



Are you experiencing Carer Harm?

If you are a family carer, ask yourself:

Does the person I care for behave in a way that causes me physical injury, emotional pain, or other kind of harm?

In my engagement with professionals and organisations, is my coping capacity and need for support recognized and responded to?

This leaflet may be useful to any family carer experiencing carer harm



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FAMILY CARERS IRELAND

Family Carers Ireland is in a unique position to support carers experiencing carer harm, recognising that the needs of family carers exist on a continuum of severity and that family carers have strengths as well as needs. With this in mind, supports for carers experiencing harm include:

- A focus on the full spectrum of carer well-being.
- A willingness to act as an advocate for any carer who feels they need it.
- Support for any family carer in a situation where the state is engaging to 'take over' their caring role.
- Help with development of a safety plan through the Free Emergency Scheme – joining the scheme ensures that the person you care for will continue to receive the support they need during a time of crisis and from people you trust. See: <https://familycarers.ie/carer-supports/help-guidance/emergency-care-scheme>
- If there are other children or family members who are 'young carers' who are also affected, Family Carers Ireland has a dedicated young carer support team who can be contacted in confidence at youngcarers@familycarers.ie or their Freephone Careline 1800 24 07 24.
- All of these supports are free of charge and can be accessed directly.

UNDERSTANDING CARER HARM

What is 'Carer Harm'?

Carer Harm is where a family carer experiences intentional or unintentional harm from the child/adult they are trying to support. Harmful behaviours experienced can include:

- Psychological (e.g., emotional abuse, bullying, threats, humiliation, mocking, controlling, intimidation, coercion, refusing to allow the carer to leave the house, insisting the carer provide all of the care, verbal abuse)
- Physical (e.g., slapping, hitting, pushing, kicking)
- Sexual (e.g., inappropriate sexual comments, unwanted touching, or sexual acts without consent.)

Other types of Carer Harm

Family carers can also experience harm from the professionals and organisations they are in contact with. Harm can be experienced because of the attitudes or unrealistic expectations of professionals you can come into contact with. It can also be as a result of:

- Discrimination (e.g., making rules around accessing services without a valid reason such as age requirements or being humiliated and distressed by discussions that suggest by meeting your needs, and those of the person you care for, will deprive others seen as more needy of support).
- Institutional (e.g., where organisations disregard a person's rights or provide inadequate responses to complex needs. For example, not being listened to, having to 'beg' for support or being sent from agency to agency as part of disagreements between service providers or professionals about responsibilities and funding).

Prevention and Protection

Sometimes family carers do not understand or are not aware of what is, and is not, acceptable behaviour. This may leave you believing that being subjected to intentional or unintentional harmful behaviour from the child/adult you are trying to support is the 'norm', the price for caring. Being aware of harmful behaviours and recognising the risks associated with these behaviours is vital to help prevent carer harm and protect you as a family carer.

It is not uncommon that you might want to keep your experiences of harm a secret due to a sense of shame that your own child/ relative has injured you. You might feel guilty that you are 'telling tales' on the child or person you are caring for. You may also be worried about possible consequences such as triggering unwanted care alternatives or interventions for example, residential care if it is perceived that you are at risk/unable to manage.

The stigma associated with carer harm means that family carers like you are rarely asked questions about this. This means you don't get an opportunity to disclose the harm you are experiencing, and it can be difficult to know who you should tell.

Even when you have shared experiences of carer harm or raised concerns, professionals may not always seem to grasp the seriousness of the harmful behaviour. Professional responses often focus on just education and training with the expectation that this will enable you to continue to manage to provide the necessary care, even when the child or adult you are caring for has very complex needs.

Potential situations where carer harm is more likely

- You are isolated and you have nobody to talk to or to give you advice. You are not getting any practical and/or emotional support from professionals or formal care givers.
- The person you support and care for has health and care needs that you cannot meet, particularly if this arrangement continues over a long period of time.
- The child or adult you are caring for does not have insight or understanding of your capacity to meet and provide the level of care they require. They may refuse to accept support from outside agencies, including respite opportunities which would give you an opportunity to focus on your own needs.

