



Young Carers Peer Support Group Starter Kit

A practical guide for educators, non-teaching staff and leaders to provide young carers with peer support groups in education and community facilities.



Acknowledgement

A special thank you to the Government of Western Australia, Department of Communities, for providing the funding to develop and pilot this program in schools.

This program has been developed by Carers WA on the land of the Whadjuk Noongar nation. Carers WA acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures; and to Elders both past and present.

Carers WA acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers often have unique and specific needs. We understand and recognise that it is essential that these needs be met so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers may have the same health and wellbeing outcomes and life opportunities as other Australians.

Carers WA is committed to understanding, embracing and celebrating the rich and multi-dimensional experiences that shape our lives and aims to ensure that everyone who engages with the organisation feels welcome and included.

We aim to provide a nurturing environment that welcomes engagement and values contribution from people of every nationality, race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief, social background, ability, family status, marital status, age or political opinion.



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Young Carer Website

www.carerswa.asn.au/young-carers

ABN

38 219 836 631

NB: The above numbers and emails are not crisis support numbers and are not manned outside of business hours. If you need support outside of these hours please call Lifeline 13 11 14; Suicide Callback 1300 659 467; Crisis Care 9223 1111; Beyond Blue 1300 224 636; Samaritans 135 247

Hello & welcome

To your four-part practical toolkit to support young carers in your education facility!

This guide has been designed by the Young Carers team at Carers WA in consultation with young carers, educators, non-teaching staff and service providers across multiple schools in WA.

This online resource is designed for anyone and everyone and can be used by educators, non-teaching staff, students and leaders. Whether you are a primary school, high school, CARE school, TAFE or University or Community group this toolkit can be utilised and adapted to suit your staff and young people.

We have provided guidelines and suggested activities and resources, however you may choose to use parts or all of the toolkit. It is up to you to decide what will work best for your setting and young carers.

Some facilities that run the group chose to invite guest speakers from other agencies such as headspace or Kookaburra Kids to facilitate a session

Throughout this toolkit you will be provided with all of the information and resources you need to set up a Peer Support Group for young carers in your organisation; facilitators do need to be aware of, and follow their organisation's risk management policies and procedures including those for accident, injury or disclosure from a young person.

Let's get started!

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Part A: Let's Begin!

In Part A of this toolkit, We outline who Carers WA are, who Young Carers are and how a Peer Support Group for Young Carers can benefit young people and your organisation.

How to use this toolkit

We have developed a series of information sheets and resources that are embedded into this document. To open the resource you require, click on the icon in the section.

The following icons are recognised throughout the toolkit to represent the type of resource;

Document



Activity



Information





Who are Carers WA?

Carers WA is a non-profit, community based organisation and registered charity dedicated to improving the lives of the estimated 230,000 family and friend carers living in Western Australia (WA).¹

The Young Carer team at Carers WA are a youth friendly team of professionals dedicated to recognising and supporting the needs of young carers.

Carers WA is recognised by both State and Federal Governments as the peak body representing the needs and interests of carers in WA.

Through our research and work with carers, service providers and education facilities, we have identified the increasing value of peer support to a carer's ability to better manage their caring role.

