Getting help from the council as a carer

If you’re supporting someone else as an unpaid carer, you might qualify for help from your local council. This factsheet looks at the carer’s assessment – the process the council uses to work out whether you’re entitled to support – and what support you might get.
About Independent Age

Whatever happens as we get older, we all want to remain independent and live life on our own terms. That’s why, as well as offering regular friendly contact and a strong campaigning voice, Independent Age can provide you and your family with clear, free and impartial advice on the issues that matter: care and support, money and benefits, health and mobility.

A charity founded over 150 years ago, we’re independent so you can be.

The information in this factsheet applies to England only.

If you’re in Wales, contact Age Cymru (0800 022 3444, agecymru.org.uk) for information and advice.

In Scotland, contact Age Scotland (0800 12 44 222, agescotland.org.uk).

In Northern Ireland, contact Age NI (0808 808 7575, ageni.org).

In this factsheet, you’ll find reference to our other free publications. You can order them by calling 0800 319 6789, or by visiting independentage.org/publications
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1. **Am I a carer?**

A carer is someone who helps another person in their day-to-day life who would struggle to cope without their support – usually a relative or friend. The person might need help because of a physical disability, mental health problem, or because of their age, for example. When we refer to carers we mean carers who are unpaid, rather than those who provide care as their job or through a voluntary organisation.

You may be a carer because you have had to step in to support a spouse or partner, or an older relative or friend, who needs your help so that they can continue living in their own home. You may help them to:

- wash and dress
- get regular healthy meals and enough to drink
- get to GP appointments
- keep their home clean and carry out household chores.

Caring doesn’t just mean providing physical help. You might:

- give emotional support
- keep an eye on someone to make sure they’re safe, for example by making sure they take their medication properly
- help with budgeting and financial matters.

You might find it hard to judge whether you’re a carer. For many people, they feel they’re just looking after someone they care about in the same way they would expect to be helped. However, caring for someone in this way can bring challenges and it’s important to seek out the help that’s available. By identifying yourself as a carer, you’re acknowledging the vital role you’re playing and making sure you’ll be able to continue caring in future.
Some examples

Janice lives with her sister Maureen. Maureen is registered blind and needs help with a number of day-to-day tasks, such as getting around their home safely, preparing meals and opening and reading post. Janice is Maureen’s carer.

Gus visits his Mum, Hanne, every day. She has severe depression. Gus provides emotional support, keeps her house clean and safe, and checks that she is taking her medication at the correct time. Gus is Hanne’s carer.

Jasmina had a stroke last year, which has affected her mobility. She lives with her husband, Paul, who is deaf. Paul carries out tasks Jasmina is no longer able to do, such as preparing food and shopping and helping her to get dressed. Jasmina helps Paul to communicate, for example by attending medical appointments with him and alerting him when the doorbell rings. Jasmina and Paul are carers for each other.

Mrs Novak finds it hard to stand for long periods of time and rarely leaves her house. Her neighbour Sally does
some shopping for her once a week and regularly washes her bedding and clothes. She also visits her regularly for a chat, to make sure she gets some company. Mrs Novak’s nephew, Adam, lives in a different part of the country. He visits when he can to help her with household chores and helps her to get to medical appointments. When Sally goes on holiday each year, Adam stays with his aunt for a longer period to help out. Sally and Adam are both carers for Mrs Novak.
2. **What help can I get as a carer?**

Caring can be very rewarding but also challenging. Many people are very happy to provide care to people they are close to, but could probably still benefit from support.

As a carer, you may find that you need:

- **practical support** with things such as housework or shopping and preparing food for you and your family. You might want to take regular or occasional breaks from caring – so you can do things like attend your own medical appointments, see family and friends, or rest – but worry that you’ll be leaving your partner, friend or relative without support.

- **emotional support.** It’s common to feel a mixture of emotions. While you may be happy to care for someone, at times you might also feel inadequate, frustrated, taken for granted, or guilty for feeling upset or resentful about the situation.

- **financial support.** This may be due to the extra costs of being a carer (such as added petrol costs from driving the person you care for to appointments). Your income may also have dropped if you’re unable to carry on working or have had to reduce your working hours since becoming a carer.

- **information.** This could be information about what help is available to you or about how best to look after the person you care for.

