IMAGO Young Carers

Am I a young carer?

A guide for young people to understand young carers and available support.

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About Imago

Imago is a social action charity providing services and support to individuals and communities in Kent, East Sussex, and London since 1964.

What does Imago mean?

Pronounced: ih-mah-goh

noun

The final stage of metamorphosis of a butterfly or moth, the state it attains through its process of growth and development

verb

To promote, develop and facilitate change and resilience, supporting independence and empowering communities

We have delivered young carer projects across the South-East for over a decade and are very passionate about empowering their lives and providing additional support to their families.

Introduction

This guide explains what it means to be a young carer, why you might be eligible for support, what to expect from our service as well as highlighting the positive impact this could have on your; education, wellbeing and social interactions.

We understand that every family is unique and has its highs and lows. You may go through times of emotional or financial hardship and do whatever you can to make the best of a situation.

Some see the ‘label’ of a young carer as a negative and are uncertain as to what a referral would be mean for them and their family, so let us give you some reassurance.

We aim to ensure that all young people referred to our service, whatever the circumstances, have the best possible chance at being able to access the same opportunities and life experiences as their peers and support with building confidence and resilience in tough situations.

Young carer definition

A young carer is a young person under 18yrs who provides practical and/or emotional support, usually to a family member who may have:

- A long-term health condition, illness or frailty
- Physical Disability
- Neurodevelopmental Disorder such as Autism
- Poor mental health
- Issues around addiction

Being a young carer can happen to any young person at any time, maybe even overnight due to an accident or sudden illness.

For some it may be because of a progressive condition but for others it might be as they get older, need to do additional chores or provide support to younger siblings if their parent/guardian's health means they're unable to.

Whatever the circumstances might be, this can affect the everyday life and wellbeing of the young person and the family as a whole. Additional support may therefore be necessary to put in place.

We understand that thinking of yourself as a 'carer' can be difficult to get your head around, especially if providing this help and support has been something you've always done.

Quite often however, we see amazing young people struggle with anxiety or in their friendship groups, so accepting support from additional services can have a positive impact on you and your family.

Young carer rights

There are three laws that recognise young carers in England:

The Children Act 1989
The Care Act 2014
Health and Care Act 2022

More information about these acts can be found on Carers Trust website; carers.org/know-your-rights

These include the right for every young carer to have an assessment to better understand what support they need.

An assessment for older young carers (for example, young carers aged 16 and 17) is offered to discuss their needs and what support will be required when turning 18.

The Government has also given local councils clear guidance on what they have to do to support young carers.

Young carer assessment

A young carer assessment is essentially a questionnaire (so there's no wrong answers) and helps young carers express their feelings and identify their needs. It ensures they are heard in decisions affecting them and assists in planning the necessary support.

The assessment considers the family's needs, particularly the person being cared for, and aims to prevent young carers from taking on excessive responsibilities.

Key points of the assessment include:

- Level of caring responsibilities considering age
- The care provided and the impact on carer's wellbeing
- Support to balance caring with own health and wellbeing
- Access to local support and provision
- Possible breaks from caring responsibilities

Young carers can refuse an assessment, but support may be limited without one. Assessments are offered yearly until the carer turns 18, transitioning to an adult carer support plan if desired and where possible.

Carers have the right to view their assessments and request that changes be made.

Assessments can be conducted by a member of staff either at home, school or college, over the phone, virtual call or out in the community. They could also be completed with another trusted professional or can be completed alone, depending on age.

Examples of care

When we picture carers, many may think of those who help elderly, frail or physically disabled adults to get out of bed, washed and dressed.

While many young people are providing such physical and practical care, it is important to also understand that providing emotional support is also considered care. Often young people are just as impacted by this.

Examples below:

Daisy, aged 6

Mum is a single parent who suffers with poor mental health and sometimes finds mornings difficult. Daisy may feel the need to help cheer mum up by giving her a cuddle, making her smile or make her a drink and feels sad to see her mum this way.

