IMAGO Young Carers

Is my child a Young Carer?

A parent/guardians guide to understanding why your child may be eligible for support as a Young Carer

IMAGO

Your local charity
Building Resilience, Facilitating Change
Since 1964

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ABOUT US

Imago are a social action organisation that has been delivering diverse services and support since 1964 to individuals and communities throughout Kent, East Sussex and London. So whether you're aged 5 or 105, we may have a service for you.

What does Imago mean?

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.

For further information about our projects and services in your area or to read our latest impact report, please visit:
www.imago.community/Information/About-Imago

INTRODUCTION

We understand that each and every family has a different make up, has its good days and bad, may go through times of emotional or financial hardship be it long or short-term and does whatever is in their power to make the best of a situation.

This is why it's so very important to stress that this guide is not intended to make you feel in any way inadequate or judged as a parent or guardian, guilty or unable to cope with family circumstances.

Some see the 'label' of a Young Carer as a negative and have many ideas as to what this would be mean for them and the 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.

This guide is intended to explain what it means to be a Young Carer, why your child might be eligible for support, what to expect from our service as well as highlight the positive impact this could have on their; education, wellbeing and social interactions.

YOUNG CARER DEFINITION

A Young Carer is a child aged 5-18yrs who provides a form of care, supervision or emotional support, usually to a family member who may have:

- A long-term health condition, illness or frailty
- Physical Disability
- Neurodevelopmental Disorder
- Poor mental health
- Substance misuse issue

Being a Young Carer can happen to any child at any time, maybe even over night due to an accident or sudden illness.

For some it may be because of a gradual condition but for others it might be as they reach a certain age, need to carry out additional chores or provide support to siblings if their parent/guardian's health means they're unable.

Whatever the circumstances might be, this can affect the everyday life and wellbeing of a child and the family as a whole and additional support may be needed to be put in place.

We understand that thinking of your child as a 'carer' can be difficult to get your head around, especially if you, the parent or guardian are the primary caregiver to your children and family.

Quite often however, we see amazing parent's burnout trying to hold everything together themselves, so accepting support from additional services is NOT a failing and will have a positive impact on your child and family.

EXAMPLES OF CARE

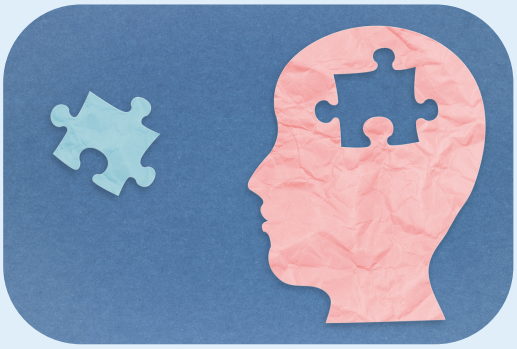
When we talk about carers, many will think of those who visit homes to help elderly, frail or physically disabled adults to get out of bed, washed, dressed and fed.

While many young people are also providing this physical and practical care, it is important to also be mindful of young people who provide emotional support and are often equally impacted by this, please see some 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, make her a drink and feels sad to see her mum this way - this could have a lasting impact on Daisy's own welfare.

Samuel, aged 10
Mum and Dad at home and are primary carers for Samuel's older sister with Autism. Samuel may need to miss out on opportunities if his sister has a 'meltdown' or may be at the brunt of it or often helps to calm her down. Samuel may feel he doesn't get the same attention as his sister and doesn't understand her condition which may cause him to be resentful, angry and confused.

Alex, aged 14
Dad who has alcohol dependency. Alex may undertake some practical tasks i.e. cooking, cleaning and put Dad to bed but may also stay up at night to make sure Dad is ok and worries for his welfare while at school. Alex doesn't have friends over and says no to meeting up with them in case something happens to Dad.



IMPACT OF CARING

It may not always be obvious that a child is in a caring role, especially if they are not caring directly for a family member. Instead they might need to take on additional chores or practical tasks that could impact their; education, wellbeing and social interaction:

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. Not communicating their stresses, worries, seemingly lack of engagement in class may then be misinterpreted as poor behaviour. 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 report to having 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. Many Young Carers report to feeling alone with 69% feeling less connected to others since the pandemic.

Social Interaction

Missing out on social opportunities can have a lasting impact on young people. As mentioned, 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 REFERRING

Education

We provide free Young Carers Awareness Training to schools as well as awareness raising assemblies ensuring that Young Carers are normalised, identified and supported within school. One way is for your child to attend an in-school Young Carer support group. These regular groups have shown to improve attendance and attainment. Knowing they're not alone makes a big difference.

Each school we train is encouraged to have a Young Carer Champion for your child to talk to should anything change. We may be able to support or signpost you to receive help with finances such as; transport, grants and crisis support to ensure your child isn't missing in education.

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 them feel less isolated, particularly if they have worries around developing their cared for's condition or experience anger, frustration or resentment towards their cared for. Depending on the outcome of their carers assessment, we may be able to offer short-term 1:1 support to set some goals for your child as well as offer our weekly online 'Time out Tuesday' sessions open to all registered Young Carers aged 5+. These give them 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 your childs wellbeing but also build positive relationships. It might be that through 1:1 support, if needed, we identify and find any hobbies or interests they wish to access. We often hear that Young Carers would like more quality time with their parent, particularly if their cared for is a sibling, this can help with any anger or resentment.

WHAT TO EXPECT

While the majority of our referrals come from schools and other professionals, we do also accept referrals from yourselves as the parent/guardian. If a referral is being made on your child's behalf then we expect a conversation to have been had with you to gain your verbal consent for each child identified and ideally a conversation with your child(ren) so they're aware.

However your child is referred to us, we require a separate consent form completed by you the parent/guardian to gather additional information. This would include; their health needs, any allergies, dietary requirements, anything else you feel we should be made aware of as well as who you're happy for us to inform e.g. their school/college and how you're happy for us to contact you e.g. calls only, emails only etc*. If there is any further information we need in order to progress the referral, our team will be in touch.

Your child will be offered a carers assessment - this is essentially a national tool for Young Carers that aims to cover all scenarios so some questions may not feel relevant to your child or reflect your family circumstances. This along with the the information stated on the referral form as well as conversations with the Support Coordinator, will help us identify the level of support needed for your child(ren). The assessment is repeated the following year or sooner should we be notified of any changes to circumstances or impact.

Once your child has completed their assessment, we will be in touch to discuss the outcome and advise what you can expect in terms of support. If the referral has come from your child's school or other professional then we will also update them as to how we are to proceed which could be different for each child referred e.g. your youngest child might be identified as low level in terms of caring responsibility and impact whereas your eldest child could be a medium or high level if has more responsibilities and emotional impact.

*Please note that the majority of our correspondence is shared via email i.e monthly newsletters, invites to respite opportunities, useful updates and signposting as well as links to any forms or surveys needed to be completed

CONTACT US

If you would like to know more about our Young Carer service before submitting or consenting to a referral, please see our contact details below.

Please note that the support we offer would depend on the outcome of your child's individual carers assessment. This would be completed once we have received their referral.

To speak to one of our Hub team call: 0300 111 1110

To email: youngcarers@imago.community

Website: www.imago.community/Children-and-Young-People

Our social media platforms:

Facebook: Imago Community
Instagram: imagocommunityuk
X: @imagocommunity

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