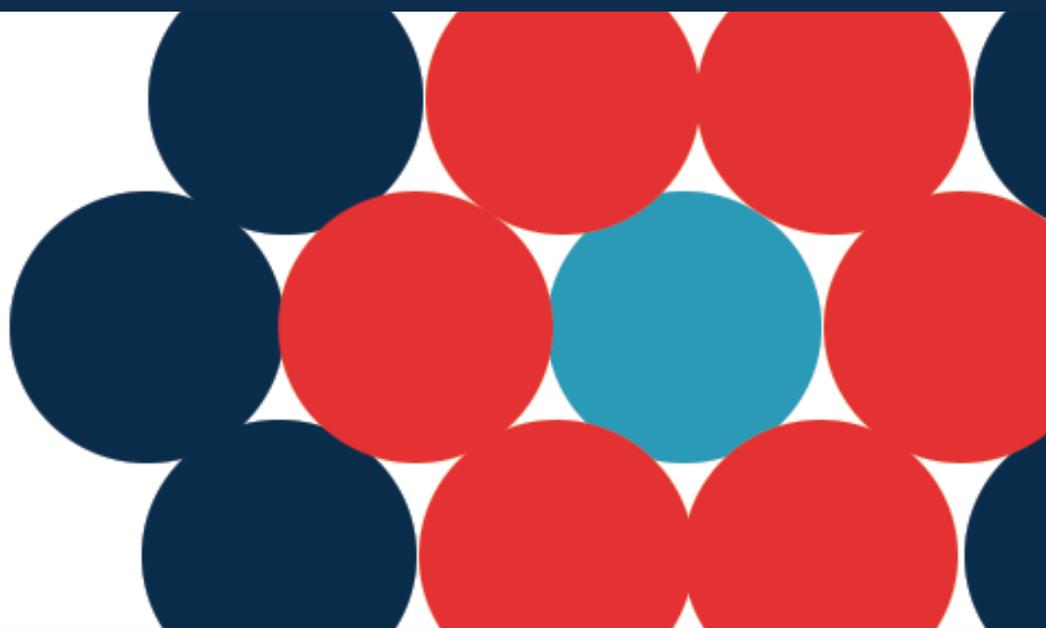


# Tips for carers: getting the most out of your relationship with your social worker

Co-produced with social workers and carers



## Good Practice Principles and Tips for Carers

**Developing a strong and cohesive relationship with your social worker gives you a better opportunity to access the information, advice and assistance that may be available to you.**

In the first year of the Carer Aware project, we developed good practice principles and tips for social workers to help them to support unpaid carers more effectively. We worked with carers and social workers from every part of Wales through focus groups to coproduce these principles. We also held individual interviews with carers to gather carers' experiences and thoughts on what needs to change to make the experiences better.

Based on the experiences shared by carers and social workers, we have produced this set of principles and tips to help you have better conversations.

### Context

Carers Trust Wales and Carers Wales have been awarded funding from Welsh Government to deliver a project called 'Carer Aware'. The following good practice principles and tips have been produced through this project. The project aim is to transform the recognition, respect and support for unpaid carers across health and social care settings. At the heart of the project is a commitment to co-produce sets of principles, practical tips, advice and training to improve service delivery.

From focus groups that we held, it became apparent that there are mutually perceived barriers that need to be broken down to enable more effective communication. It was highlighted that this is particularly important before, during and after a Carers Needs Assessment when you are explaining your caring role and what support you need.

The Social Worker Good Practice Principles have been developed for social workers to remind them of certain things that they need to take into account when working with you.

The aim of this document is to help you understand the process so that you can work more effectively with the social worker during the carers needs assessment. It aims to provide you with the information you need about your rights and to consider ways to enable you and the social worker to communicate better to build lasting, constructive and mutually beneficial relationships.

We explore what your rights are, give you ideas on how to best communicate your needs and a checklist on things to consider before, during and after the assessment. We have also included information on how to communicate during the process of the transition of a child to adult services, hospital discharge and what to consider when preparing for end of life.