Samuel, aged 10

Mum and Dad are the primary caregivers for Samuel's younger brother who is Autistic. Samuel sometimes misses out on opportunities if his brother has a 'meltdown' and often helps to calm him down. Samuel doesn't understand his brother's condition which may cause him to feel resentful, angry and confused.

Alex, aged 14

Dad who has alcohol dependency. Alex often does the cooking, cleaning and helps put Dad to bed but also stays up at night to make sure Dad's ok. He worries for his welfare while at school, doesn't invite friends round and says no to meeting up with them in case something happens to Dad.

Zara, aged 17

Younger sister who has epilepsy and experiences regular seizures. Zara feels very protective of her sister and worries a lot when they are not together. Zara sometimes feels guilty when out with friends or looking into University in case she may be needed at home to help.

Impact of caring

Research shows that identifying a young carer typically takes about three years. It may not be clear that a young person is in a caring role, especially if it's all they've known. Their practical and emotional responsibilities can affect their education, wellbeing, and social interactions.

Education

There are thought to be up to 3 young carers per classroom across the UK. Some may struggle to get to school/college on time, focus, participate, complete homework or coursework or stay awake either due to caring responsibilities, worry or stress. Some stress may be because of not having the right uniform, stationery, equipment or money for food and bus fare.

Wellbeing

Research shows that 38% of young carers have their own mental health condition. Many do not communicate their experiences, worries or stresses with family, a trusted adult or friend, which can have a negative impact on their wellbeing as a child and through to adulthood.

Social Interaction

Missing out on social opportunities can have a lasting impact on young people. Many do not talk about their home lives with friends, so they may not know or understand the reason why they're having to say no to meet ups, clubs or activities. Finances, access to a vehicle or public transport to attend youth groups/clubs/hobbies etc could lead to isolation and impact development.

Benefits of being referred

Education

We provide free Young Carers Awareness Training to school staff as well as assemblies ensuring that young carers are normalised, identified and supported within school. Many schools now have young carer support groups. These regular groups have improved attendance and attainment, to know they're not alone makes a big difference.
Each school we train is encouraged to have a Young Carer Champion to talk to should anything change.

Wellbeing

Having other young people who are living in similar situations or a trusted adult to talk to can be extremely beneficial. This can help to feel less isolated, particularly if there are worries around their cared for's condition or experiencing anger, frustration or resentment towards their cared for.
Depending on the outcome of the carers assessment, we may be able to offer short-term 1:1 support to set some goals as well as offer our monthly online 'Time out Tuesday' sessions open to all registered young carers aged 5+. These give a chance to connect with others, play games, do arts and crafts and have fun.

Social Interaction

Having regular social interaction can help not only with wellbeing but also builds positive relationships. It might be that through 1:1 support, if needed, we identify and find any hobbies or interests to access including our Youth Shadow Board.

What to expect

The majority of our referrals come from school staff and other professionals that may be working with a young person but we also accept referrals from parents or guardians. We encourage a conversation to have been had with the young person first to gather their thoughts and feelings about the referral.

The young person would be offered a carers assessment, as is their right. This along with the the information stated on the referral form, will help us identify the level of support needed. The assessment is repeated the following year or sooner should we be notified of any changes to circumstances or impact.

We will then be in touch to discuss the outcome of the assessment and advise what to expect in terms of support.

As we are not an emergency support service, it may be that support is mostly offered through school, monthly newsletters and updates, access to resources via our website and invites to online/respite activities should we receive funding to do so.

Respite activities are not guaranteed and we try to benefit as many different young carers as possible so may be limited.

Contact us

If you think you could be a young carer, speak to your school or a parent/guardian who can get in touch with our team.

If you would like to know more about our young carer services and check out some further resources, please visit our website:

www.imago.community/young-carers-services

Parents/guardians can follow us on our socials for news and updates in your area:

ImagoCommunityUK for all Imago service updates

ImagoYoungPeopleSupport for young people news

Imagocommunityuk