

UNPAID

CARERS

TOOLKIT



In Control
Scotland
Choice. Control. Community. Change.



**Recognising
yourself as a
carer**

**Your rights as a
carer**

**Short
breaks
for carers**

**Flexible carers
budgets**

**Emotional and
practical
impacts of
caring**

**Building
trust and
relationships**

**Navigating the
system and Carers
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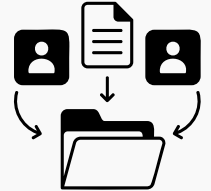
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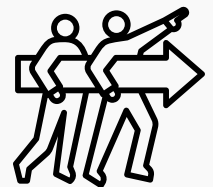
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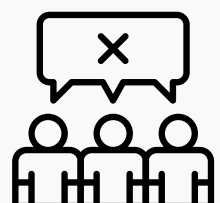
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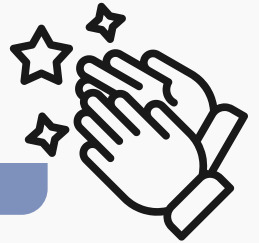
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In Control Scotland

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1. Introduction

Unpaid carers play a vital role in supporting family members, friends, and neighbours who require assistance due to illness, disability, mental health needs, addiction, or age-related conditions.

All carers have the right to an Adult Carer Support Plan (ACSP) or a Young Carer Statement, which is the starting point for accessing support through Self-Directed Support (SDS). This process begins with a conversation with a social worker about how caring affects your life and what outcomes matter to you, such as improving your wellbeing, having time for yourself, or staying connected with family and friends.

During an assessment, you will discuss your caring role, what you can and cannot manage, and what support would help you sustain your wellbeing. Your agreed outcomes will guide what support is put in place and the level of self directed support budget you may receive.



This toolkit is designed for unpaid carers in Scotland, as well as for professionals and family members who support them. It aims to provide clear, practical information to help carers navigate services, understand options such as self-directed support (SDS) and flexible budgets, build positive relationships with professionals, and maintain their own health and wellbeing while continuing to care. These options can give carers more choice and control over how support is arranged, helping them tailor help to what works best for their circumstances.

We have provided the information in this toolkit to the best of our ability. However, we recognise that each local authority area may interpret the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 and the Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013 slightly differently, and that processes may vary across different areas.

2. Understanding Your Caring Role



What is an unpaid carer?

If you support family members, friends, or neighbours who require assistance with personal care, physical care, medication management, emotional support, finances or help them access the community, then you are an unpaid carer. Self-directed support can provide ways to shape support around these responsibilities to improve balance, wellbeing and independence.

Anyone can become an unpaid carer at any time in their life. Carers can be any age, including young people, and don't have to be related to the person they care for. They can be a spouse, partner, or another relative, and don't need to live with the person they are caring for. Under self-directed support, unpaid carers are recognised as key partners in care whose views and knowledge help shape flexible and personalised support.

Recognising yourself as a carer



Despite the importance of this role, many people do not immediately identify themselves as carers, often seeing their responsibilities as a natural extension of their relationship with the person they support. It can sometimes take an average of two years for people to acknowledge their role as a carer.

Self-directed support encourages every carer to be recognised early so they can access support tailored to their needs. Identifying as a carer is the first step toward exercising your rights, such as an Adult Carer Support Plan (ACSP) or Young Carer Statement (YCS).

The “hats we wear” – dual roles and identity



Caring can begin at any stage of life and may involve a wide range of tasks, from managing daily activities and appointments to providing emotional, physical, or practical support. Many carers balance these responsibilities alongside employment, education, and other commitments.

Emotional and practical impacts of caring



The increasing hours of care often results in the general health of carers deteriorating. Unpaid carers who provide high levels of care for sick, or disabled relatives and friends, are more than twice as likely to suffer from poor health compared to people without caring responsibilities.

Caring responsibilities can have an adverse impact on the physical and mental health, education and employment potential of those who care, which can result in significantly poorer health and quality of life outcomes. Self-directed support is designed to help you maintain a life alongside caring, offering flexible options to reduce stress and support your wellbeing.

Carers Trust Scotland have produced a Health & Wellbeing toolkit for Unpaid Carers which offer practical ideas & activities to help support carers in their role, you can access this on the following link:

<https://carers.org/resources/all-resources/149-adult-unpaid-carer-wellbeing-toolkit>

Warning: The video link below features unpaid carers discussing the realities of how their roles often cover intense emotional and physical challenges. Viewers and listeners should prepare for frank discussions.

