
Young carers

Summary

- As a young carer, you might help out with jobs around the house, give medicines and organise appointments for the person you care for.
- Even though you are caring for someone else, it is important that you remember to take care of yourself as well.
- Having negative feelings such as guilt, frustration and anger is normal. But if you feel like your feelings are becoming too hard to manage, it is a good idea to speak with someone about it.
- Carers Victoria offers free counselling and information for young carers.
- The Australian Government can help by providing respite care and financial assistance to young carers.

More than 380,000 of Australia's carers are young carers (aged under 26), with about 150,000 aged under 18. The person they care for might be a parent, partner, sibling, their own child, a relative or a friend. They might be supporting someone with an illness, a disability, a mental health issue or an alcohol or drug problem, or an older person with care needs.

If you are a young carer, even though you are caring for someone else, it is important that you remember to take care of yourself by taking time out and continuing to do activities that you enjoy.

Your care role

As a young carer you might help with:

- shopping, cooking, cleaning, washing and other household jobs
- helping someone to move around the house
- taking someone to medical appointments
- giving medication
- getting dressed
- emotional support
- paying bills and banking
- making medical appointments and speaking with doctors
- looking after siblings if a parent is unable to look after them because of their own health issues.

To make the most of your care role and to avoid it taking over your life:

- Take regular breaks. This might mean organising informal or formal respite, or could be taking time out to do the things you enjoy – playing sport, listening to music or hanging out with friends.
- See if you can share your care role with someone, like a sibling or an aunt or uncle.
- If possible, continue with your schooling or work, even if it means cutting back your hours. If you need help to continue your education or to stay in the workforce, there are programs that can help. See the information below.
- Learn as much as you can about the condition of the person you care for. This will help you understand their moods, behaviour and physical changes, as well as their treatments and therapies.
- Share any negative feelings you experience (like anger, frustration or guilt). You may be able to talk to family members, friends, other carers or a counsellor.

Dealing with negative feelings

Caring for another person can be a rewarding experience, but it can also be difficult. Having care responsibilities can sometimes mean you do not have as much time for study, hanging out with friends or paid work.

This can be frustrating, especially when it leads to problems such as falling behind with schoolwork, running out of money or the breakdown of friendships. Sometimes you might just feel sad or alone.

If you feel frustrated or isolated because of your care role, it is important that you speak with someone about it. You might speak with a friend or family member, or visit your local doctor. There are also free counselling services available over the phone or in person. Sometimes it helps to speak with someone you do not know who is removed from the situation.

Friends and family relationships

If your care role takes up a lot of your time, sometimes it can be hard to stay in touch with friends and even harder to have a partner. Maybe you do not have a lot of spare time or you might be embarrassed to invite people over because you are worried about how friends might react.

Caring for another person can be a big undertaking, and you should be proud of what you are doing. You care for that person so their life can be better, even if it means it places limitations on yours. Your friends should respect that.

Caring for a family member can put a lot of strain on family relationships. This strain can quickly lead to frustration. People can take these frustrations out on each other without meaning to.

Most young carers will experience these stresses at some point. If you do, it helps to:

- not take things personally – often people argue because they are under stress
- get some help– this might be respite (so you can all have a break from each other) or counselling
- share feelings – talk to each other about your frustrations and other feelings because it often helps to get these things out in the open and to realise that everyone is feeling the same way.

Fitting in study or work

It can be difficult to fit study or work in around a demanding care responsibility, especially when the person's needs can be unpredictable. You might have to work late or have an assignment due just when the person needs you, or your care role might leave you too tired to concentrate at work or school.

The person you care for is important, but so are you. It is important that you can devote the time you need to the other essential things in your life.

If you are finding it hard to keep up with school, university or work, speak with your school or employer about your situation. You might be eligible for extra leave (either paid or unpaid) and special consideration at school, such as extensions on assignments.

If you ever find yourself getting stuck, you might be able to access emergency respite care. This is where the person you care for can receive care from someone else for a short period so you can get things back on track.

Carer support services

If you ever feel overwhelmed by your care role, or if you feel sad and alone, it is a good idea to get help as quickly as possible. There are many sources of carer support and help available, no matter where you live:

- **Carer associations** such as Carers Victoria offer phone counselling and other carers support. Call the Carers Victoria advisory line on 1800 242 636 for immediate help (weekdays 8:30am to 5pm).
- **Your local doctor** might help with advice and refer you to a counsellor if necessary. Your doctor will also be able to keep an eye on your general health and wellbeing and answer questions about the condition of the person you care for.
- **Counselling** can help you work through personal issues associated with your care role. Carers Victoria offers six free sessions with a counsellor in your local area (telephone counselling can also be arranged).

- **Support groups** are a great way to meet people in a similar situation to you. They can offer friendly advice and make suggestions for ways to take care of yourself while caring for someone else. Support groups can be via online or meetings in person.
- **Websites** such as **Carers Australia** and **ReachOut** provide information and support. ReachOut includes a forum where you can discuss your issues with other young people.

Government carer support

To help support young carers to continue their care role, the Australian Government provides access to respite care and financial assistance to eligible carers.

Young Carers Respite and Information Services (Young Carers) help young carers who need support to complete their secondary education, or the vocational equivalent, due to the demands of their care role. Respite care is also available through these services. Contact Carers Australia for more information on 1800 242 636.

Respite care

If you are under 25 and are the main carer for a parent, partner, child, relative or friend who has a disability, is an older person with care needs, or who has a severe mental or physical condition, you can contact the **Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre** on 1800 052 222 to access direct or indirect respite care.

For a carer, respite care provides time away from the care situation. For the person you care for, respite care offers a change of scenery that may include fun activities, group outings, individual support, camps and holiday programs.

'Direct respite' is care provided in the person's home or another location to give you 'time off'.

'Indirect respite' provides services that help support your education. This includes help at home, transport, tutoring, activities during school holidays, social support (for example, access to sporting groups), material support (for example, school books and uniforms), peer support, skill development (for example, to build your cooking or budgeting skills) and mentoring.

Financial help for carers

The government can also offer financial help to you or your family in a number of ways:

- The **Carer Allowance** is a payment to people who provide daily care at home to someone who has a disability or a severe medical condition. It is not means-tested.
- The **Carer Payment** is a payment for people who cannot support themselves financially because they care for someone who has a disability or a severe medical condition. You can work, train or study for up to 25 hours per week and still get the payment.
- **Youth Allowance** is a payment to eligible young people who are studying or looking for a job.
- **Newstart** is a payment for people over 21 years of age who are unemployed and looking for a job.
- **Abstudy** is financial help for eligible indigenous secondary and tertiary students.
- Other help you can get includes Rent Assistance, the Pharmaceutical Allowance and concession cards.

For further details and information on how to apply for these and other support packages, contact your local Centrelink office on 13 27 17 or visit the **Centrelink** website.

Where to get help

- Your doctor (GP)
- **Carers Victoria**, call 1800 242 636
- **Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre**, call 1800 052 222
- **Centrelink**, call 13 27 17

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Department of Health and Human Services

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