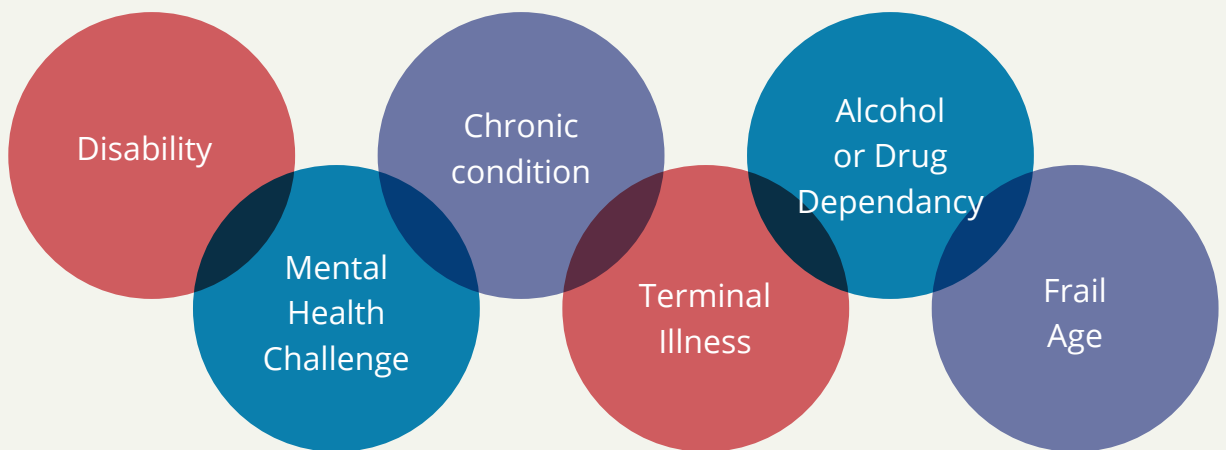




Who are young carers?

National and international research shows that young carers rarely self-identify for a variety of reasons, making them a “hidden” vulnerable group. Many young carers also aren’t familiar with the term “young carer” until after the term has been explained to them, meaning that identification can be difficult for you as a key person at school.

A young carer is a person, under the age of 25, who provides unpaid care to a loved one, who may be living with one or more of the following conditions;



Due to their situation, young carers have extra responsibilities which can impact on their home, school and social life.

In Western Australia, it’s estimated there are over 22,000 young carers in both metropolitan and regional or remote areas.



At least 1 in 11 young people in Australia have some level of responsibility as a carer in their home. This equates to there being, on average, 2-3 young carers in every classroom in Australia.



Why is it important to support young carers?

A young carer's role will vary from person to person and may include physical and emotional tasks that can be demanding and challenging. The support a young carer provides will go above and beyond what a non-carer would be responsible for.

Types of responsibilities may include;



Household duties - cooking, cleaning, laundry, shopping, looking after other siblings or family members including themselves.



Personal support - showering and bathing, dressing, using the toilet, mobility assistance (transport, wheelchair assistance, getting in and out of bed and shower), administering medications, translating, making phone calls and managing appointments and finances.



Emotional support - providing company to the person they are caring for, regular and sometimes constant supervision, having to assess and support the care recipient's emotional and psychological wellbeing.

The nature of these responsibilities can impact the young person's capacity to fully engage in education, relationships, and community.

The following link provides a holistic visual framework which underpins the risk and protective factors of being a young carer.

The “school” section is important for leaders and educators as it outlines how the education environment can support and have a positive impact on a young carer’s wellbeing.



Challenging and Protective Factors Information Sheet

www.carerswa.asn.au/yc-challenging-protective-factors-info-sheet/

Community

Protective Factors

- Sense of belonging, purpose and connection to land/community.
- Peer connection and friendships.
- Information and access to service providers that can offer support to both carer and care recipient.
- Respite through community facilities, programs and activities (there are often lots of free options including sports, parks, beaches etc.).

Challenging Factors

- Community stigma and discrimination creates barriers to individuals regaining positive health and education outcomes.
- Social isolation delays treatment seeking causing further deterioration in health and the ability to look after one’s health.
- Community resources become further stretched to meet increased needs.

Relationship

Protective Factors

- Increased empathy to other’s needs.
- Providing safe places to discuss feelings.
- Being understood and therefore increasing confidence to form relationships.
- Better relationship with family members.

Challenging Factors

- Lack of social skills or social isolation.
- Difficulties in accessing social and recreational activities outside of the home.

- Co-dependency between the young carer and the person they are caring for.
- Thoughts and feelings of worry, fear or that something terrible might happen if they leave the person they are caring for unattended.

