

Community Support Plan

Jenny (16) • Young carer

Aim: understand the developmental impact of 5 years of caring + build an attachment-informed support plan to protect wellbeing, education and relationships.

Lifespan development lens: Bowlby's attachment theory

Certificate of Higher Education in Health and Social Care

- Psychology in Health and Social Care (LCHS4010)
- Assessment 1: Individual Presentation
- Student ID: 2434856

What we know

- 5 years as main carer after father's death (bereavement + role shift).
- Mum: mobility problems → needs cooking, cleaning, shopping support.
- Mum: memory problems + low mood → needs help with admin & routines.
- Jenny is 16: key tasks include identity, independence, education, peer relationships.

Key questions

- How might long-term caring + loss affect Jenny's emotional regulation and relationships?
- What support reduces caring load while keeping a "secure base" around Jenny?
- How do we protect school attendance, sleep, and social development?
- What does a whole-family plan look like (mum's needs + Jenny's rights)?

Outcome focus

Reduce inappropriate caring • Increase consistent adult support • Strengthen family routines • Build peer & community connections • Plan for transition to adulthood

Core ideas

- Humans are biologically primed to seek proximity to an attachment figure under stress (attachment system).
- “Secure base” + “safe haven”: a reliably responsive caregiver supports exploration, learning and emotion regulation.
- Internal working models (IWMs): expectations about self (“am I worthy?”) and others (“are they available?”).
- Disruption/loss can activate anxiety, protest, and adaptations to keep relationships safe.
- Attachment patterns are not fixed: later relationships and support can reshape IWMs.

Why it fits Jenny

Jenny has experienced a major attachment disruption (father's death) and may have had reduced caregiver availability from mum due to illness and low mood. Attachment theory helps us predict how “being needed” and “not being able to rely on adults” can shape coping, self-worth and relationships.

Attachment-informed goal

Create consistent, trustworthy support around Jenny (a secure base), while reducing her caregiving burden so she can resume age-appropriate exploration: school, friends, hobbies and future planning.

Key sources: Bowlby (1969/1982; 1988); Cassidy (2013).

3) Applying attachment theory: possible impacts (past 5 years)

Bereavement + long-term caring

Experiences (inputs)

- Father's death → loss of an attachment figure + loss of stability/routine.
- Mum's low mood & memory problems → less consistent emotional availability.
- Jenny becomes the “reliable one” → role reversal / parentification risk.
- Chronic stress + reduced adult buffering → heightened vigilance and responsibility.

Potential developmental impacts (outputs)

- Internal working model may shift towards: “I must cope alone” or “I earn care by providing care”.
- Compulsive caregiving/anxious strategies: difficulty saying no, guilt when prioritising self.
- Emotion regulation: risk of anxiety, low mood, sleep disruption, burnout.
- Social development: less time for peers, hobbies and identity exploration.
- Strengths can also grow: empathy, maturity and problem-solving (if support is fair and bounded).

Working hypothesis

Jenny may present as “capable” while feeling emotionally unsafe or over-responsible. The plan should reduce load and increase reliable adult support, so secure-base functioning can return.

Community support plan (health & social care) • Attachment-informed

Evidence: young carers often show poorer mental health on average; parentification is a recognised risk when caring is excessive (Lacey et al., 2022; Alfonzo et al., 2022; Hendricks, 2021).

Biological (nature)

- Adolescence brings heightened sensitivity to stress and social evaluation.
- Chronic stress can affect sleep, concentration and emotion regulation.
- Individual differences (temperament/genetic vulnerability) may shape anxiety/low mood risk.
- Caring may reduce time for self-care: nutrition, exercise and medical appointments.

Environmental (nurture)

- Availability of a responsive adult “secure base” buffers stress.
- School support, peer connection and respite services protect development.
- Poverty, stigma or isolation can increase load and reduce help-seeking.
- Mum’s mood/cognition impacts consistency of care; Jenny’s stress can feed back into family climate.

Attachment framing of nature–nurture

We can’t change the past, but we can change the environment now: increasing predictable support and reducing stress helps Jenny’s regulation systems (biological) and her expectations of relationships (psychological).

Secure base and sensitive responsiveness are linked to better regulation and exploration across development (Bowlby, 1988; Cassidy, 2013).

Jenny's needs

- Respite from daily caring tasks (time to be 16).
- A consistent trusted adult outside the home (secure base).
- Support for bereavement, stress, guilt and low mood (if present).
- School support: attendance, deadlines, exams, quiet study space.
- Peer connection: young carer group / safe social time.

Mum's needs (reduce reliance on Jenny)

- Practical help: home care, cleaning, shopping, meal prep.
- Mobility support: OT assessment, aids/adaptations.
- Memory support: prompts, calendars, pill organisers, simplified admin.
- Mental health support for low mood (GP review, talking therapy if indicated).
- Contingency plan for crises (who steps in if Jenny is at school/unwell).