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*“Carers and social workers can be allies working together”*

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*“We need social workers to be able to support us through lifechanging experiences”*

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*“Carers need to have confidence in their social worker”*

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*“Both carers and social workers are experts so need to be equal and have mutual respect”*

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## What is a Carers' Needs Assessment?

**A carer's needs assessment is a legal entitlement under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. It is for all carers who, regardless of their age, length of time they spend caring, care for someone who is disabled, ill, has a mental health condition or is older. Your local authority is responsible for providing a carer's needs assessment.**

If the local authority knows that you are a carer, they should offer you an assessment. If they don't offer you one, you can ask the local authority for one at any time. This includes requesting one before you decide to take on a caring responsibility, asking for a review of an existing assessment annually or if your circumstances have changed.

The assessment is an opportunity to discuss with your local authority what support or services you may need to help you with your caring responsibilities. During the assessment, they should also consider what help you may need to help you look after your own health and well-being and also consider what you want to achieve as part of your day-to-day life outside your caring responsibility.

Under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act, information, advice and assistance services have been set up by all local authorities in Wales.

Each council service should be able to help you find support that may be available in your local area that may help with your caring responsibilities. The service:

- Must promote early intervention and prevention to ensure that you can be better supported.
- Should work with you to explore the options that may be available to meet any care or support needs you may have.

- Recognise that you as the individual have a voice and control. This means that social workers should work with you and take into account your personal preferences and needs.

Hopefully by addressing any issues you may have as early as possible, it will prevent you from needing more formal support and services in the longer-term.

The law states:

- Local authorities must offer an assessment to any carers where it appears that they may have needs for support.
- The duty to assess a carer's needs is irrespective of the level of support you may need or the financial resources you or the person you care for may have.
- The carer's needs assessment must include an assessment of the extent to which you are **able and willing** to provide (or continue to provide) care.
- The assessment must consider what personal outcomes you want to achieve such as education and training activities or if you work or want to work.
- If a child is the carer, the assessment must assess the outcomes that the people with parental responsibility for the child carer wish to achieve for the child. For children, the assessment must consider their developmental needs and the extent to which it is appropriate for them to provide care.
- You should receive an appropriate and proportionate assessment of your needs. The assessment must follow the legal obligations contained in the Act but the process should be flexible and adaptable.

## Carers' Needs Assessments commissioned to external organisations

**Some local authorities commission external organisations, such as local carers centres, to undertake carer's needs assessments on their behalf.**

Anyone undertaking the assessment must be a suitably skilled, trained and qualified practitioner.

If you are referred and have an assessment by an external provider, ensure that you still prepare and consider all the information below.

The external provider will still need to have in-depth knowledge about the impact of caring on your life.

After the assessment if any needs are identified that the provider cannot meet either themselves or through others, they will refer the assessment, and presenting unmet needs, back to the local authority for further consideration.

You can find out more about carers' needs assessments with our guide that can be downloaded for free here: <https://www.carersuk.org/wales/help-and-advice/factsheets-carers-wales/getting-an-assessment-in-wales>

We also have a series of bi-lingual videos that discusses the subject here: <https://www.carersuk.org/wales/help-and-advice/factsheets-carers-wales/getting-an-assessment-in-wales/assessments-in-wales-videos>



## Building the relationship

**Both carers and social workers, independently and collectively, agreed that trust is the most important element of building a successful relationship. For this to happen, open and honest communication from the beginning is key. This needs to begin from initial contact and should be cemented during the Carers Needs Assessment.**

When communicating with social workers you should consider:

- The social worker is there to support you to get the assistance to which you are entitled. Be welcoming to them indicating that you are willing to work with them.
- You may be uncomfortable about speaking about your caring role. Use the social worker's experience and let them lead the conversation if you are unsure what to say.
- It's normal to feel strong emotions when talking about your caring role. This is something that impacts your life and involves one or more of the most important people in your life. Showing emotion is not a negative thing to do when talking to your social worker.
- You have the right to talk to the social worker on your own. You may even find that you thought you would be comfortable talking and then discover that you are not. Find a way to communicate this with the social worker and look to find another opportunity. You may also find it overwhelming talking about your caring role. If you do, tell the social worker how you feel so they can help you.
- Have a clear idea about what support you want to gain from talking to the social worker but also be willing to listen to their suggestions.
- Sometimes you may not be eligible for support and you may disagree. Be open to continue working with the social worker and building on the relationship as this may lead to further support in the future.



