



Is my child a young carer?

A guide to understanding why your child may be eligible for support as a young carer

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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



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 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
- Poor mental health
- Substance misuse issue

Being a young carer can happen to any young person at any time, even over night 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 carry out additional chores or provide support to younger 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 perhaps 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, complete homework or coursework or stay awake either due to caring responsibilities, worry or stress. Not communicating their worries, lack of engagement in class may 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.

Social Interaction

Missing out on social opportunities can have a lasting impact on young people. As mentioned, many do not talk about home life 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 offer free Young Carers Awareness Training to all schools and colleges in our areas, as well as awareness 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.

All Young Carer Champions are invited to attend our termly online meetings to share updates, good news stories, group ideas, and any areas of concern for example, a young carer's loved one is soon to start treatment or undergo an operation that would cause them to worry.



So many of us felt unseen and unheard at school. Having a Champion each young carer knows is in our corner has increased confidence and wellbeing hugely



Benefits of referring



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 monthly 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 child's 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.

Highly recommend Imago for their young carers support. As a family they have been the most helpful service we have had over the years!



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

What to expect



Your child will be offered a carers assessment - this is essentially a questionnaire 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 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, we will also update them as to how we proceed which could be different for each child referred e.g. your youngest child may be providing a 'lower' level of care and has less of a negative impact whereas your eldest child could be providing a 'higher' level of care if has more responsibilities and greater emotional impact.



Contact us



If you think your child could be a young carer, you can either speak to your child's school young carer champion if they have one to make a referral or get in touch with our team.

Call : 0300 111 111 0

Email; youngcarers@imago.community

If you would like to know more about our young carer services, please visit our website:

www.imago.community/young-carers-services

You can follow us on our socials for news and updates in your area:



[ImagoCommunityUK](https://www.facebook.com/ImagoCommunityUK) for all Imago service updates

[ImagoYoungPeopleSupport](https://www.facebook.com/ImagoYoungPeopleSupport) for young people news



[Imagocommunityuk](https://www.instagram.com/Imagocommunityuk)