Rights & duties (UK):

- Young Carer's Needs Assessment must consider if it is appropriate for Jenny to continue providing care (Children and Families Act 2014, s96).
- Transition/young carer assessments are available before 18 to plan for adulthood (Care Act 2014, s63 and transition provisions).

6) Attachment-informed community support plan

Reduce load • Build secure base • Support exploration

1) A secure base for Jenny

- Allocate a named key worker (consistent check-ins).
- Identify a trusted adult at school.
- Weekly “how are you coping?” review + escalation route.

2) Reduce caring burden

- Adult social care assessment for mum + practical care package.
- Community help: meals/shopping support.
- Emergency backup plan so Jenny can attend school.

3) Strengthen routines & safety

- Simple household routines (visual schedule).
- Memory supports for mum (calendar, pill box, prompts).
- Calm, predictable communication in the home.

4) Repair & support relationships

- Attachment-informed family sessions: validate grief, reduce role reversal.
- Help mum respond warmly/consistently in small ways.
- Encourage Jenny to ask for help without guilt.

5) Support exploration (teen development)

- Young carers group + peer support (normalise, reduce isolation).
- Protect education: homework time, exam adjustments, transport if needed.
- Identity time: hobby/club once weekly, plan for post-16 pathways.

Plan logic: increased reliable support (“secure base”) and reduced chronic stress support better regulation and exploration (Bowlby, 1988; Cassidy, 2013). Young carers often benefit from targeted support (Lacey et al., 2022; Fleitas Alfonzo et al., 2022).

7) What this looks like: first 4–6 weeks

Steps + measurable outcomes

Timeline (example)

Week 1

Young Carer's Needs Assessment + mum's care needs review. Immediate practical support (e.g., shopping/meal help) and an emergency plan.

Week 2

School meeting: identify a trusted adult, agree flexibility (deadlines/exams), and protect study time. Screen Jenny's wellbeing and sleep.

Week 3–4

Introduce young carers group/peer support. Start brief attachment-informed sessions (grief, guilt, help-seeking). Install memory aids/routines for mum.

Week 5–6

Review package effectiveness; adjust support. Begin future planning (post-16 pathway) and ensure Jenny has weekly "identity time" (hobby/club).

How we'll know it's working (examples)

Jenny: attendance improves; reports less guilt/stress; sleeps better; meets friends weekly; knows who to contact when overwhelmed.

Mum:

has practical support in place; admin tasks are simplified; mood/cognition support engaged; fewer crises reliant on Jenny.

Usefulness

- Explains mechanisms: how caregiver availability shapes emotion regulation and help-seeking.
- Highlights why “competent” young carers can still be distressed (hidden needs).
- Supports relational interventions: consistent key worker, family sessions, school as secure base.
- Evidence base for secure base/sensitive responsiveness concepts across development.

Limitations & safeguards

- Risk of “blaming families”: may underplay poverty, service gaps, housing and disability supports.
- Attachment language can feel pathologising if used without cultural humility.
- Less specific on learning/cognition and system-level change—needs pairing with rights-based and ecological approaches.
- Jenny’s wellbeing also depends on practical provision for mum (adult services), not just relationships.

Balanced conclusion

Use attachment theory to guide **how** we support (secure base, consistent relationships), but use legislation and whole-family assessment to ensure **what** support is provided (practical care, respite, education protections).

- Ainsworth, M.D.S., Blehar, M.C., Waters, E. and Wall, S. (1978) *Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Bowlby, J. (1969/1982) *Attachment and Loss: Vol. 1 Attachment*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1988) *A Secure Base: Clinical Applications of Attachment Theory*. London: Routledge.
- Cassidy, J. (2013) 'Contributions of attachment theory and research: A framework for future research, translation, and policy', *Development and Psychopathology*, 26(4pt2), pp. 1415–1434.
- Fleitas Alfonzo, L., Singh, A., Disney, G., Ervin, J. and King, T. (2022) 'Mental health of young informal carers: a systematic review', *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 57, pp. 1947–1965.
- Lacey, R.E., Xue, B., McMunn, A. and others (2022) 'The mental and physical health of young carers: a systematic review', *The Lancet Public Health*, 7(9), pp. e787–e796.
- Hendricks, B.A., Abel, J.E. and others (2021) 'Parentification among young carers: a concept analysis', *Journal of Pediatric Nursing*, 60, pp. 1–8.
- Children and Families Act 2014 (UK), s96 (Young carers' needs assessments).
- Care Act 2014 (UK), s63 and transition provisions (young carers assessment/transition).