School

Protective Factors

- Sense of belonging and purpose.
- Provides opportunity for the young carer to take a break from the caring role.
- Opportunity to make peer connections and friendships with others who have shared experiences.
- Development of school policy around young carer needs to increase education outcomes.

Challenging Factors

- Bullying from peers.
- Social isolation.
- Low self-esteem.
- More likely to have poorer learning outcomes.
- More likely to withdraw from the education system, than young people not in a caring role.

Individual

Protective Factors

- Increased self-esteem and overall wellbeing.
- Skill development around self-care.
- Genuine social connections.

Challenging Factors

- Feelings of shame and/or embarrassment, or resentment (from missing out on "normal" experiences) about their caring role due to feelings of being alone and isolated.
- More likely to experience increased illness due to poorly managed self-care eg. lack of sleep.



How can a Peer Support Group help young carers in your school or community group?

Young Carers often feel different or isolated from their peers and have limited opportunities for socialization. A quarter of young carers in one study reported being bullied at school because of their caring role (Sempik and Becker 2013). Stress is also common among Young Carers and they have significantly lower educational attainment.

We know that peer support is a valuable prevention and early intervention tool, particularly for young people.

Peer support can be described as the sharing of knowledge, lived experiences and social, emotional and practical support among peers.¹³

Peer support groups empower young people to to build positive relationships and encourages help seeking behaviors.¹³

This Peer Support Starter Kit and suggested activities and resources are specifically designed to assist carers to:

- connect with people in similar circumstances
- learn from their peers through the sharing of lived experiences
- experience relief from carer stress through forming personal connections and sharing of personal stories and experiences
- Have an opportunity to set goals and build skills separate from their caring role



Click [here](#) for more information about the CHIME Framework in which this toolkit aligns in-person peer support practices to.

What are the benefits of peer support?

Benefits to the school or organisation;

- Enables the school/organisation to review their policies under the "Carer's Recognition Act 2004" to ensure they are delivering a best practice approach.
- Empowers schools/organisation to encourage young carer students to remain engaged in school and community, increasing attendance, education outcomes and overall opportunities.
- Raises awareness of young carers and their needs, which reduces stigma and encourages young carers to build a positive relationship and seek help from the school.
- The school/organisation will receive support from the Carers WA Young Carer team and resources that will support young carer policy, promotion and peer support.

References 5, 6, 11, 12, 13, 14

Benefits to the young carers;

- Provides the opportunity to take a break from their caring role, in a safe and inclusive environment.
- Reduced isolation which leads to improved mental health, improved ability to cope with stress, trauma and change, and improved optimism and self-esteem.
- Builds a sense of belonging and feelings of acceptance, inspiration, hope, empowerment and motivation.
- Reduced stress through the provision of support and coping strategies that enables the young carer to better manage their own self-care.
- Confidence and upskilling of emotional resilience to better manage their educational outcomes alongside their carer responsibilities.
- An opportunity to set goals and build skills outside of the caring role.

Part A: Let's Begin!



Still not quite sure about some of the impacts that young carers experience and the vital role you can play in your school?

Check out this video!

Your Carers 'My Mental Health'

bit.ly/Young-Carers-My-Mental-Health



Young Carers 'My Mental Health'

<http://bit.ly/Young-Carers-My-Mental-Health>



Bristol & South Glos. Young Carers





Considerations

Including young carers in your organisation's policy

A whole school or organisation approach is most effective when supporting young carers and their families; this includes acknowledging and supporting young carers in policies, intake processes and guidelines for deadlines and assessments.

Policy plays an important role in embedding a positive culture and reducing stigma which will support young carers in their education environment. Young carers need governments, service providers and the community to be informed about, and respond appropriately to, issues that are important to their caring role and family's needs.

The following document highlights the rights of the carer which is outlined in Western Australia's state legislation under the "Carers Recognition Act 2004".¹⁴

You can also adopt this policy if your school has not yet developed one. We recommend including young carers, young people, parents and staff in the development of your school's policy.