This video by **Carers UK** highlights the emotional toil being a Carer can have:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHQ6hQ3SQUM>

3. Your Rights as an Unpaid Carer



Legal Rights and Support The Carers (Scotland) Act 2016

The Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 came into force on the 1st April 2018. The Act provides new rights to carers in a number of areas. These include:

- a duty for local authorities to provide support to carers, based on the carer's identified needs which meet the local eligibility criteria.
- a right to an adult carer support plan and young carer statement to identify your needs and personal outcomes. (This is available to carers of all ages, no matter how many hours of care they provide and whether or not the person they care for provides care).
- a requirement for local authorities to have an information and advice service for carers which provides information and advice on, amongst other things, emergency and future care planning, advocacy, income maximisation and carers' rights.
- a duty on the NHS to inform and involve you if the person you care for is discharged from hospital.

You can find out more about the **Carers (Scotland) Act 2016** on the following links:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2016/9/contents>

Statutory Guidance [\(social-care-self-directed-support-scotland-act-2013-statutory-guidance.pdf\)](#)

Employment Rights



Balancing work and caring can be difficult. As a result, many carers have had to leave employment. This can impact on both their finances and confidence. In Scotland, carers have rights in the workplace which include:

- **Entitlement:** - up to one week of unpaid leave per year for any employee.
- **Eligibility:** - from day one of employment, for dependants needing care due to illness, disability, or age.
- **Time Off for Dependants:** - This is a separate right to take time off for unexpected, urgent situations involving a dependant.
- **Purpose:** - to deal with unexpected disruptions or breakdowns in care arrangements.
- **Protection:** Protection from dismissal for taking this leave
Right to Request: - employees can request flexible working (e.g., home working, flexi-time, job sharing) from their first day.
- **Employer Duty:** - employers must consult with you if they can't meet your request, rather than just refusing.
- **Frequency:** - employees can make requests twice a year.

Some employers offer additional benefits and support for employees with caring responsibilities, (*check if your employer has an unpaid carers policy*)

Carers UK (Scotland) provide good information and advice about your rights as an unpaid carer, you can check this out here:

<https://www.carersuk.org/scotland/help-and-advice/work-and-career/your-rights-in-work/>

Financial Support



If you provide care for one or more people you might be able to get:

- Carer Support Payment
- Scottish Carer Supplement
- Carer Additional Person Payment

<https://www.mygov.scot/carers-support-payment>

Package of Support Available for Carers in Scotland

Please note that the amounts stated in the green column are as of August 2026 and these amounts can change, you can check for up-to-date changes on this link: <https://www.mygov.scot/carers-support-payment>

Payment Type

Carers Support Payment

Financial support if you care for someone who gets a qualifying benefit.

Scottish Carer Supplement

An extra payment you'll automatically be paid on top of your Carer Support Payment. It has replaced Carer's Allowance Supplement.

Carer Additional Person Payment

Extra money you can get for each additional person you care for who gets a qualifying benefit.

How Much You Can Get

Up to £86.45 a week. You might get less than this if you get certain other benefits, such as State Pension.

£11.70 a week.

£10.40 a week

Effect on Other Benefits

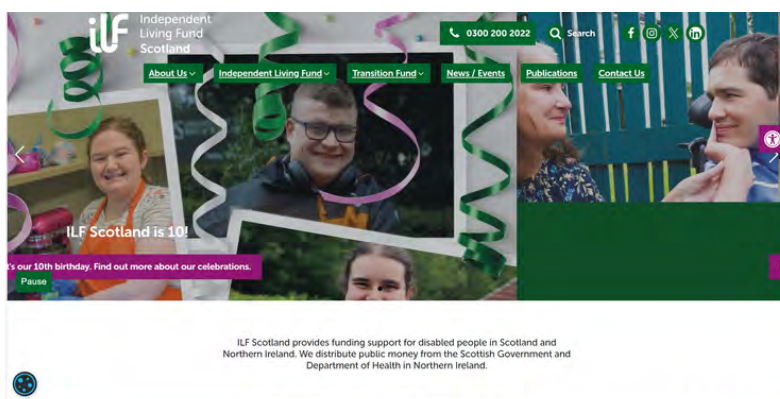
The Department for Work and Pensions will reduce the amount you get for any income-related benefits, such as Universal Credit.

No effect on other benefits.

No effect on other benefits.

There are also other benefits you can get if you provide care: <https://www.mygov.scot/carers-support-payment/support-for-carers>

ILF - Independent Living Fund



The ILF Scotland Independent Living Fund is designed to support individuals who have complex disabilities to live independently in Scotland.

Applications can be made through your local authority's social work department. Potential applicants must:

- live in Scotland
- be aged 16 years or over at the time of application
- access Self-Directed Support (SDS)
- receive a social care support package / SDS of at least £800 per week
- Or the applicant's net weekly SDS budget is less than £800 (but not less than £485) but they have an unpaid carer living in the same home with them who provides a significant amount of unpaid care and who is eligible for a Carers Support Plan.

This is aimed at applicants who, were it not for the amount of unpaid care received, would meet the £800 Threshold Sum. This is known as the [Carer Component](#).