The assessment relies on you both being as open and honest as possible. This will build trust and ensure that you are able to have meaningful and constructive discussions. It will help you to agree on what has been said and come to an agreement or compromise on what the next steps need to be.

Having a carer's needs assessment does not mean that you will be automatically entitled to any particular service. The aim of the assessment is to focus on your needs and work with the social worker to find ways that you can be supported.

## Carer's Needs Assessment (What Matters Conversation) – key legal rights

**There is a lot of information to take in about carers' needs assessments and carers have indicated their reluctance or concern about approaching their local authority about accessing this support. Below we have outlined the key legal rights in connection to assessments.**

- ✓ Under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, you have a legal right to a Carers Needs Assessment (sometimes known as a What Matters Conversation).
- ✓ You should contact your local council to request a carers needs assessment if you have not already been offered one
- ✓ You have a right to an assessment regardless of how many hours you care, the support you may have or how much money you have.
- ✓ You are legally entitled to have the assessment in your own right.
- ✓ A carer's needs assessment does not depend on the person you care for having a Disabled Person's Needs Assessment or having a support plan in place.
- ✓ The local authority can do your assessment as part of the assessment for the disabled person (called the 'whole approach'). You need to ask them whether your needs are being considered as part of this.
- ✓ If you do not feel that your needs have been adequately considered as part of this approach, you have the right to request a separate carers' needs assessment in your own right.



## Tips for Carers (Before the assessment)



Before your assessment, you have the power to inform the local authority about your needs to make the assessment process as smooth as possible. You can also make preparations yourself to feel empowered before the assessment begins. Here are tips that carers have discussed as being useful.



### Asking for your assessment

- When asking for an assessment make sure that you let the local authority know how urgent it is.
- Make sure that you tell them if you are finding caring difficult to manage and realistically how long you can cope without any support.
- Ask in advance about what the process involves. Each council has a different process.
- Let the social worker know in advance if you have any communication needs or preferences (for example, a different first language, BSL, Voice to text, Easy Read, Interpreters, Welsh speaker etc).
- Let them know if you want your assessment done face to face, over the phone or internet (Zoom etc), or at a different meeting place. Sometimes it may be difficult to discuss your needs openly in front of the person you care for.
- Think about any cultural needs you may have. This may be in relation to your race, religious beliefs or language requirements. Make sure that you explain what your needs may be so they can prepare in advance.
- Tell them what days and times are most convenient for you.



## Preparing in advance for your assessment

- Think about what you do and record all aspects of your caring duties.
- Use a diary, log what you do (including times) and record any challenges you have. This will help the social worker understand what your daily life entails.
- Think about the main issues you want to raise in order of their importance to you.
- If you have any background information or evidence about your situation, including care plans for the person you look after, read them before you have the assessment.
- Make sure that you honestly consider any aspects of caring you can or cannot do or you need additional support with.
- Think about what other needs you have.
- Include any support you need to help you look after your own health and wellbeing.
- Describe what support you need to meet any personal outcomes you may have, such as work, education or leisure opportunities.
- If you have identified needs that require additional support, try and investigate what local services may be on offer in advance.
- Let the social worker know if you have not found any ways to meet your own needs so that they can investigate and make further enquiries.