Young Carers School Policy

www.carerswa.asn.au/young-carers-school-policy/



Young Carer Charter

www.carerswa.asn.au/info-027-young-carer-charter-26oct2022/



National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

bit.ly/NPChildSafeOrg



Privacy

With regards to young carer's information, it is important to review your organisation's privacy policy around the collection, storage and communication of information and guardian consent. This will maintain trust with both families and young people and will ensure legal obligations are met.

Diversity and inclusion

In planning an inclusive peer support group, it is important to encourage diversity that takes into account different ages, cultural backgrounds, and genders to enable variants in perspectives and broaden group membership.¹⁸

We understand that each organization and group is unique, diverse and has varying needs. Your staff will know more about your cultural needs than we do! We encourage you to consult your young people and include them in the process to ensure all promotions and group actions are inclusive, respectful and appropriate.

Sustainability

Ensure your group is sustainable using the following strategies:

- If possible, enlist more than one staff member to be involved in running the peer support group and advocating for Young Carers. This will ease workload and ensure continuity in the case of absences or staff changes.
- Invite young carers to register with Carers WA so they can have access to all of our supports and events!
- Adopt a policy and promote young carers in your school (we can help with that)
- Encourage the group to take ownership and take the lead - this is after all their group - the group should be empowering, insightful and most of all, fun!
- Some sessions can be less structured and goal oriented than others; allowing time for peer relationships, socialising and respite time is just as important.

Regularly evaluate the group's growth through feedback. We recommend reviewing the group at least once per year or as required.

Part B: Planning

Following a process chart, planning document or checklist can be a great way to ensure that you are covering all bases and nothing will be forgotten.

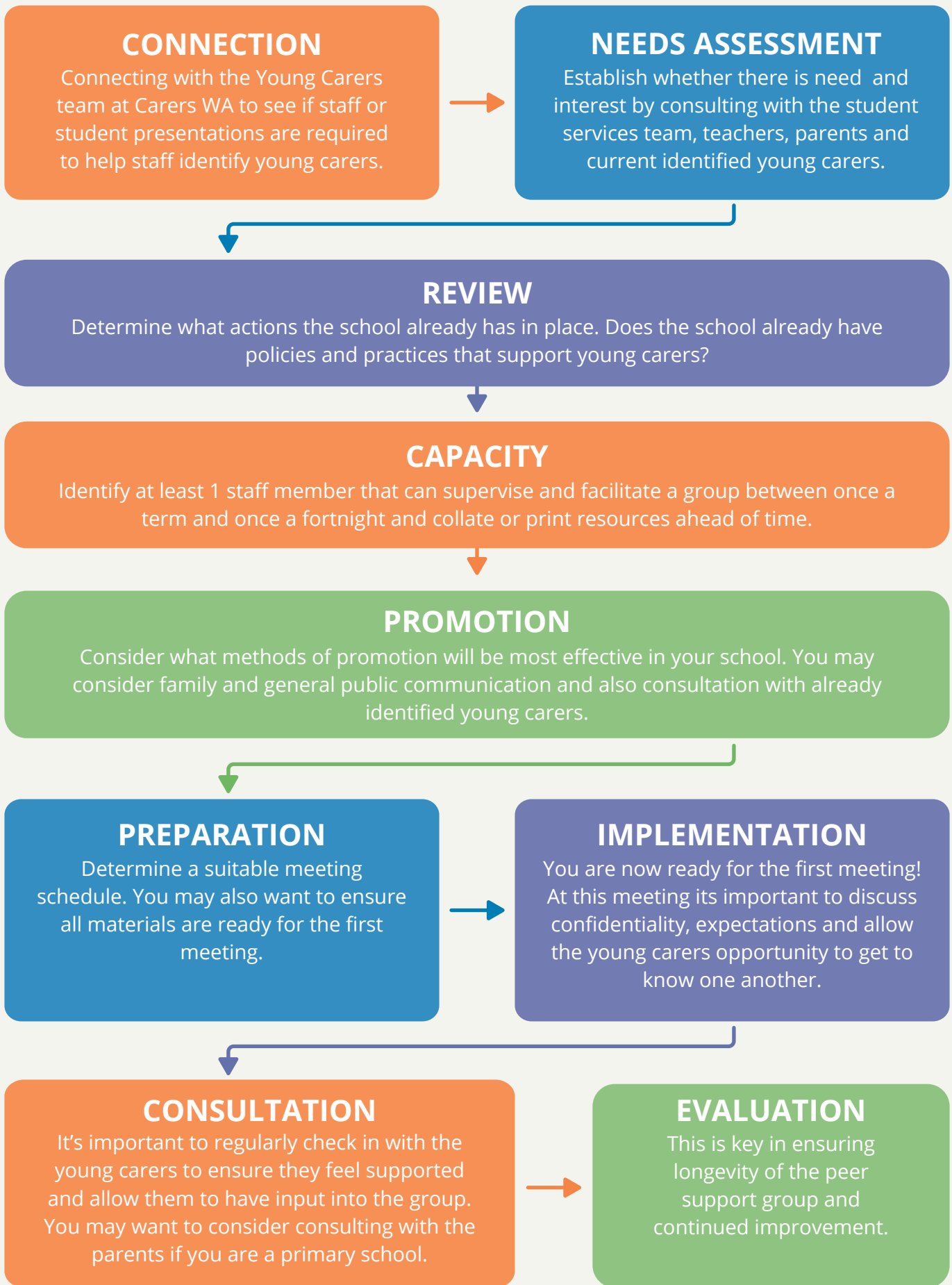
We have put together an example Process Flowchart to provide an overview of the steps required to implement your Peer Support Group from connecting to Carers WA all the way through to evaluating the group.