It’s important to recognise how you’re feeling and any concerns you have. You may be entitled to help and support, and you shouldn’t feel worried or unsure about asking for it.
In the rest of this factsheet we’ll look at the carer’s assessment. This is the assessment the local council uses to work out whether you qualify for help from them as a carer. However, other help may also be available to you, for example from local support groups or charities. For more information, read our guide *Caring for someone*. 
3. What is a carer's assessment?

A carer’s assessment is a free assessment of your needs as a carer, carried out by the local council. It is a chance for you to discuss your caring responsibilities and how they affect you. The council uses the carer’s assessment to work out:

- whether you need support
- whether you’re willing and able to carry on providing care
- the impact your caring role has on your wellbeing
- what you want to achieve in your day-to-day life
- whether you qualify for help from the council.

Who can have a carer’s assessment?

If you provide unpaid necessary care for someone and it isn’t part of your job, and you need any level of support (or may need it in the future), you have a right to a carer’s assessment. It doesn’t matter how much care you provide, whether it’s practical or emotional support, or what your financial situation is – you are entitled to an assessment.

You don’t necessarily have to ask for a carer’s assessment to get one. Your potential need for support might be picked up on if the council is assessing the needs of the person you care for, for example.

Q: Can I refuse to have a carer’s assessment?

A: Yes, you can. If you change your mind at a later date and request an assessment, the council will have to carry one out at that point.
4. **Arranging a carer’s assessment**

To arrange an assessment, contact the adult social services department of your local council. If you live in a different area to the person you care for, you’ll need to contact the local council for the area they live in. Their details should be in the phone book or search online at [gov.uk/find-local-council](https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council).

If the person you look after hasn’t had a care needs assessment, this can be carried out at the same time. This will work out what care they need and whether they qualify for council help. Read our factsheet **First steps in getting help with your care needs** to find out more. Even if they’re not eligible for any council help, you may still qualify for support as their carer.

You may prefer to have your assessment carried out separately to the assessment of the person you care for, so you can speak more openly for example. A carer’s assessment can be arranged:

- somewhere other than your home
- over the phone
- while the person you care for isn’t at home.

**Good to know**

You have a right to a carer’s assessment and services to meet your assessed needs, even if the person you help isn’t getting council support or has refused a care needs assessment or services.

**Types of assessment**

Carer’s assessments aren’t always carried out face to face. They may take place over the phone or online.
The council must offer you a supported self-assessment if you’re able to undertake this option. This involves completing a questionnaire and then discussing what you’ve written with someone from the council. If you’re interested in this but it hasn’t been offered to you, ask your council’s adult social services department about it. You can also refuse a self-assessment and request a face-to-face or phone assessment instead, if you want to.

Q: How long will I have to wait for my carer’s assessment?

A: Government guidance doesn’t give exact timescales, but says that social services should complete an assessment within a reasonable time. How long you wait will depend on the urgency of your situation. The council should give you an indication of how long it will take and keep you informed throughout the process.

If you think you have been waiting too long for an assessment, consider making a complaint to the council using their complaints procedure.

If you urgently need help, for example if the person you care for has become unwell and you can’t cope on your own, emergency assessments can be arranged for you both. Tell the council if and why there’s any particular urgency when you contact them to arrange an assessment. Social services may also arrange a temporary care package for the person you care for until an assessment can be arranged.
5. Getting help from an independent advocate

An independent advocate is a trained person who can help you to understand and be involved in your carer’s assessment and express your views and wishes. They can also help you to challenge decisions.

The council must arrange for you to have an independent advocate if you don’t have anyone appropriate to help you and you have substantial difficulty with one of the following:

- understanding the relevant information
- remembering that information
- using the information to be involved in your assessment
- communicating your views, wishes and feelings.

If you meet these conditions, the council must arrange an advocate so you can be properly involved throughout the carer’s assessment process. You must also be provided with an advocate if the council prepares or revises a support plan for you – see chapter 12 for more on support plans.

You have the right to decide if someone is an appropriate person to help you, if you have the mental capacity to make that decision. If the council suggests a friend or relative is able to help, but you disagree, you’re entitled to receive help from an independent advocate arranged by the council instead.

If you don’t qualify for an advocate through the council, you can still arrange to have an advocate involved if you want to, and if that resource is available locally. Advocacy services are generally free, and you can contact them directly. The council should be able to tell you about local advocacy schemes.
To do...

Ask the council for details of local advocacy organisations. To find out more about advocacy, see our factsheet Independent advocacy.
6. Preparing for your carer’s assessment?

