



PLANNING FOR LIFE AFTER 16

Social Services: carers' assessments

About Carers' Assessments

Parents and other carers who support people with disabilities may be entitled to help with their caring responsibilities. A carer's assessment is the process used by Social Services to determine whether you are eligible and, if so, what help you need.

You are entitled to have your needs assessed if you provide unpaid care to someone with a disability 'for a substantial amount of time on a regular basis'. 'Care' means not only 'hands on' help with practical things like washing and cooking, but also supervision if, for example, your son or daughter find social situations confusing or get lost easily. There is no legal definition of 'substantial', but if you have to spend much more time supporting your disabled son or daughter than your other children, you are likely to qualify.

Requesting a Carers' Assessment

If your son or daughter is offered a community care assessment, Social Services may offer you a carer's assessment at the same time. If not, you can contact them directly to request an assessment of your needs. You should do this by writing or emailing the social services department that supports your son or daughter. The National Autistic Society website has a draft letter for requesting a carer's assessment. You can find it on page 10 of the section on *Carers' Rights*. Please see the factsheet *Social Services: Sources of Further Information* for details of the National Autistic Society's website. You are entitled to have your needs assessed even if your son or daughter has refused a community care assessment, and, in some cases, this can be a useful way of drawing attention to their needs as well as your own.

See the factsheets on *Social Services and Community Care Assessments* for more information about Social Services' assessments of young people with disabilities. If your son or daughter has a significant disability and you feel that caring for him or her is seriously impacting on your life, but social services have refused to assess or draw up a care plan for him or her, please contact the Afasic Helpline for further assistance.

Social Services can turn down your request for a carer's assessment if they think you do not qualify.

If they do this, ask them to write to you setting out their reasons. If you do not agree with their decision, you can make a formal complaint. For more information about how to make a complaint about Social Services, see the factsheet *Social Services: Sources of Further Information*.

The assessment process

There is no set format to the process. Social Services often arrange for a social worker to carry out the assessment, but sometimes delegate it to a trained assistant or somebody from your local carer's centre or other voluntary organisation. The assessment will explore how your caring responsibilities impact on your life and should look at things like:

- > Work – If you are not working, is this by choice or because you have to care for your son or daughter? If you are working, do your caring responsibilities restrict your job opportunities in any way?
- > Leisure time – What effect do your caring responsibilities have on your ability to pursue your own interests, or meet up with friends?
- > Going shopping – Do you always have to take your son or daughter with you and does this make things difficult? Or can you only go shopping if someone else is available to care for him or her?
- > Relationships with other family members – How does caring for your son or daughter affect your family life generally, and especially your relationships with your partner and other children? Does it, for example, mean that, if nobody else is available to care for him or her, you cannot go to parents' evenings at your younger children's schools, or attend family events such as a wedding?
- > Health – Are your caring responsibilities impacting, or are likely to impact, on your health and if so, in what way? Are you unable to attend medical appointments unless somebody else is available to care for your son or daughter?
- > Housing – Does your current home present any problems around safety or privacy?

You can also raise any other relevant issues at the assessment. If there is a particular form of support you think would really help you, you can mention this too, explaining why you think it would make such a difference. As with any assessment, it is a good idea to make some notes beforehand so that you do not forget to say anything important.

After the Assessment

The social worker overseeing your assessment will assess how urgently you need help and then categorise you as critical, substantial, moderate or low risk. You will then receive a letter telling you the outcome.

If your needs are assessed as critical, the local authority must act to reduce the pressure on you by providing appropriate support either directly to you, or by increasing or changing the help given to your son or daughter. If they fail to do so, you can file a complaint or possibly take legal action. If you are considering doing this, we would recommend consulting the Afasic Helpline first. The Carers' UK website has a list of the risks that qualify as 'critical'. For details of the Carers' UK website see the factsheet *Social Services: Sources of Further Information*.

If your needs are assessed as substantial, moderate or low risk, Social Services may offer you some support, but note that they are under no legal obligation to do so. You can of course complain if you are not happy with their decision.

If Social Services decide that you are not eligible for support, they should at least signpost you to other local organisations that may be able to help you. Some local charities, for example, provide volunteers who can spend a couple of hours a week with your son or daughter, allowing you the chance to have some time for yourself.

Support for carers

If Social Services offer you help, this may be in the form of support delivered directly to you, or to your son or daughter, or a combination of the two. So, for example, if the assessment identifies that you need more time for yourself, Social Services may either provide a care worker to support your son or daughter at certain times during the week, or arrange for him or her to attend a social group or other activity, or do both.

Social Services often give carers vouchers for short breaks which can be 'cashed in' with a number of recommended agencies. There is, however, no restriction on the type of support Social Services can provide, so do ask for anything you think would help you. If you feel that the support you are offered does not meet your needs, you can refuse it, but you are advised to try negotiating first and see if you can reach agreement on some other form of help.

Social Services will include on your son or daughter's community care plan details of any support they undertake to provide either directly to you, or to him or her on your behalf. If for confidentiality reasons you would rather they did not do this, you can ask for your own carer's plan.

If, at any time, your circumstances change and your current support package is no longer appropriate, you can request a review of your needs.

Carers' Support and Funding

Social Services may require you to pay for any or all of the support they provide. Each local authority has its own policy on whether they will make any charges and, if so, under what circumstances. This is likely to depend on your financial situation and possibly other considerations, such as your level of need, or the type of support they are providing. You should be able to find details of your local authority's policy on their website. Alternatively, ask at your local carers' centre.

You may be able to find details of your local carers' centre on your local authority's website. Alternatively, try the online search facilities on the websites of Carers UK or the Carers Trust (www.carers.org). It can be worth contacting your local carers' centre even if you and your son or daughter do not receive any support directly from Social Services, as they usually offer a range of helpful information and support.

Social Services may offer to provide your support through direct payments, or, if you would prefer to receive help this way, you can ask them to do so. Direct payments means that instead of providing support directly, Social Services give you the funding so that you can decide what help would most suit your needs and arrange it yourself. You are not obliged to accept direct payments if you are offered them. If you like the idea but are worried about the logistics of managing direct payments, Social Services or your local carers' centre may be able to provide assistance or point you in the direction of someone else who can help. Some parent carer forums are now providing information and signposting in relation to direct payments. Your Social Services department or local carers' centre will be able to tell you how to contact the parent carer forum in your area.

Further information

For more information about these or any other related matters, see the factsheet *Social Services: Sources of Further Information* or contact the **Afasic Helpline** on **0300 666 9410** or **0207 490 9420**.