You can find out more about ILF here:

<https://ilf.scot/independent-living-fund/>

The primary transition fund available in Scotland for young people is also managed by ILF Scotland. The ILF Scotland Transition Fund provides one-off grants of up to £4,000 for disabled young people aged 16 to 25 to help them try new activities and adjust to life after leaving school or children's services. <https://ilf.scot/transition-fund/>

4. Self Directed Support



Self-directed support (SDS) for carers in Scotland is a system that gives unpaid carers more control over the support they receive to help them with their caring role, as well as providing support for the person they care for.

It's based on the principles of the **Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013** and is delivered through options that include a direct payment to manage support themselves, support from the local authority, or a combination. The goal is to provide support that is tailored to individual needs and circumstances, empowering carers and the people they care for to live more independently.

You can read or download the Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013 here: www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2013/1/data.pdf and Statutory Guidance **(Carers (Scotland) Act 2016: statutory guidance - updated July 2021 - gov.scot)**

The Values and Ethos of Self Directed Support

The ideas of self-directed support were first developed so that people who did not want to choose a direct payment (or were deemed not to have the capacity to do so) could still have a similar level of choice, control and flexibility. They are based on the principles of Human Rights including participation, choice, control, flexibility and having the power to make informed decisions about your own life.

The 'Four Pillars' of Self Directed Support



- **Choice** – over how, when and in what way support is provided
- **Control** – over how you choose to manage and direct the support and what help you need to do this
- **Freedom** – to get right support to live the way you want
- **Dignity** – in the way you access support, work with others, make a contribution to your local and other communities



If you are eligible for a self-directed support budget you will be offered 4 options for using your budget. You can find out what the options are on the following page and what would be most suited to you.

In this section, you can also find out about:

- What sort of things you can spend your budget on.
- Examples of using your budget flexible and creatively.
- Myths - What self-directed support is and what it isn't.

Self Directed Support Options

You have a legal right to choose how your support budget is managed. Use this selector to decide which fits you.

Option 1 – Direct payment

The Local Authority decide how much money can be spent on your support, this is paid to you and you arrange your own support and manage this

Option 2 – Individual Service Fund

You choose the support, but a provider or the Local Authority manages the money

Option 3 – Local Authority Arranges Support

The Local Authority chooses and arranges the support for you

Option 4 – Mixed Support Package

A mix of the above Options

Flexible Budgets



What sort of things can I spend my budget on?



Holiday/short break/leisure



Support in your life or home, like hiring a cleaner, gardener or someone to do your shopping



A one-off piece of equipment or technology and/or on-going maintenance of this



Specialist support to keep you healthy, happy and safe, for example a personal trainer



Things to help you in any employment you have, or work or learning, like driving lessons, adult education courses, or items needed to help with work

Outcomes

Improved wellbeing/Respite

Enhanced quality of life

Feeling supported

Better mental and physical health

Maintaining own life and relationships outside of caring.

Examples of creative uses of budgets



Holiday/short break/leisure

Donna is a parent carer to her 2 sons, Jack and Billy who both have autism. She uses her self-directed support budget to pay for a short break once a month. When she arranges time away with friends for an overnight spa break.

This short break once a month gives Donna some **respite** and **time to spend on her own with friends** away from her caring duties, **increases her wellbeing** and **maintains her relationships** outwith her daily caring duties.

A one-off piece of equipment or technology and/or on-going maintenance of this

Janice holds down a full time job as well as being a full-time carer to her adult Brother, Scott who has a learning disability and autism. She is able to work from home mostly, but sometimes needs to attend meetings at the office. This can sometimes be outwith Scott's support, so Janice purchased a ring doorbell and set up a monthly subscription with her self-directed support budget.

This allows Janice to leave Scott, (who is non-verbal) for short periods, where he is able to **spend time independently on his own** at home. Janice is able to answer and speak to any visitors coming to the door via the ring doorbell. This helps to keep Scott **safe and secure** and also allows Janice to meet the requirements to **continue in her working role**.

Examples of creative uses of Budgets



Support in your life or home, like hiring a cleaner, gardener or someone to do your shopping

David works and is also a full-time carer to his daughter, Stacey who has complex needs. He was really struggling to keep on top of housework due to his work commitments and looking after Stacey. Due to the untidiness of the house David was reluctant to invite friends and visitors into his home.

David was able to use his self-directed support budget to hire a cleaner to come in and clean the house once a week. This allows David to have a bit more **time on his own, feel less stressed** and he is now **confident** inviting friends and visitors into his home.

Membership of a group, club or organisation that connects you in the community

Amanda is a full-time parent carer to her son Adam who has a severe learning disability.

Amanda uses her self-directed support budget to pay for a membership to a local yoga club in her community centre. Attending the weekly yoga classes supports her **mental and physical wellbeing** and also keeps her **connected to her community** as well as giving her a **break from her caring duties**.

