

What is a care leaver?

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 which amended the Children Act 1989 defines a care leaver as:

“a person who has been in the care of the Local Authority for a period of 13 weeks or more spanning their 16th birthday.”

Growing up in care can affect an individual for their whole life. As frontline staff we need to consider a care leaver as anyone who has spent any time in care of the state (such as foster care or residential children’s home).

Care experienced young people may live in supported accommodation or alone from the age of 16. A looked after child becomes a care leaver when they reach their 18th birthday.

Young people who have had experience in care need support throughout their lives.

Personal advisers (PA).

The personal adviser (PA) will be introduced to the young person alongside their social worker when they turn 16.

At 18, the PA will become the care leaver’s worker. They will work with the young person until they turn 21 or up to 25 if in full-time education, or if the young person has requested additional support and advice.

As a young adult, care leavers can make their own decisions. The PA is there to support and advise the young person to make decisions that are right for them.

I AM A CARE LEAVER

AS MY GP YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PATIENTS LIKE ME....



The majority of young people entering care have experienced abuse and neglect. As a result, care leavers can experience a range of mental and physical health issues that continue into adulthood and affect their entire lives.

Looked after children’s statutory health assessments no longer take place once a young person reaches their 18th birthday.

As health care plans and reviews no longer take place, young people can be left to navigate services without professional support.

Inequalities and vulnerabilities

In 2017, the Care Leaver’s Association published “45 Care Leaver Friendly Ways” which showed that.

Care leavers are:

- 7 x more likely to die before the age of 25 than the general population
- 25 x more likely to be homeless
- 33 x more likely to be involved with sex work
- Up to 40 x more likely to be in the criminal justice system.
- 4 x more likely to have a special educational need compared to the overall child population

This does not need to be the case. Supporting the physical and mental health needs of care leavers helps individuals to reach their full potential and write their own future.

The Care Leavers Association health report 2017 listened to the views of over 420 care leavers of all ages. Well-being issues reported included:

- Mental Health
- Isolation
- Low Self esteem

What can GP's do to support care leavers?

Health promotion: Care leavers may exhibit risk-taking behaviours to cope with the trauma they have experienced. Those in or leaving care are more likely to become teenage parents. There is also a high incidence of alcohol abuse and drug use in this vulnerable group. It is important to recognise this and support the adult or young person to manage their trauma in conjunction with healthy lifestyle advice.

Pregnancy: It is important for professionals to be aware that a young person is care experienced when providing care during pregnancy, this information should be communicated to appropriate members of the health care team.

Care leavers may need extra health or social care support during the ante or postnatal period. Decisions to refer for support and assessment during pregnancy should be risk assessed and not automatic. Care leavers may benefit from the support of the family nurse partnership or perinatal mental health service.

Decisions to refer for support or assessment during pregnancy should be discussed with the care leaver.

The GP should review support needs at the 6-week postnatal baby check.

Transition: Transition to adult services can be difficult to navigate. Primary care has a responsibility to ensure that referrals to adult services are made and that the care leaver knows how to access the services they require. Key ages for transition are 18,

21 and 25. There is increased risk of the young person being lost in the system at these times.

Access: Ensuring that all staff are trained in understanding the needs and trauma experience of looked after children and care leavers ensures that young people and care-experienced adults feel safe and welcomed in the surgery.

As a GP practice you hold the care leavers health history, they may come to you to find out about the health of their parents or their early life.

Registering care leavers at your practice:

Knowing who your care leavers are helps to provide care that meets their needs.

Ask all new patients over the age of 16 if they have had an experience of care and ask permission to code this on their notes. Not all adults with care experience will want to share this information and that is their choice.

Care leavers can often be termed vulnerable adults and should be registered with your practice even if they don't have proof of identification when they first present. Register, and ask for the documentation to follow.

Referrals: If it will benefit their treatment, consider referencing a patient's past care experience in referrals. As vulnerable adults, care leavers may be prioritised for services. Knowing a patient is care experienced enables a trauma informed approach. It

is good practice to inform the patient when you are sharing this information.

Communication:

Try to involve care experienced patients in decisions about their health. What do they want? What do they feel is best for them?

Careful review of health records avoids repetitive questioning or patients repeating their story.

Try to create opportunities to see care leavers without their worker as this gives them the opportunity to open up and disclose information.

Avoid jargon and professional speak.

Listen: Take time to listen and hear their story. Be their doctor and encourage continuity of care.

Offer Cradle to Grave support: The health issues that children in care can experience can continue to affect them well into adulthood.

Take a holistic view of the person's needs: It can be helpful to not always concentrate on fixing symptoms. Try to tailor treatment and support to the needs of the patient sitting in front of you. Ask how you can support the young person in the surgery before referring. Support care leavers to build robust self-care skills and resilience enabling them to lead healthy independent lives.

Produced for the Primary Care Safeguarding Forum by Dr Sharon Kefford and Dr Tamsin Robinson.

Thank you to the children, care leavers and foster carers from Ealing and Surrey for your help and advice in developing this leaflet.

“WE WANT THRIVING, NOT SURVIVING”

Caring for better health. Care Leaver's Association 2017