We have provided the flowchart on the following page as well as a printable version of the document accessible through the icon below.




Process Flowchart (printable version)

www.carerswa.asn.au/peer-support-process-flowchart/



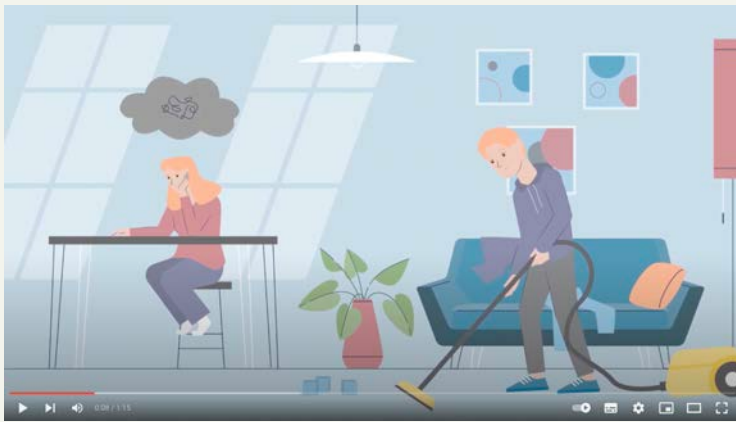
Promoting your Peer Support Group in your school

The following resources have been designed as a way to engage young carers in your school to get involved. You may wish to use some or all of the resources, or develop your own.

To access the document click on the  icon next to the description.

Let's get promoting!

'Are you a Young Carer?' video: <https://youtu.be/X0m8JFYu99Y>



Promotional Poster (Primary School)

www.carerswa.asn.au/primary-school-peer-support-promo-poster/



Promotional Poster (High School)

www.carerswa.asn.au/peer-support-promo-poster/



Classroom/assembly and social media promotion

www.carerswa.asn.au/peer-support-social-promotion/



Newsletter announcement

www.carerswa.asn.au/peer-support-newsletter-announcement/

The Young Carers team can support you to promote the group by

Step 1: Delivering a short assembly presentation (5-10 minutes long)

Step 2: Deliver a short in classroom presentation/workshop with relevant year groups (10-15 minutes long)

Preparing for the first meeting



Eligibility

If there is a lot of interest in the group, you may want to consider dividing the group by ages. Pilot group facilitators indicated 6-10 participants per group is ideal.