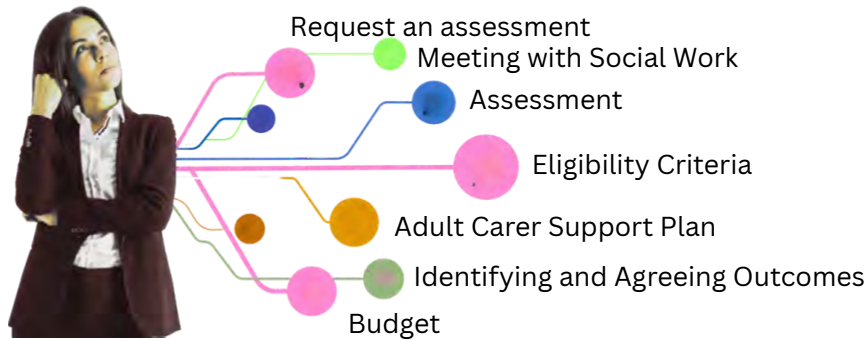
Self Directed Support is:

-  About increasing the ways people can direct all the resources available to them
-  Increasing flexibility of spend with a focus on people getting a life not just a service
-  Making people accountable for achieving what they want
-  About knowledging risk and working with people to make positive informed decisions in their lives
-  Trying to be more effective and efficient and ensure that people can access the right support in their own communities
-  The way that all social care is delivered in Scotland
-  Your budget for social care

Self Directed Support is not:

-  Just about increasing the take up of direct payments
-  Only about employing personal assistants or hours of support
-  Giving people money and forgetting about it
-  Increased risk and exploitation
-  About implementing service cuts
-  Something different or additional to social care
-  A benefit or related to your benefit

5. Navigating the System



Requesting an Assessment

Accessing Self Directed Support (SDS) begins with a conversation about a carers entitlement to an Adult Carer Support Plan (ACSP) or Young Carer Statement (YCS). This identifies what matters to you and meeting your ‘personal outcomes’, such as improved health, time for rest or reconnecting socially, all of which is the first step in accessing self-directed support. This starts with a conversation with a social worker about what is important in your life and your priorities known as outcomes.

Contact your local authority’s social work department to request a carer’s assessment of your needs, detailing how caring affects your life. You can self-refer or have a professional refer you.

Clearly state you are a carer seeking support and are interested in Self-Directed Support (SDS). Mention the urgency of your needs.

What to Expect

The assessment process starts with a conversation about your day-to-day life, the challenges you face, and what would help you continue caring while maintaining your own wellbeing. Your adult carer support plan is then developed to outline these needs and how they will be addressed.

Be open and honest—especially about tasks that are difficult for you or aspects of caring that cause stress. This ensures your plan truly reflects your situation.

Identifying Outcomes

Rather than focusing on specific services, the assessment aims to identify outcomes, what would make the biggest difference to your life. Examples include **improving your health**, **feeling more connected**, or **having more time for yourself**. These outcomes guide any self-directed support budget you may receive.

Eligibility and Assessment

During your assessment, the social worker will explain whether you meet the local eligibility criteria for support. Each local authority sets its own eligibility thresholds, typically ranging from low and moderate to substantial and critical. Many local areas are currently operating at the critical level. Your assessment will explore your needs, the impact of your caring role, and the outcomes that matter most to you.

Your Rights During the Process

You have the right to:

- Request an assessment at any time
- Receive clear information about eligibility and support
- Be involved in all decisions regarding your support
- Choose how your self-directed support budget is managed
- Ask questions and seek clarification
- Request a review if your situation changes

Outcomes



What sort of things can I do to meet my outcomes?



Short break/leisure



Hiring a cleaner, gardener or someone to do your shopping



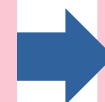
Purchasing piece of equipment or technology and/or on-going maintenance of this



Attending a local yoga/keep fit class



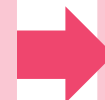
Meeting up with family and friends



Improved wellbeing/Respite



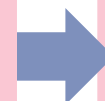
Enhanced quality of life/feeling less stressed



