

Information sheet C4 – advice, assessment and support for carers

A “carer” is a family member or a friend who provides someone with care and support. If you are a carer, you have a right to advice, and if you want it, a “carer’s assessment” of your own needs. You don’t have to be providing a lot of care, or to be supporting someone all the time, to be entitled to help. This information sheet explains the help available for carers, and how to access it.

■ What is the difference between advice and a carer’s assessment?

A carer’s assessment is a detailed discussion with a trained member of staff, which will produce a written statement of what your needs are, and what you can do to reduce them, or prevent them from getting worse. If caring is having a significant impact on your wellbeing, the assessment may tell you that you are entitled to publicly-funded support.

You don’t have to have a carer’s assessment to get advice about what support may be available. The countywide organisation Carers Northumberland, a charity which is partly funded by the Council, can give advice and provide support with a wide range of issues that matter to carers. It can also put you in touch with other people in a similar situation, which is sometimes the most useful kind of support. Contact details are over the page.

If the person who you are providing care and support to is having a “needs assessment” themselves (see Information Sheet C1), we recommend that you have a carer’s assessment so that we can make sure that we take account of your needs when we plan how to meet theirs. If you are aged under-18, you should also have a carer’s assessment.

Otherwise, we would usually recommend that you first contact Carers Northumberland. They can give you advice to help you decide whether a formal carer’s assessment would be worth your while at present. If you do want a carer’s assessment, immediately or later on, you are entitled to ask for one.

■ What does a carer’s assessment involve?

If you ask for a full carer’s assessment, we will discuss with you what impact caring is having on a number of areas of your life. We will ask whether there is a risk that caring could harm your own mental or physical health. We will ask whether you have any issues about combining caring with looking after children or other adults who need help. We will ask whether it is creating practical issues about your ability to look after your own home or to eat healthily. We will ask whether you may have difficulty combining caring with paid or voluntary work, or with education or training. We will ask whether caring leaves you with enough time and energy to get to the shops and other places where you need to go, and to take part in leisure activities that matter to you. You may also want to tell us about other ways in which caring is affecting your life.

■ What benefits are there in having a carer’s assessment?

If all you need is some advice, and an opportunity to make contact with other carers, a full carer’s assessment may not give you anything extra. A carer’s assessment is most valuable if you have needs which you want taken into account in the plan for the person you care for, or if you think you need publicly funded support yourself.

■ What support are carers entitled to?

You are entitled to support if you have difficulties in any of the areas of life which we ask about that are having a significant impact on your wellbeing.

Often the most important way to make life easier for you will be to adjust the care and support arrangements for the person you care for. This might mean providing some extra support so that you have time during the day to get some rest or do other things or it may just mean arranging the person's services in a way that doesn't create difficulties for you.

If you are providing a lot of support, or if there are a lot of other things going on in your life, you may need some longer breaks from caring. We will discuss with you how this might best be arranged, and what replacement care will be needed for the person you care for. Obviously the person themselves will need to agree to this. We will also arrange replacement care if you have other plans or commitments which mean that you won't be able to provide care during some periods of time.

Finally, some carers may find that caring leaves them with so little time that they need support with other basic tasks in their lives to enable them to carry on. If necessary we can assist with this. If caring is taking over your life to the extent that you don't have time to deal with your own basic needs, we will want to discuss with you how sustainable this is.

■ Personal budgets and direct payments

Flexibility is often very important for carers. So carers may find it particularly beneficial to take direct control of any funding for support with their needs.

If we agree that you need publicly funded support, we will tell you what we estimate it will cost and whether you will have to contribute (Information Sheet C8 has more information about charges). We will also do the same if we agree to fund care and support for the person you care for. If you decide that you want to control some or all of the money yourselves, we will help you to make the necessary arrangements, and we will agree with you a final figure for how much money you will need. This is called a "direct payment". For instance you can use a direct payment to arrange replacement care directly, to let you take breaks from caring at the times when they will be most beneficial for you. Usually a direct payment for replacement care will be paid to the person you look after, while payments for any support that you need yourself will be paid to you. If the person you look after can't manage the money themselves, you may be able to manage it on their behalf.

Even if you choose to ask us to arrange services for you, we will tell you how much these are costing – this is known as a "personal budget".

■ Contacting Carers Northumberland

Carers Northumberland (www.carersnorthumberland.org.uk) can be contacted at:

- 107-109 Station Road, Ashington, Northumberland, NE63 8RS
- Phone: 01670 320025
- Email: info@carersnorthumberland.org.uk