Top tip

It’s easy to downplay your needs or feel you shouldn’t complain. Try not to do this! There’s nothing wrong with admitting you need help, and if you don’t mention something important in your assessment, you risk not getting the help you need.

The council should provide you with information in advance to explain what will happen at the assessment. This should include a list of questions that will be covered.

You may want to think about how being a carer affects you, what might help, and whether you want to carry on providing all of the care you have been providing. For example:

- are you getting enough sleep or is it disturbed by your caring role?
- is your health affected? If so, how?
- are you able to go out without worrying about the safety of the person you care for?
- are your other relationships being affected?
- do you need information about what support and benefits are available?
- is your caring role having an impact on your job?
- what equipment is needed by the person you care for to enable you to care for them safely?
• do you need any training, for example in first aid or in moving and handling the person you care for?

• do you want to spend less time in your caring role? For example, you may wish to go back to work or attend a course or just have more time to yourself.

It can be helpful to record some of this information in a diary so that you remember to mention it during your assessment.

To do

Don’t forget to tell the council about any communication needs you have, so that adjustments can be made for you at your assessment, such as providing an interpreter or information in large print.
7. **What happens at the assessment?**

A carer’s assessment must look at:

- your needs for support as a carer
- whether you’re willing and able to continue providing the same level of care
- what you want to be able to achieve in your day-to-day life (known as ‘outcomes’ – see below) and whether your caring responsibilities are having any impact on this
- the impact that caring has on your wellbeing
- whether your caring role is sustainable, and consider any possible needs you may have in the future.

The assessment must take into account that the amount of care you provide and the impact this has on you might not always be the same. For example, the condition of the person you are caring for may get worse at certain times. Your need for support may have to be considered over a period of time to take fluctuating needs into account.

The person carrying out the assessment must have the necessary skills and knowledge to undertake the assessment.

**Looking at your need for support**

One of the aims of the assessment is to work out whether you can achieve certain ‘outcomes’. These are as follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The outcomes</th>
<th>Examples of what this means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carrying out any caring responsibilities the carer has for a child</td>
<td>any responsibilities you might have for a child, which could include finding the time to look after a grandchild if you’re responsible for doing this when their parents are unavailable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing care to other persons for whom the carer provides care</td>
<td>being able to look after an adult with care needs, such as an adult child or a husband or wife with care needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintaining a habitable home environment in the carer’s home</td>
<td>keeping your home clean and safe; being able to pay the bills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing and maintaining nutrition</td>
<td>having the time to shop and prepare meals for yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing and maintaining family or other personal relationships</td>
<td>having enough contact with other people, including maintaining current relationships with family and friends, and developing new ones if you don’t have the personal relationships you want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in work, training, education or volunteering</td>
<td>being able to continue a career or apply for a new job, volunteer, continue your</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making use of necessary facilities or services in the local community, including recreational facilities or services</td>
<td>having the opportunity to use services such as local shops, public transport and leisure facilities</td>
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<td>---</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engaging in recreational activities</td>
<td>finding time to do things you enjoy, such as going on holiday or pursuing a hobby</td>
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You may find that your council interprets these outcomes quite narrowly. You may have to put your case forward strongly if you feel they’re underestimating your difficulties, or not including something you have difficulty with.

### Looking at your wellbeing

The assessor must also consider and discuss the impact that being unable to achieve any of the outcomes listed above has on your wellbeing. See chapter 8 for an explanation of what is meant by wellbeing.

You will usually be the best judge of your own wellbeing and need for support, and the council must take this into account. So if being able to continue doing something or doing it in a particular way is important to you, make sure you tell the assessor.
8. How the council works out if you qualify for support

The council uses national eligibility criteria to work out whether or not you qualify for council support.

You will qualify for support if your carer’s assessment shows that the answer to all three of the following questions is ‘yes’:

- Are your needs a result of caring for another adult who needs your help?
- As a result of these needs, is your physical or mental health deteriorating or at risk of deteriorating, or are there any of the outcomes described in chapter 7 that you’re unable to achieve?
- Is this having, or is it likely to have, a significant impact on your wellbeing?

Good to know

The assessor must look at all of the outcomes and each one is equally important. So, an assessor can’t just look at eating and keeping your home habitable, for example.

You’ll be seen as being unable to achieve these outcomes if:

- you can’t do them without help, or
- doing them without help would cause you a lot of pain, distress or anxiety, or
- doing them without help puts your, or other people’s, health or safety at risk.
What does ‘a significant impact on your wellbeing’ mean?

