

Am I an unpaid carer? Becoming a carer for a family member



You didn't apply for the job and there was no start date. It just began with picking up a prescription or dropping off groceries. But now every visit feels less like catching up over a brew and more like managing an operational shift.

If your relationship with Mum or Dad has quietly turned into tracking medications, policing household safety and dreading the next phone call, you should ask yourself the question: am I an unpaid carer?

What is an unpaid carer?

An unpaid carer is anyone who provides voluntary, unpaid support to a family member, partner, or friend who could not manage daily life without help due to illness, frailty, disability, or cognitive decline.

To understand this dynamic, it helps to understand what an unpaid carer is in legal and social terms:

- Becoming a carer for a family member usually happens when an adult child gradually assumes responsibility for managing their ageing parent's physical safety, health, administrative tasks, and daily wellbeing, flipping the traditional balance of care and nurture.
- When you become a carer for a family member, the emotional friction usually stems from this profound shift in authority. You are suddenly auditing, managing, and protecting the very person who spent decades protecting you.

Recognising the signs you've transitioned to being an unpaid carer

Many adult children do not identify with the term "carer" because they view what they do as simply fulfilling family duty. However, understanding what an unpaid carer is in practice starts with recognising how much of your personal energy has been redirected into managing your parent's life.

Common signs you have crossed the line from visiting child to primary caregiver include:

- Spending hours managing GP appointments, coordinating repeat prescriptions, chasing bank statements, or sorting through stacks of unopened mail.
- Feeling a wave of tension whenever the phone rings, constantly checking the kitchen for expired food, or worrying whether the gas hob was left on.
- Spending every weekend cleaning their bathroom, handling laundry, and batch-cooking meals rather than simply enjoying each other's company.
- Carrying a persistent, underlying sense of responsibility for your parent's safety and mood 24 hours a day.

If these patterns sound familiar, stop beating yourself up for feeling exhausted, you are balancing a second full-time role alongside your own life. Asking "am I an unpaid carer" is the first step toward getting the right support in place.

What are unpaid carers entitled to in the UK?

In the UK, unpaid carers are entitled to a formal Carer's Assessment from their local council, financial support through Carer's Allowance or Carer's Credit if eligible, and access to local respite care options.

If you provide regular care for a relative, knowing what are unpaid carers entitled to can open up vital financial and practical resources:

- **A carer's consultation:** A free consultation conducted by your local authority adult social services department. It looks specifically at how caregiving impacts your life and identifies what support, equipment, or breaks you need.
- **Carer's allowance or carer's credit:** Financial support or protection for your State Pension record if you spend 35 hours or more a week caring for someone receiving qualifying disability benefits.
- **Respite and visiting care:** Local council funding or private home care services designed to step in so family carers can take a short break, go on holiday, or simply rest.

Dealing with resentment and guilt

Feeling resentful toward an aging parent does not mean you are a bad son or daughter; it means your personal capacity has been pushed far past its healthy limit.

Resentment often builds when a parent rejects your advice, refuses to eat properly, or resists outside help despite how hard you are working to support them. Guilt

usually follows immediately behind, a sharp wave of shame after you lose your temper or catch yourself wishing you didn't have to visit this weekend.

Both emotions are completely normal responses to chronic caregiver strain. Relieving this pressure requires two things: learning what unpaid carers are entitled to in terms of formal support, and setting boundaries with aging parents so you can preserve your own mental health.

Tips for setting boundaries with aging parents

Setting boundaries with an aging parent is rarely as simple as reading off a script. Every family dynamic is different, and proud or sensitive parents can easily feel defensive if boundaries sound too rigid, clinical, or blunt.

The secret to setting boundaries with aging parents gently is to steer habits rather than lay down strict rules. It is about protecting your energy so the time you spend together feels warm and meaningful, rather than rushed and resentful.

- **Trade chores for genuine quality time:** Instead of simply refusing to clean or cook, frame it around your relationship. Softly express how much you miss just sitting down together for a proper catch-up over a brew. Suggesting a little outside help for the heavy housekeeping lets your visits be about spending time together again.
- **Build predictable routines instead of instant responses:** If frequent phone calls during work or late hours are wearing you thin, steer non-urgent catch-ups toward a warm, regular routine. Setting a predictable daily chat, like a quick call over an afternoon tea, reassures your parent that they have your dedicated attention, without you feeling constantly interrupted.

- **Offer choices rather than mandates:** Proud parents often resist boundaries because they fear losing control. Instead of telling them how things have to be done, involve them in planning the week. Asking which afternoon suits them best for running errands gives them agency while helping you protect your calendar.
- **Focus on shared wellbeing:** Remind your parent that any adjustments you make are meant to keep life enjoyable for both of you. Protecting your own emotional bandwidth ensures you can show up as a happier, more relaxed, and present son or daughter.

Restoring your original role as a son or daughter

If you have been asking yourself "am I an unpaid carer", remember that accepting professional support is not a sign of failure. It does not mean you are abandoning your Mum or Dad; it means you are delegating practical tasks so you can protect your emotional bond.

Understanding what are unpaid carers entitled to empowers you to explore flexible visiting home care. Having a Care Professional pop in daily to assist with medication reminders, personal care, and heavy housekeeping handles the operational work behind the scenes.

When professional care handles the day-to-day logistics, you don't have to be a care manager, safety monitor, or housekeeper anymore. You can step back, take a deep breath, and return to what matters most: simply being their son or daughter.



Need help taking a step back from caregiving?

If you are feeling overwhelmed by your caregiving duties and want to explore your options, Radfield Home Care is here to help.

Our friendly local teams offer free, confidential consultations to discuss how gentle visiting care can support your parent while giving you back precious quality time together.

Contact your local Radfield Home Care branch today to talk through your options.