## The Carer's Needs Assessment – Getting the best out of the conversation

**In our focus groups, some carers described a loss of control during their carer's needs assessment and did not feel that they were able to express their opinions how they would have liked.**

Here are some tips on what to do after the assessment:

- If the social worker has not got back to you in the time they stated, get in touch with them to remind them. Agree a new date to expect a response.
- If you have needs that are deemed eligible for support and meet the eligibility criteria then you should be offered that support. If a support plan is put in place, you should be provided with a copy of the plan in writing.
- If you receive a support plan but do not feel it meets your needs, talk to your social worker to discuss what you consider to be missing.
- Understand that a support plan will only be put in place if your needs are deemed as eligible cannot be met in other ways that may be available to you.
- If you are unhappy with the outcome of the assessment, ask the social worker to explain why your needs cannot be met.
- If you are still unhappy with the explanation you can raise a complaint. Please see our assessment guide for more information.



## Transition from children to adult services

Transition from children to adult services can be a difficult time for parent carers and their children. Below are some tips that may help to make the process run smoother and help alleviate some of the frustrations that parent carers and families can face.



### Tips

- Ask your current social worker what the process is for transferring a child to adult and ask them to help you with any different agencies that may be involved.
- Ask to meet with the new social worker as early as possible.
- Get to know your new social worker and have conversations with them to build trust.
- Ensure that both social workers involve you and your family in the process and take a person-centred approach.
- Make sure that the new social worker listens to you and what the young person wants to achieve in relation to their goals and personal outcomes.
- Ask to be involved in the planning process so you have input.
- Ask for a copy of the plan. Make sure it includes an explanation of how the transfer is going to happen and a predicted timeline for when these elements will occur.
- Ask to be kept up to date with what is happening in a timely manner.
- You can request for your current social worker keeps in contact to ease the transition.



## Hospital Discharge

**When someone is being discharged from hospital, you will be faced with some important decisions.**

This may be that you are considering taking on a caring role for the first time or the needs of the person you were caring for have changed considerably.

Regardless of the situation, you have a choice about the extent you are able and willing to provide care, if at all. If you are going to, or think you are going to have a need for support, you are legally entitled to ask for a carer's needs assessment before the person is discharged or at any time afterwards (see section on Carers Assessments above).



### Tips

- If you are a carer or are likely to take on the role, make sure that you tell the discharge nurse as soon as possible so that you can be involved in the discharge planning process.
- It is useful to get express permission from the person that you care for that they want to you to be involved in their treatment to ensure that you can be consulted on all matters relating to their care.
- If nurses and others use medical jargon when they speak to you, ask them to explain what they mean in a way that you can understand. You will then be in a better position to ask any questions.
- Work with the discharge team, social services and any other required parties to ensure that all the support you may need is in place prior to discharge.
- Ask if the person you care for is entitled to the reablement service and what this will mean for you.
- Make sure that you tell the discharge nurse that you want advance notice of the planned discharge day and what will happen in relation to transport (if needed) and any medication.
- Try and get information on local carers services that may be available in your area that could offer support.
- If you have not received a carer's needs assessment or the person being discharged does not have a support package in place on the day of discharge, think very carefully whether you can manage. If you don't think you can manage, make sure that you tell the hospital as soon as possible.