Feeling supported/learning new skills



Better mental and physical health/feeling connected to community

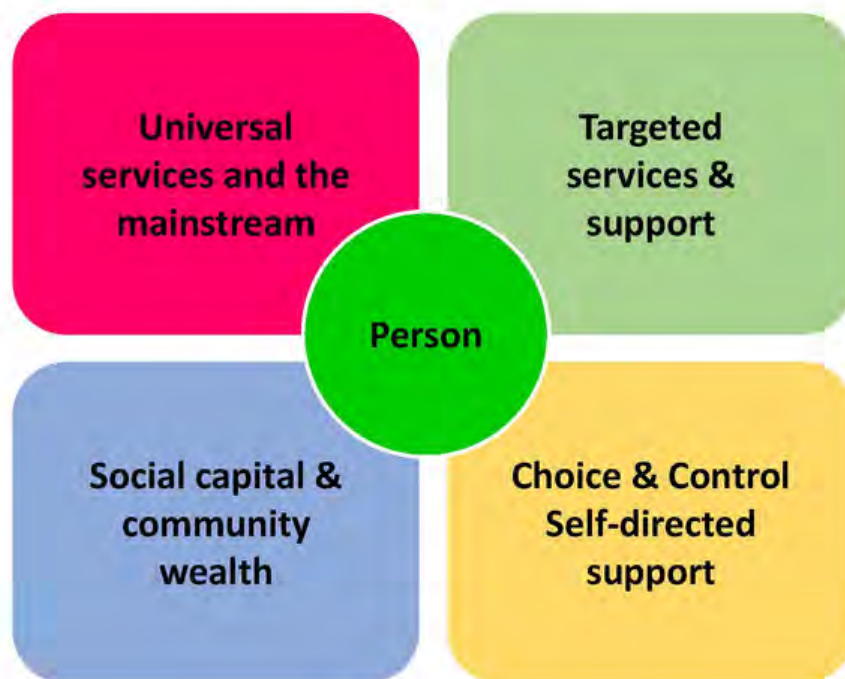


Maintaining own life and relationships outside of caring.

The following graphic can provide a very simple way of mapping local opportunities, activities and sources of support and inclusion when discussing the assessment process. When used as part of a co-produced review and strategy, it is a very simple way of identifying different services and also starting a conversation about its use, who it is for and how accessible it is.

Looking at community wealth, at the start of the assessment process can significantly move the conversation away from financial support and gather the support around the person and community.

Part of the whole local offer



Universal Services and Mainstream

Schools, Doctor's Surgeries, Shops, Leisure Centres, Libraries, Open Spaces/Parks, Roads and Transport, Citizens Advice.

Often people with additional individual support needs feel excluded from this world; access, language, noise, environment can all mean they may find it hard to make the most of these opportunities.

Social Capital & Community Wealth

Clubs, Social Spaces, including community sports, hobbies, allotments. ***Opportunities to be part of their community***

Targeted Services & Support

Focus generally on person's condition or diagnosis, this could be a Dementia cafe, Learning Group

Self Directed Support

After working through the other areas of your life then (if eligible) a Self Directed Support budget maybe put in place. Each eligible person will be allocated an indicative amount of funding which will, with support to creatively plan, be used to get the support needed to enable a person to live independently and be included.

6. Preparing Your Adult Carers Support Plan



Once an assessment has been completed and agreed by yourself and/or the supported person, then an Adult Carer Support Plan (ACSP) is drawn up. This is where your or the person you are supporting, outcomes are outlined and how they are going to be achieved.

An adult carer support plan helps you think about what support you might need if you wish to continue caring and what could help you to have a life alongside caring. The plan sets out any needs you have and how they will be met. Making a plan also helps to decide which level you reach in the local eligibility criteria for support. No matter what level you are, every carer can access information and support from community organisations like your local carers centre and you may also be able to access other forms of support too!



A focus on outcomes



Recognition of the impact of your caring role



Flexible options to do something that positively affects your wellbeing

On the following pages we have provided some worksheets to help you prepare for an Adult Carer Support Plan, including thinking about your caring role, how this impacts you, what a normal day looks like for you, thinking about what outcomes you would like to achieve and what you would need to continue in your caring role.

We have also included some questions you may find helpful to ask during your assessment.

Assessment and Adult Carer Support Plan

Before meeting a social worker or practitioner, use these prompts to identify your needs.

My Caring Role



What do I do daily?

Physical Care

Personal Care

My Caring Role



Medication

Finances

Emotional Support

The Impact



**How does caring impact
my physical health?**

**How does caring impact
my mental wellbeing?**

**How does caring affect
my social life?**

A day in a life



What does a good day
look like?

What does a bad day
look like

What would need to
happen to have more
good days?

Instead of asking for specific services, focus on 'outcomes' (e.g., "I want to attend a weekly yoga class to improve my mental health", "I need 4 hours of 'me-time' a week to catch up with friends to feel less isolated")

My Outcomes



What would make my life easier?

The personal outcomes network highlights how the outcome process work. This website below will hopefully highlight how to identify an outcome for yourself or person you support and help you be more prepared when you go through the assessment/support plan process with Social Work department.

[Personal Outcomes Network](#)

Willingness to Care



Am I able and willing to continue providing the same level of care?
(Be honest here; it is your right to say no to certain tasks).

What would you need to continue in your caring role?

Asking Questions

The core of the carers assessment is identifying what you need to continue caring while maintaining your own life. Below are some questions you may find helpful to ask during the assessment



What are the local council's eligibility criteria for carers to receive support



How long is the waiting time for the assessment, and who do I contact if it takes too long?



What if I need an independent advocate to help me through this process?



Can I have a separate carer's assessment, or must my needs be included in the cared-for person's plan?



Asking Questions

Support



What support is available to ensure I can get enough sleep and maintain my own physical/mental health?



How can I get support to continue my hobbies, see friends, or take a break from caring?



I feel I have no choice in my caring role; what support can help me regain control?