- The person you are supporting is angry about their situation. This might lead to abusive, aggressive, or frightening behaviors.
- The person you are supporting has a history of substance misuse and/or domestic violence.
- Pressure on parent carers of adult “children” which increases as you both age. This can lead to difficulties in family relationships or inappropriate restrictions on the lives of older parents who are family carers.

How can I help prevent or reduce the risk of experiencing carer harm?

- Talk through your situation with a professional or a support organisation like Family Carers Ireland. They can provide advice, advocacy, direction, and peer support.
- Seek early intervention and concrete supports such as home care or respite. If this is not available or if you are facing barriers accessing the necessary health and social services for the person you are supporting which would help to keep you both safe and well, seek help from a professional or advocacy organisation, who can assist you to advocate for what you need, such as:

Citizen Information Phone:

0818 07 4000



Family Carer Ireland National Freephone Careline:

1800 24 07 24

National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities:

0818 07 3000

SAGE Advocacy:

01 536733



- Inform yourself about the condition of the person you are supporting from the beginning. Explore opportunities to engage in education and training as a way of understanding behaviours, getting help with self-care, and connecting with other carers. Family Carers Ireland have a wide range of helpful training available <https://familycarers.ie/carer-supports/learning-education>
- Consider and discuss with a professional if the person you are caring for would benefit from referral to other services or supports.
- Do not be tempted to restrain the person you look after.
- Access counselling and seek out support for all the members of your family affected, such as that offered by Family Carers Ireland: <https://familycarers.ie/carer-supports/help-guidance/counselling>

I am experiencing intentional or unintentional harm from the child/adult I support, what can I do?

In the first instance, speak to someone about your experience – contact your GP, Public Health Nurse, Social Worker, school or service provider or Family Carers Ireland National Freephone Careline 1800 24 07 24

Other steps you can take

- Seek support from carer or peer support groups – these can provide a space to share and validate your experiences, voice concerns, and learn about entitlements, services, and supports.

Family Carers Ireland run a number of groups, check for a group in your area here:

<https://familycarers.ie/carer-supports/carer-support-groups>

- Online Family Support groups can also provide support if it is difficult for you to leave the house. See links below:
- Family Carers Ireland Online Family Support Group <https://forum.familycarers.ie/>
- Care Alliance Online Family Carer Support Group <https://www.carealliance.ie/OnlineFamilyCarerSupportGroup>.
- You can also access peer support through organisations specific to the condition(s) of the person you are caring for.
- Get help with development of a safety plan for you and other family members through Family Carers Ireland Free Emergency Scheme – joining the scheme ensures that the person you care for will continue to receive the support they need during a time of crisis and from people you trust. See: <https://familycarers.ie/carer-supports/help-guidance/emergency-care-scheme>
- As part of your safety planning, contact your local Community Garda and brief them on your situation, ask them to call to meet your family so that if there is a crisis, they will be familiar to your child and other children.



- If you or a family member are in immediate danger, call 999 or 112 and ask for an immediate Garda response.

(These supports are also free of charge and can be accessed directly).

Remember, if you are experiencing carer harm, public sector bodies have a duty to protect your human rights

Human rights reflect the minimum standards necessary for people to live with dignity. Legislation enacting the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) places a statutory obligation on public sector bodies to protect human rights in carrying out their function and in how it provides services.

These rights include protection from abuse or being treated in a degrading way, respect for family life and protection of physical integrity.

Public bodies such as the Health Service Executive, Disability Networks and health and social care providers have a duty towards adults and children at risk to take reasonable steps to prevent ill-treatment or harm. Professionals working in these organisations must treat you with **fairness, equality, dignity, and respect.**

If you feel you or the adult you care for have been unfairly treated by a public service provider such as the HSE, care provider or any publicly funded service, contact the Office of the Ombudsman 1890223030, www.ombudsman.ie

The information and guidance in this document is based on a small research project that involved interviews with 9 family carers who have experienced carer harm as well as interviews and focus groups with a range of professionals. This document was co-designed using a World Café methodology and by drawing on the emerging research findings. The information does not relate to the experiences of all family carers. For further information on this project, please contact Dr Sarah Donnelly, Assistant Professor of Social Work, School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice, UCD: sarah.donnelly@ucd.ie