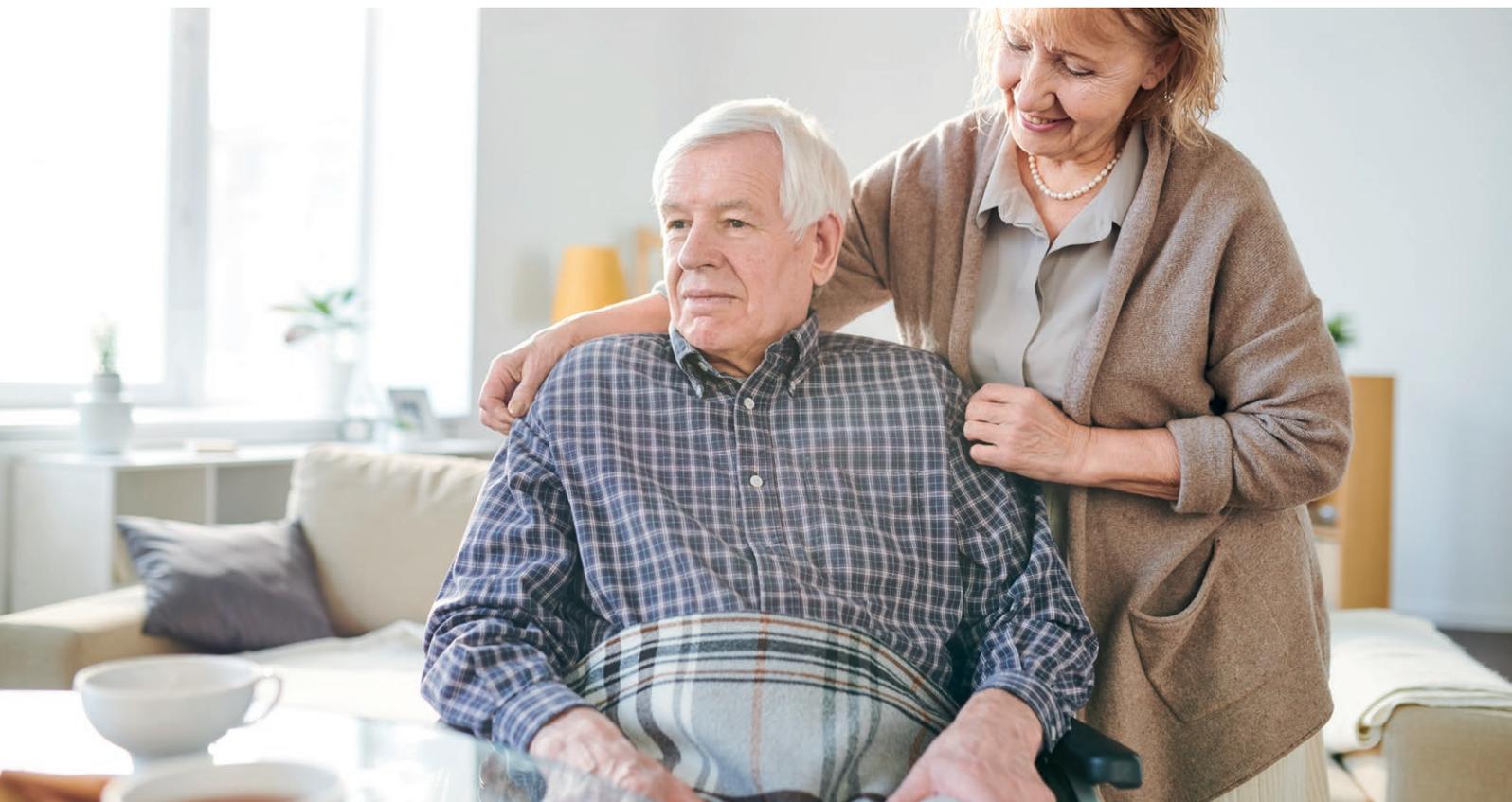


## Preparing for End of Life

**When you are caring for someone who is nearing end of life, there are many things to consider before and after the bereavement.**

You may need support with end of life care planning and support during this time. You may also need help after the bereavement to cope with the legal and practical processes of registering a death and the emotional loss.

- Think about advanced care planning so that the wishes of the person you care for and, when appropriate, your own wishes and feelings can be taken into account by all professionals involved.
- Try and plan in advance with professionals for any crisis to ensure that you get a prompt and urgent response to your needs.
- Ensure you tell your social worker how you are feeling and coping.
- Be honest, they can consider what they can do to help and support you or refer you to agencies that can help.
- Ensure that you tell your social worker about your beliefs and needs so that they can be sensitive to you and the person you care for.
- If circumstances change and you feel the need for additional support, ask for a review of any care or support plan that may already be in place.
- After bereavement, ensure that you get the support that you need including information on practicalities and benefits you may be entitled to.
- Ensure that you get bereavement counselling or emotional support if you need it.



# Acknowledgments

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