Timing

Determine whether it's possible to hold the group meeting in class time. If not, other alternatives include recess or lunch time, free periods or after-school hours.

We also recommend that the group meeting goes for anywhere between 30 minutes to 1-hour.

Before the first meeting you can also look at your availability and how frequently the group will meet. This may be fortnightly, monthly or once a term.

Meeting Location

You may have access to a permanent meeting room that you can use to host the meeting each time. Alternatively, you may wish to consider booking rooms such as a library room space, arts rooms, or the gymnasium. Perhaps get outdoors on the oval, if the weather is looking clear.



Part B: Planning

Facilitation

At least one staff member will need to be the main supervisor and facilitator of the Peer Support Group. This will generally be a student services staff member such as a school chaplain, youth worker, psychologist or a school leader or teacher.

The role of the staff coordinator is to coordinate the group meetings, locations etc. They would not necessarily be required to facilitate the group's activities or conversations, as you may choose at the first meeting to develop an Activity Leader role.

The Activity Leader role may work in a number of ways. Each young carer in the group could take turns as leader per meeting or you could have the group decide on a group member to be an Activity Leader. This person should not dominate the space or the discussions. Instead, they will be responsible for time keeping with activities and conversations, and facilitating the group out of any potentially harmful or irrelevant topics.

As the main facilitator, you may like to invite 'subject area' speakers to cover some topics for example from helping minds or kookaburra kids.

Funding

As a general estimate, if the school can arrange food, we recommend averaging approximately \$10 -15 per meeting. If the school cannot provide snacks, ask the young carers if they would all like to bring a "share plate". For example, this may include dip, crackers, chips, cookies, fruit or vegetables.

Schedule

Now that you've completed your planning and are ready to go, your meeting schedule might look something like this! Please note this is an example.

What	Young Carer Peer Support Group
Date	1st February 2023
When	Every three weeks
Where	School Library - Room 1
Time	10.00am -11.00am
Comments	For any further questions contact: School Chaplain, Jane Smith



Part C: Implementation

You may choose to use some of the following documents:



Parent/Guardian Consent Form

www.carerswa.asn.au/peer-support-parent-guardian-consent



Pre-Evaluation Questionnaire

www.carerswa.asn.au/peer-support-pre-evaluation-questionnaire



Post-Evaluation Questionnaire

www.carerswa.asn.au/peer-support-post-evaluation-questionnaire

Remember to evaluate as you go - consider the needs of the group, adapt and evolve!

Part D: Resources

The following section includes a library of resources to support the delivery of the in-person peer support group sessions

These resources include;

- **Suggested session plans**
- **Icebreakers**
<https://www.carerswa.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Icebreakers.pdf>
- **Activities**
- **Discussion starters**



Content and delivery

There are plenty of activities that can be delivered in the peer support group sessions to build the capacity of the young carers and improve their mental health and wellbeing. This may be related to the young carer’s roles or it might simply be discussing key themes young people experience.

Here you will find suggested session plans that you can use or adapt to suit the needs of the young carers in your group. Some groups found that some activities or topics were easily extended over more than one session as the young people were engaged and happy to devote more time to the activity. There are versions for Primary School and High School.

Session	Topics and Objectives
1	Introductions, rapport and identifying strengths
2 and 3	Vision boards and self-reflection: Identifying interests, skills motivations and goals
4	Help seeking: When/Why, Who and How
5	Understanding Worry: Identifying and normalizing worry, introducing various strategies for managing worry
6	Emotions: Identifying and normalizing a variety of emotions, increase emotional vocabulary and further explore and practice strategies for managing emotions
7	Mindfulness and gratitude: Introduce mindfulness and gratitude as ways of managing emotions and increasing resilience

You can also consider inviting other external agencies and local community groups to support delivering topics e.g. art therapists.