To get council support, it’s not enough to show that you need support and are unable to do certain things because of your caring role. You must also show that this has a significant impact on your wellbeing. But what does this mean?

Wellbeing covers a lot of different areas, including:

- your personal relationships
- your physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing
- your safety, and protection from abuse or neglect
- your financial wellbeing
- your housing situation
- your control over your daily life
- your participation in work, education, training or leisure activities
- your ability to contribute to society
- your dignity.

If your caring role could have a big effect on at least one of the areas of wellbeing mentioned above, then this could be considered a significant impact. Or, if your role has a small effect on several of these areas of wellbeing, this could add up to a significant impact overall.

Using this as a basis, councils have to make their own overall judgment on whether your caring role has a significant impact on your wellbeing. This is personal to you and the impact may be different for people who are in similar circumstances. When they are making this decision, the council should take into account what is most important to you in terms of what you want and need to achieve in life.
An example of someone who may qualify

Jane struggles to find time to exercise because she cares for both of her parents. She really enjoys swimming, and this also greatly eases the pain she suffers in her joints. For Jane, not having the time to exercise could be seen as having a significant impact on her physical wellbeing as well as her emotional wellbeing. This might not be the case for someone in very good health, or who did not enjoy exercising.

An example of someone who may not qualify

Pieter cares for his sister. This leaves him with little time for leisure activities. However, he describes himself as satisfied with the amount of time he has for himself. Friends and family visit regularly, which gives him the company he wants. The council might decide that Pieter’s caring needs don’t have a significant impact on his wellbeing, because although his caring role takes up most of his time he is happy with the amount of leisure time he has.
After your assessment, the council must give you a written record of the assessment – ask if you don’t get one. Check that it’s accurate and that everything relevant has been taken into account. You should also be given a copy of the decision about whether you qualify for support.

If you don’t qualify for support

If you don’t qualify for support from the council, they must provide information and advice about what can be done to meet or reduce your needs and to stop you developing new support needs in the future. The advice should be personalised and specific.

If you disagree with the council’s decision, you might want to challenge it or make a complaint. For example, you might think the assessment isn’t an accurate record of your needs. See our factsheet Complaints about care and health services for more information.

Remember

If you don’t qualify for support from the council, this doesn’t mean you’re not a carer. Other support may be available to you. Read our guide Caring for someone to find out more.

If you do qualify for support

If you qualify for help, the council might provide care and support to the person you care for, or provide you with support directly. This will be discussed with you, and with the person you care for if necessary.
See chapter 12 for more information on what support services might be available to you.

You may be charged for support services – see chapter 10.
10. How much will I have to pay for support services

You may be charged for support services – you’ll be given a financial assessment to work out what you can afford to pay based on your income and savings. However, councils are advised not to charge carers for support provided to them, in recognition of the valuable role that carers play in society. Any charges should not have a negative impact on your ability to look after yourself and the person you care for.

The council must not charge you for care and support provided to the person you care for. You can only be charged for support directly provided to you. For example, if the person you care for agrees to have replacement care to give you a break, you should not pay for this. The person you care for may be charged for these services – they would be given a financial assessment to work out how much they should pay. Read our factsheet Getting a financial assessment for care at home or Paying care home fees to find out more about how they might be charged.

Arranging your care

If the council have decided not to charge you for support, or your financial assessment shows the council will pay something towards your care costs, then they must work with you to create a support plan (see chapter 12) showing how your needs should be met.

You can also ask the council to arrange your support services even if you’ll be paying for them all yourself (self-funding). However, they may charge you for arranging this help.
11. Personal budgets and direct payments

What is a personal budget?

If you qualify for support and the council is paying for some or all of it, the council must prepare a support plan with you to show how your needs are going to be met (see chapter 12).

Everyone who qualifies for financial help from the council has a right to be told what their personal budget is. This is the amount of money that the council has calculated is required to meet your needs as set out in your support plan. The personal budget is the total of:

- any amount that the financial assessment found you would have to pay towards your support (if the council charges carers for support services)
- any amount that the council must pay towards your support as a carer.

What the council must do

The council must:

- be clear about how it calculated your personal budget
- make sure that the budget is high enough to meet your assessed support needs
- take into account the local cost of the type of services you need
- tell you what your estimated personal budget is at the start of the support planning process, so that you can start planning your support knowing how much money is likely to be available
• increase your personal budget if it becomes clear that the amount in the estimated budget isn’t enough to meet your needs.

