

Self-care support for children and adolescents with long-term conditions: the REfOCUS evidence synthesis

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Plain English summary

The REfOCUS evidence synthesis

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Plain English summary

Long-term conditions (LTCs) are physical or mental health conditions that cannot be cured, that have an impact on a person's life and that require ongoing care and support. Large numbers of children and young people live with LTCs and the NHS is under pressure to find more efficient ways of caring for them. It is crucial that any changes to services do not risk children and young people's quality of life (QoL).

Self-care support describes techniques that help young people and their families gain the confidence, skills and knowledge they need to manage their condition and get the most out of health services. Self-care support is often provided by a health professional, but could also be given by another person who is able to help (e.g. teacher, parent or peer).

NHS policy-makers would like to know which types of self-care support are most likely to reduce costly health services without risking children and young people's QoL. To answer this question, we identified all studies that reported the effects of self-care support for children and young people (aged < 18 years) with long-term physical or mental health conditions. We included studies that reported effects on QoL or health symptoms and service use.

Ninety-seven studies were included, evaluating 114 interventions. Most interventions were for children and young people with asthma and provided over 2 hours per four sessions of self-care support.

Self-care support led to small improvements in children and young people's QoL. It did not reduce children and young people's hospital admissions but did lead to small reductions in children's emergency service use. Interventions that reduced service use did not automatically reduce children and young people's QoL, but study results varied. Future studies should test different types of self-care support over a wider range of conditions.

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