Click on the below Dropbox link to find all the lesson plans available to you.

www.dropbox.com/sh/a1kxenv2wahkpa0/AABLK-LjSZ-6IXI2IMFMnDvCa?dl=0
Password: yctoolkit@123

Discussion starters - choose one to get the conversation going!



Mental health and emotional wellbeing

Recognising signs of different mental health issues, seeking support, supporting others with mental health illnesses, compassion fatigue and burnout.



Mindfulness and building resilience

Share ideas around things you find helpful when dealing with stress and ways in which you identify when you might not be dealing with stress. There are lots of mindfulness activities available in this toolkit and online to research and practice.



Relationships

Understanding healthy relationships (friendships, family, intimate), boundaries and consent. Identify relationship and sexual health services that are available.



Social media

There are a lot of positive benefits of social media, however, there are also many negative impacts. Discuss key important themes around cyber safety (privacy, stalking, harassing), cyber bullying (trolling, verbal), screen time (concentration and sleep), body image, constant comparison and gratification through amount of “likes and followers/friends” and human connection. How to overcome the pressures of social media and use social media in a positive way (advocacy and choice).



Bullying

Discuss the varying forms of bullying for example; face-to-face, covert and cyber which can be physical, verbal and psychological. Discuss overcoming bullying, taking action and seeking support.



Sexual and reproductive health

Learn about sexual and reproductive health, issues, rights and diversity in its many forms. It's important to also consider topics around safe sex practices, relationships and informed consent and behaviors.



Healthy habits

Support for building healthy habits around sleep, nutrition, physical exercise, social media and gaming.



Alcohol and other drugs

Talk about safe partying, leavers, how to manage peer pressure, abstaining from or cutting down on alcohol or other drugs and what support services are available.



Culture

Learn about each other's backgrounds and explore other languages and cultures around us. This may include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or even learning more about your heritage.



Politics

Advocating for young carers needs, climate change, human rights, equality and equity are just some of the political topics that may interest young people.



Adulting

Learn skills for #Adulting101! Managing Centrelink, Medicare, tax, health appointments, NDIS support, budgeting and life after school.



Employment and careers

Discovering what careers interest you, building on your skills as a young carer, resume and cover letter writing, where to look when applying for jobs and how and mastering an interview. Did you know, the Young Carers Program has a "Career Planning and Employment Support" service? To find out more click [here](#).



Education opportunities and future studies

Discovering what you like, applying for courses, time management, the career pathways from different education facilities; training centres, TAFEs, universities



Services and supports available for young people and young carers

Do a little investigating to find out what services out there may be useful for you, there are plenty! We also recommend looking into what supports are available within your current networks for example; school, community groups, sporting clubs, online groups. Also check out what supports Carers WA can provide you here.

Wanting to get another service in to deliver a session? Check out these additional comprehensive self-help list of:



Youth Resources, see WA Youth Services Directory

see WA Youth Services Directory:
www.yacwa.org.au/ways/



Activities

see WA Mental Health Commission:
www.mhc.wa.gov.au/getting-help/helplines



Staying Connected

Stay connected with the Young Carers team at Carers WA by visiting us at...



Website

www.carerswa.asn.au/young-carers



Facebook

www.facebook.com/CarersWA/



Instagram

www.instagram.com/carerswa/



Linkedin

www.linkedin.com/company/carers-wa/

If you are looking for additional support about young carers you can visit the “[Young Carers](#)” section on the Carers WA website to keep up with our happenings, events and services.

We can also provide individualised support to young carers facing a range of challenges. To find out what we can do for you, you can reach the Young Carers team at:



Carers WA General Phone

1300 227 377



Email

youngcarers@carerswa.asn.au

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