If your support will be provided through a service to the person you care for (such as replacement care to give you a break from caring), this must be included in the personal budget of the person you care for, not yours.

The council must involve you in deciding how your personal budget is spent. For example, if your support plan says you need support to take part in activities you enjoy, you should have a say in what you use that money for.

**Direct payments**

If the council will be contributing to your personal budget, you can choose to receive this contribution as a direct payment. This means that rather than receiving services from or arranged by the council, you receive money from them to buy services that you feel best meet your eligible needs. This can give you more choice and control. You should still be given information and advice about the local services that can help to meet your needs, even if you’re making arrangements yourself.

You can’t use your direct payment to buy services to meet the needs of the person you care for. The money must only be used to meet your own needs.

Your council may fund a local scheme to provide support for people using direct payments.

For more information, see our factsheet *Social care: ways to use your personal budget.*

**Good to know**

You must be given a copy of your personal budget – ask if you don’t get one.
12. Your support plan

If the council is going to arrange support services for you or pay you a direct payment so you can do so yourself, they must develop a written support plan with you. This sets out how your needs will be met.

You must be fully involved in putting this plan together. The council must also involve the person you are caring for if you wish, and anyone else you request to be involved. You may be entitled to help from an independent advocate while the plan is being written or reviewed (see chapter 5).

What should be in your plan

The support plan must always include:

- what your needs are
- which of your needs qualify for support (eligible needs)
- which needs will be met by the council and how
- how the support services will help you to achieve what you want to in your day-to-day life (your ‘outcomes’) and help your wellbeing
- what your personal budget is
- how to prevent or delay your needs from getting any worse. For example, details of how to arrange respite care
- whether any of your needs will be met by a direct payment (see chapter 11), how much the direct payment is and how often it will be paid to you.
Agreeing your plan

The council must do what they can to agree your final support plan with you. You have the right to receive a copy of it – ask for it if you don’t get one.

If you don’t think your support plan fully meets your needs, raise any concerns with the assessor. You may want to add more information or suggest an amendment.

Good to know

If a care and support plan is also being developed for the person you care for, the council shouldn’t create the two plans in isolation. It should consider combining the plans if appropriate, and if you both agree.

Putting together your support plan: finding out what services are available

The council must provide information about the services available in your local area, including (where possible) how much they cost.

Councils are not limited to meeting your needs in set ways. The types of services suggested will depend on your needs, but might include:

- practical help with things like housework or gardening
- advice about benefits
- emotional support such as counselling and help to relieve stress
- support to improve your wellbeing and take part in leisure activities, such as gym membership or classes
- training to feel more confident in your caring role, such as moving and handling training
• emotional support from other carers, such as attending a local carers group

• breaks from caring.

If your support plan is not meeting your eligible support needs as identified in your carer’s assessment, contact social services as soon as possible. They must sort out the problem. This may include carrying out a review or taking urgent action if necessary.

For more information on being a carer and other support that might be available, such as financial support from Carer’s Allowance or help from charities, read our guide Caring for someone.
13. What can you do if something goes wrong?

Often problems can be sorted by talking to the social worker or their manager. But if this doesn’t work, you have other options.

There are two main ways of trying to resolve disagreements:

- making a complaint
- using a solicitor to pursue a legal case.

**Remember**

There is a time limit for using each of these procedures. It’s important not to miss it. It may be best to consider making a complaint or taking legal action at the same time as trying to sort things out with your social worker, so you don’t miss the deadlines.

You must make your complaint within 12 months of the problem occurring or of you becoming aware of it, although it’s usually better to start the complaint as soon as possible. If you’re unhappy with the outcome of your complaint, you may be able to take it to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (0300 061 0614, lgo.org.uk).

If you decide to pursue a legal case, the time limit is much shorter. If it becomes necessary to start court proceedings, you’re likely to need a judicial review. Judicial review proceedings must be started promptly within three months of the date when there were first grounds for a legal challenge.

It’s sometimes possible to pursue a late complaint or a late legal challenge.
More information, including about how the time limits work, can be found in our factsheet *Complaints about care and health services*.

**To do...**

If you want specialist legal advice, you will need to find a solicitor who specialises in community care law. Read our factsheet *Complaints about care and health services* to find out more.
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Thank you

Independent Age would like to thank those who shared their experiences as this information was being developed, and those who reviewed the information for us.

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