How can I combine working/studying with my caring responsibilities?



Asking Questions

Support



Can you explain what Options 1, 2, 3, and 4 would look like in my specific case?



What happens if the proposed support does not meet my agreed outcomes?"



How can I receive a copy of my assessment in a clear, written format



Key Tips for Assessments

Be honest: Do not downplay your struggles, or you may not get the support you need.

Focus on 'What Matters': Frame your needs around "outcomes" (e.g., "I need to take a pottery class to maintain my mental health" rather than just "I need a break").

Bring Support: You are entitled to bring a friend, family member, or a professional from a local carers' centre with you.

Review Agreements: Ensure you are clear about what has been agreed at the end of the meeting

7. Advocacy Support



Independent advocacy can play a vital role in helping carers navigate the health and social care system, ensuring their views are heard and their rights are upheld. Advocacy services provide impartial support, helping carers communicate clearly, understand processes, and challenge decisions when necessary.

How Advocacy Can Help

Independent advocates can support carers to:

- **Prepare** for assessments, reviews, and meetings.
- **Communicate** their needs, preferences, and concerns.
- **Understand** their rights under Self-Directed Support (SDS) and the Carers (Scotland) Act.
- **Request** flexibility or challenge decisions relating to their support.
- **Navigate** complex or unclear processes within social work or care services.
- **Advocacy** is particularly valuable when carers feel overwhelmed, unheard, or unsure how to progress issues relating to their support or the support of the person they care for.

When to Seek Advocacy

You may find advocacy helpful if:

- **You are struggling** to get clear answers or updates.
- **You feel your views** are not being taken seriously.
- **You need support** to challenge decisions or restrictions around your self-directed support budget.
- **You are experiencing** delays or barriers in accessing support.
- **You are preparing** for an Adult Carer Support Plan discussion or review.

Accessing Advocacy Services

Independent advocacy is free and available across Scotland through local advocacy organisations. Carer Centres can also help direct you to appropriate advocacy support and assist you in preparing for key meetings and conversations.

The Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance (SIAA) also provide a list of Advocate Services available in Scotland for your local area, you can access their website via this link:

<https://www.siaa.org.uk/find-an-advocate/>

Power of Attorney and Guardianship Orders



Power of Attorney

In Scotland, a Power of Attorney (PoA) is a legal document allowing an individual to appoint a trusted person such as an unpaid carer to make decisions on their behalf. It must be set up while the person still has the mental capacity to do so.

An attorney can help with:

- money and property
- care and welfare decisions

A supported person can make a power of attorney only when they are able to understand and make decisions.

A financial attorney can start helping straight away, or only if a supported person no longer has capacity.

A welfare attorney can only start helping if a supported person no longer has capacity.

All powers of attorney must be registered with the Public Guardian.

You can find out more about applying for Power of Attorney as a carer here:

<https://www.mygov.scot/power-of-attorney>

Guardianship Order

In Scotland, a guardianship order gives an unpaid carer the legal authority to make long-term decisions and manage affairs for an adult (aged 16 or over) who lacks the capacity to do so themselves.

A guardian may help with:

- paying bills
- dealing with bank accounts
- making care decisions
- making welfare decisions

A sheriff grants the order.

The order is usually for a set time, such as 3 years.

An adult means someone aged 16 or over.

If needed, an application can be made up to 3 months before a child turns 16.

This can help make sure the order is ready for their 16th birthday.

A guardianship order can cover money, property, care, welfare, or a mix of these.

You should get legal advice if you want to apply for a guardianship order.

You can find out more about applying for guardianship as a carer here:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/adults-incapacity-scotland-act-2000-guardianship-intervention-orders-making-application-guide-carers/pages/4/>

Support in the Right Direction (SiRD)



Self-directed support is the way that social care should be arranged and delivered in Scotland. It gives people choice and control over their care and support, empowering them to be equal partners in decisions about their care and to participate fully in all aspects of life. [The Support in the Right Direction \(SiRD\)](#) programme provides local independent support, information, advice and advocacy around self-directed support, in line with Scottish Government's Self-Directed Support Improvement Plan 2023-27.

The purpose of independent support is to help people and their carers make informed decisions and plans for their social care and maximise their choice and control over those arrangements using self-directed support options. With expertise in self-directed support legislation and a good knowledge of local resources, independent support organisations work with people at every stage of their social care journey. They take a person-centred approach and respond flexibly to individual circumstances, supporting all social care user groups and unpaid carers. This support includes help to understand the social care system and self-directed support, help to prepare for and participate in social care assessments, and help to plan and manage support. Independent support plays an important part in the delivery of social care and without it, many social care users and carers would struggle to access the support they need and make use of it in the way they would like.

