

# You care, we care.

## Young carers: Who are they and how can we support them?

A young carer is a person under 25 years of age who provides support and care to a family member or a friend with disability, a mental health issue, an alcohol or other drug problem, chronic or terminal illness, or who is frail or cannot look after themselves. A young carer may be caring for their own child.

A young carer may share their caring responsibilities with a family member or another person close to them. However, some young carers are the sole carer for the person in their life who needs care.

Although many young carers want to care for the person in their life and find it a rewarding experience, there can be many challenges associated with their situation — some of which may impact on their experience at school.

Below are some practical tips that may help you to identify young carers in your school, better understand their situations and needs, and assist them to access support if required.

### Identifying young carers

Research shows that one in ten people of school age is a young carer. This means there could be two or three young carers in every classroom. How would you know if a student in your classroom or school is a young carer?

While some young carers will openly disclose their role as a carer, others may not talk to anyone about what is happening at home. Some students may feel isolated because they do not want, or have been unable to discuss their experience. Some young carers may not even recognise themselves as a carer — to them, their caring role may just seem normal.

Some common signs that a student may be a young carer and in need of support include:



- being anxious or withdrawn
- sleepiness or difficulty concentrating
- regularly being late or absent from school
- diminished educational performance, including not submitting homework or assignments.

### Supporting young carers in schools

If you know that there are young carers in your classroom or school, it is important to recognise the challenges they may face and support them in the school environment.

You can help young carers by:

- creating a supportive school environment in which wellbeing is a priority and they can feel comfortable talking with someone about their home responsibilities
- showing confidence in their abilities — look for ways that they can stretch themselves and grow intellectually, even with the pressures of being a carer
- being flexible and responsive — have a chat about what flexible arrangements may help them. For example, discuss the possibility of extending deadlines during times when their caring load may be particularly high
- developing a student plan that identifies appropriate educational adjustments, such as offering extensions on assignments and catch-up lessons



- checking in with them about how they are going in other aspects of their life such as their physical and social wellbeing
- referring them to support staff at the school such as guidance officers, chaplains, school-based youth health nurses, student welfare workers, community education counsellors and youth support coordinators
- connecting the student to young carer services, particularly if they are new to their caring role
- working collaboratively with their family and relevant support agencies.

Teachers and school staff can also choose to talk to their class or broader school community about what a young carer is — highlighting the important role that young carers play in our society. Schools may even choose to hold a specific event to celebrate young carers.

## What support services are available to young carers?

In addition to school-based supports, the following organisations provide useful information and support services that can be accessed by young carers and school staff:

- **Carer Gateway:**

<https://www.carergateway.gov.au/>

A national online and phone service funded by the Australian Government that provides practical information and resources to support carers (including young carers).

- **Little Dreamers:**

<https://www.littledreamers.org.au/>

Supporting young people who provide care for a family member by linking them to peer support groups, school holiday programs, and leadership and personal development opportunities.

- **Young Carers Network:**

<https://youngcarersnetwork.com.au/>

Includes information about a Young Carer Bursary Program, which aims to help young carers remain in education:

<https://youngcarersnetwork.com.au/young-carer-bursary>

- **Youth Beyond Blue:**

<https://www.youthbeyondblue.com/help-someone-you-know/young-carers>

## Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Support for young carers

Due to social distancing measures in place to slow the spread of COVID-19, some support services available to carers may have had to change the way they provide assistance. In some instances the support may have had to be temporarily limited or cease.

This may mean that some students have become a young carer for the first time, or that students who were already young carers now have additional responsibilities.

It is important to check in with students and see how they are coping with their caring responsibilities. If a student needs additional support at this time, help them to access support at school or through the agencies listed in this resource.

Given that young carers may be caring for a loved one who has specific health needs, they may be particularly worried about them or someone in their family getting COVID-19. As the pandemic continues, it is essential that young carers know how to access health and medical advice and support.

Remind students that the best way to protect themselves and their family from COVID-19 is to practise good hygiene (e.g., washing your hands for 20 seconds) and follow the Government's guidelines.

For the latest information and advice about COVID-19 and how to stay safe tell students to:

- visit [Queensland Health's Coronavirus webpage](#)
- call 13 HEALTH (13 43 84) anytime for practical advice, including over the phone nurse assessments if you or someone in your family is experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.

## References

- **Carer Gateway:** <https://www.carergateway.gov.au/help-advice/studying-while-caring> (Accessed on 12 June 2020).

