Chapter 1: The Changing Nature of Childhood

# Case Study

Matthew is 9 years of age and lives with his mother who has complex medical difficulties. For the past 2 years Matthew has been caring for his mother who is unable to walk more than a few steps and who is confined for most of the day to her bed or to sitting in a soft armchair. With his mother’s guidance and some assistance and support from neighbours, Matthew has learned how to prepare and cook meals for himself and his mother. This is becoming easier but Matthew admits to finding it difficult when he was younger. He admits to being very frightened at times and hiding both his fears and the times he cried from his mother because he did not want to upset her. Before leaving for school in the morning he washes his mother and helps her put on some fresh clothes. He then makes her a pot of tea and some breakfast. When he returns at the end of school he first of all makes fresh tea for his mother and then, whilst talking to her about school, he starts to prepare their evening meal. He has become very adept at cutting the vegetables he buys from the supermarket each week and preparing any meat for cooking. After their evening meal he helps to settle his mother in front of the television before starting his homework. At school, Matthew is treated as different by the other children and at times feels he is being bullied. The other children often taunt and tease him about having a mother who isn’t like other mothers. He would love to join them after school to play football, which he loves, but cannot as he needs to get home to see that his mother is OK. Many times during school he is checked by his teacher and even some of the other children for daydreaming, but Matthew has admitted that during the day he sometimes gets very worried about his mother and is frightened that something might happen to her whilst he is not there to care for her.

## Activity

How might Matthew’s teachers help him with his home situation? To what extent should they become involved? Should they, for example, arrange to pay a home visit to meet with Matthew’s mother and to ‘check out’ the home environment? Should they ask for regular meetings with Social Services or health professionals? To what extent should Matthew’s teacher engage with Matthew in exploring his own feelings and emotions and how his mother’s illness is impacting upon his life chances and education? Would this be considered intrusive?