You can find a list of the funded SiRD projects and the local authority areas they support here:

<https://inspiringscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/SiRD-2024-27-funded-organisations-incl-amounts.pdf>

8. Short Breaks for Carers



Short breaks play an essential role in helping carers maintain their wellbeing and sustain their caring relationships. A break offers time to rest, recharge, and focus on your own needs, whether through relaxation, social connection, or pursuing personal interests.

Your Rights to a Break

As part of your Adult Carer Support Plan (ACSP) or Young Carer Statement, your local authority must consider whether you need a break from caring. This discussion should form part of your overall support plan and reflect your individual outcomes.

Types of Short Breaks

Short breaks can take many forms and should be personalised to what works best for you. They may include time to:

- **Rest and restore** your energy.
- **Spend time** with friends or family.
- **Enjoy hobbies**, leisure activities, or new experiences.
- **Have regular** planned time to yourself.

Breaks may be:

- A one-off occasion.
- A regular weekly or monthly activity.
- A day out.
- An overnight stay.
- A holiday.
- Taken with or without the person you care for, with additional support if needed.

Reflective Checklist



These questions can help you understand your access to short breaks



Do I understand what a short break is?

☐

Does my current support include a break from caring?

☐

Am I able to take regular breaks when I need them?

☐

Can I choose a type of short break that suits my needs?

☐

Do the professionals I work with clearly distinguish between my break and respite for the person I care for?

☐

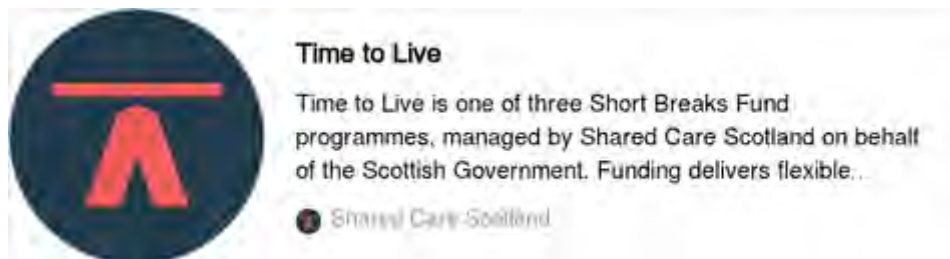
Additional Funding and Support

Carers may also be able to access funding for breaks through national schemes, including:

- **Shared Care Scotland's Short Breaks** Directory – information about local options.

<https://www.sharedcarescotland.org.uk/directory/short-break-providers/>

- **Time to Live Fund** – grants for personalised short breaks.



<https://www.sharedcarescotland.org.uk/short-breaks-fund/time-to-live/>

- **Take a Break Fund** – support for carers of children and young people with disabilities.



<https://takeabreakscotland.org.uk>

Your local carers centre should be able to advise you about what short breaks are available for you to access. You can find out who your local carers centre is here: <https://carers.org/network-partners-in-scotland/network-partners-in-scotland>

9. Building Trust and Relationships



Building strong, trusting relationships between unpaid carers and professionals is essential to ensuring effective support. Trust develops when carers feel valued, understood, and meaningfully involved in decisions that affect their lives and the person they care for. Professionals also benefit from open communication and shared understanding, which leads to better outcomes for everyone involved.

For Carers

You may find it helpful to reflect on the quality of your relationships with the professionals you work with.

Consider whether:

- You feel **listened to** and able to speak openly and honestly.
- Communication is clear, **consistent**, and timely.
- Professionals demonstrate an **understanding** of self-directed support and how it should work.
- They understand your needs as a carer and what **support** works for you.
- You are not repeatedly asked to retell **your story**.
- You are **trusted** to use your budget flexibly in ways that support your agreed outcomes.

If any of these areas feel challenging, think about what changes or support could help strengthen the relationship.

For Professionals

Professionals also play a key role in developing trust with carers. Effective relationships are grounded in clear communication, empathy, and an understanding of the emotional and practical demands of caring.

Professionals should consider whether:

- Their relationship with the carer is open, **supportive**, and respectful.
- They **communicate** regularly and keep the carer informed—even when there is no new progress.
- They **understand** the carer's needs and preferred ways of working
- Their support is **consistent** and avoids unnecessary repetition of the carer's story.
- They **trust** carers to use budgets flexibly in line with agreed outcomes.
- They demonstrate a solid understanding of self-directed support **principles**.

If gaps exist, identifying what needs to change can help rebuild confidence and improve collaborative working.

Tips for Carers



Be clear and direct when sharing information—your insight is essential



Know your rights under the Carers (Scotland) Act



Prepare for assessments by noting the realities of daily life



Seek support from your local Carers Centre or independent advocacy



Reflect on both the positive and challenging aspects of your caring role



Create a list of questions to ask professionals



Familiarise yourself with how Self-Directed Support works

Tips for Professionals



Maintain regular communication and provide updates, even if progress is slow



Ensure the carer feels heard and respected

~~JARGON~~



Avoid jargon—use clear and accessible language



Be open, honest, and transparent in conversations



Recognise the emotional and physical demands of caring



Focus discussions on clear outcomes rather than solely on processes



Offer creative and flexible support options

10. Practical Tools and Resources



Unpaid carers in Scotland can access a wide range of practical tools, services, and supports designed to make caring more manageable and to help maintain their own wellbeing. These resources offer guidance, information, and direct assistance throughout the caring journey.

