cannot cope without their support. The care they give is unpaid. 'Care and support' can mean practical help or emotional support. Carers are part of a strengths-based approach and can be key to identifying solutions. They can be a key partner in the care planning process; identifying solutions and providing support. They can help prevent the escalation of needs and provide greater insight into a person's real situation – they are expert partners and should be valued and treated as such. Supporting carers helps to maintain and protect their health and wellbeing and can prevent future carer breakdown that can lead to services providing additional support to both the carer and the person they care for. Caring for someone with ongoing needs can be extremely emotionally and physically demanding. Whilst many carers do this willingly and without complaint, the impact on their own health, wellbeing and capacity or ability to continue caring can go unrecognised, by themselves and others.

More Information

Find out more about the importance of identifying and valuing carers and carer's assessments via a separate Oldham Safeguarding Adults Board [7-Minute Briefing](#). Organisations and resources providing information and/or support for carers include: [Carers First](#), [Carers Trust](#), [Carers UK](#), [Citizens Advice](#), and [Age UK Oldham](#). [Oldham Carers' Services](#) offer a range of free services for unpaid carers and the [Carers Support Group](#) offer peer support for Oldham's unpaid and informal carers. The Positive Steps [Oldham Young Carers Service](#) provides respite, one-to-one support and information to Young Carers aged between 8-18 and their families.

Acknowledge that the carer is important in providing care and, to allow that to continue, their health and wellbeing must be maintained. To help carers access support and healthcare for themselves, arrange appointments flexibly at a time when they can leave the person they care for and considering other commitments like employment. Support carers to address their health needs (physical or mental) as soon as possible. Discuss the value of breaks from the caring role and explain the options available. Provide information and emotional and practical support to carers when circumstances change such as them starting or returning to work; changes in financial circumstances; if the person they care for becomes an adult or moves to adult services or has significant health changes. Consider providing psychosocial and psychoeducational support. This should include developing personalised strategies; building carer skills; advice on looking after their physical and mental health, and emotional and spiritual wellbeing, including information about emotional support services and psychological therapies and accessing them; Psychosocial and psychoeducational support may be needed at different stages. Be alert to the possibility of the carer receiving abuse from the person they care for, particularly if they have behavioural problems. Encourage carers to find healthy ways to relieve stress; this could be any activity that is just for them, that they can look forward to each day and feel better for undertaking.

Stress is caused by the many demands made on a person's time and energy. There can be many different triggers. Stress can be heightened by the expectations people have of themselves and can make it hard to cope with the demands of caring. Carer 'burnout' is a term that means mental, physical or emotional exhaustion that has built up over time. The term 'burnout' was introduced in America in the 1970s by psychologists who used it specifically to describe the stress and exhaustion felt by those in caring roles. Burnout can occur when carers do not get the help they need personally, as they devote all of their time and energy to helping someone else. It occurs when stress gets worse to a point where they are struggling to cope. It can also happen when carers try to do more than they are able to, emotionally, physically or financially, leading to mental and physical distress. Carers who experience burnout may feel tired, stressed, withdrawn, anxious, and depressed. Burnout can impact a person in various ways, including physically, psychologically, socially, and financially. Carer burnout is very common. Studies have shown that more than 60% of carers experience symptoms of burnout.

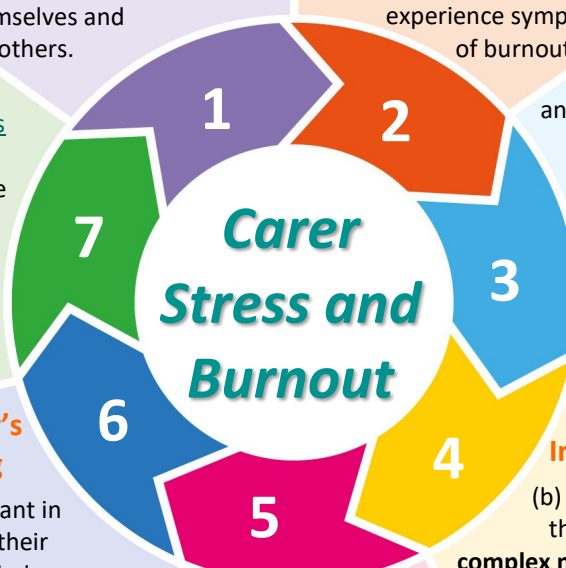
Recognising Increased Risk

All practitioners working with people and their carers should remain alert to the likelihood of carer stress and burnout and actively consider this in care and support planning, and risk and safeguarding analysis. The likelihood of carer stress and burnout occurring can be increased by many factors including: (a) Carers feeling like they are **juggling too many responsibilities** at once. Many experience stress because they see the role as their sole responsibility, even if it is too much for one person to realistically handle. Other people may place more unwanted stress on a primary carer.

Recognising Increased Risk Continued

(b) **Escalating needs** of the person they care for or the person they care for has **behavioural and/or complex needs** leading to the carer increasingly devoting more time and energy to their caring role. (c) **Role confusion** when someone quickly steps into a carer role as it can be difficult to separate this role from their role as a spouse, friend, child or other relationship. Unclear roles can also emerge when multiple family members are assisting in care, which leads to increased stress for everyone. (d) **Lack of control** by carers who may feel frustrated or held back by a lack of finances, resources or skills needed to effectively plan, manage and organise care. (e) **Carers not recognising stress or burnout**; this can impact the quality of care they are able to provide. (f) **Varied expectations** of carers who believe their care will have a positive effect on the person they care for and themselves. The reality is that the role can be very challenging.

The needs of (and risks to) the person being cared for should always be considered alongside the needs of (and risks to) the carer to ensure that any potential harm, abuse, or neglect is appropriately responded to.



Carer Stress and Burnout

Carer's Wellbeing

Carer's Needs

Offer carers opportunities to confidentially discuss their own needs (separately from the person they care for) and encourage them to recognise their caring role and seek support. Consider asking about: health and wellbeing, for example health concerns, levels of stress; details of caring, such as duration of caring role, time spent caring, type of help they provide, and support from family and friends; support services they use; employment; concerns regarding caregiving activities, social isolation, relationship stress, financial strain. Ensure carers know about their right to have a carer's assessment, the benefits and how to obtain one. Ensure carers know they can still access community support without formal assessment. Involve carers in decision-making and care planning for the person they care for and keep them up to date (with the consent of the person being cared for). Ensure carers have access to advice, guidance, and training about appropriate use of equipment and adaptations and safe moving and handling techniques, and involve them in assessments for equipment and adaptations.

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