Local Carer Centres

Local carer centres provide information, emotional support, training, and practical help.

They can support you with:

- **Understanding** your rights.
- **Preparing** for assessments.
- **Developing** an Adult Carer Support Plan (ACSP).
- **Accessing** short breaks, grants, and financial advice.

Find your nearest carer centre:

carers.org/network-partners-in-scotland

Adult Carer Support Plans and Young Carers Statements

An Adult Carers Support Plan (ACSP) (or Young Carer Statement for carers under 18, or 18 and still at school) helps identify your needs, how caring affects your life, and what support would help you maintain a life alongside caring.

You can find out more information about this at Carers UK Scotland here:

<https://www.carersuk.org/scotland/help-and-advice/practical-support/adult-carer-support-plans>

Technology and Equipment

Digital tools and practical equipment can help make caring tasks easier and support safety, communication, and independence. This may include telecare, apps, home sensors, or mobility aids.

You can learn more about technology and equipment here:

<https://www.carersuk.org/Scotland/help-and-advice/technology-and-equipment>

Emergency Planning

Every carer should have a contingency plan in case they are unable to provide care due to illness, emergencies, or unexpected events. Keeping essential information and contacts in one place ensures continuity of care.

Carers UK Scotland have some great guidance around setting up a contingency plan and you can access the guidance here:

<https://www.carersuk.org/scotland/help-and-advice/practical-support/creating-a-contingency-plan>

11. What Can Go Wrong?



While Self-Directed Support (SDS) aims to give carers greater choice and control, many still experience challenges when trying to access support. Delays, inconsistent communication, and limited flexibility can create stress and make it harder for carers to manage their responsibilities.

Delays in Assessments

Carer assessments are often delayed due to system pressures, high demand, and limited resources. Some carers wait months, sometimes longer for their assessment to be completed.

What you can do:

- Request an update from the social work department.
- Ask to speak with a senior manager if delays are significant.
- Follow up in writing to create a clear record of your request.
- Highlight any urgent changes in your circumstances.

When Communication Breaks Down

Carers often report feeling “passed around” or left without clear information. This can lead to frustration, confusion, and difficulty planning.

What you can do:

- Keep notes of calls, names, and dates.
- Contact your local Carer Centre for support and guidance.
- Use independent advocacy services to help you communicate your needs.

Challenges Using Budgets Flexibly

Although self-directed Support is meant to encourage flexibility, some local authorities apply restrictive or risk-averse rules that limit how budgets can be used.

What you can do:

- Refer back to your agreed outcomes and show how your request meets them.
- Ask for support from advocacy or Carer Centres.
- Reference Self-Directed Support statutory guidance, which clearly states that support should be personalised and flexible.

If You Need to Make a Complaint

If informal conversations do not resolve the issue, you can use the local authority's formal complaints process:

Stage 1 – Frontline Resolution:

Submit your complaint to the social work department. They should respond within five working days.

Stage 2 – Investigation:

If you are not satisfied with the Stage 1 response, request a full investigation. The council should respond within 20 working days.

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO):

If you remain dissatisfied, you can escalate your complaint to the SPSO for independent review. Find out more about how you do this here: <https://www.spsso.org.uk/>

Contacts List

Keep a note of the people you contact here

Name: _____

Role: _____

Email _____

Tel No: _____

Date: _____

What was discussed?

Name: _____

Role: _____

Email _____

Tel No: _____

Date: _____

What was discussed?

Name: _____

Role: _____

Email _____

Tel No: _____

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What was discussed?

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Role: _____

Email: _____

Tel No: _____

Date: _____

What was discussed?

12. Conclusion

Caring for another person can be deeply meaningful, but it also brings significant emotional, physical, and practical challenges. Having access to the right information, support, and resources can make a substantial difference in helping carers maintain their wellbeing and continue in their role with confidence.

This toolkit has been created to empower unpaid carers by offering clear guidance on understanding your rights, navigating support systems, exploring Self-Directed Support, and building strong relationships with professionals. We hope it gives you the clarity and reassurance needed to advocate for yourself and to access support that genuinely meets your needs.



13. Acknowledgements



This toolkit was written by Brett Rogers and June Dunlop from In Control Scotland. We would like to extend our special thanks to the unpaid carers, and practitioners who generously shared their experiences and insights during our '**Flexible Budgets for Unpaid Carers**' action learning sets, which were funded through the Scottish Government funding.

Your voices and reflections have shaped this toolkit and continue to inform how support for carers can improve.

We hope you find this toolkit helpful and look forward to your feedback.

{This version of the toolkit was updated in August 2026}

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