



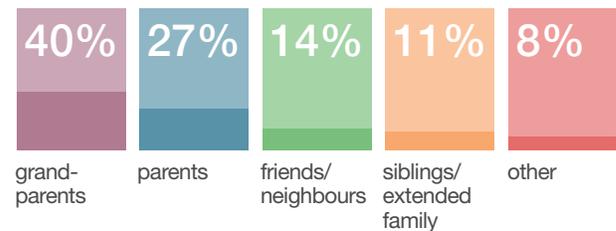
Caring for young caregivers

Young caregivers are especially vulnerable to social isolation, mental health challenges and lower educational attainment. For the estimated 47% of young carers who attend classes, chronic lateness, absenteeism, insufficient time for assignments, anxiety and problems focusing can make balancing schoolwork and caregiving a challenge. Here are some helpful policies, strategies and accommodations that can be made for students, as well as provide external resources to support them.

Young caregivers – who are they?

Young caregivers are people between the age of 15-29 providing unpaid care to a friend or relative living with an injury, illness, disability or addiction. While the majority of young carers provide support to only one person, 47% were supporting multiple friends or family members.

A majority of young carers support:



The Possible Negative Impacts of Being a Young Carer and a Student:

Physical effects

- Chronic (lasting) stress
- Limited sleep and physical exhaustion from fulfilling caregiving tasks
- Injuries from lifting a person or helping them move
- Illness as a result of neglecting their own health

Mental and emotional effects

- Limited ability to cope with stress and difficulties in finding resilience
- Increased anxiety, depression, isolation, feelings of sadness or anger
- 45% reported a mental health problem
- Constrained to one identity and pressure to fulfill other roles and life events

Educational effects

- Issues in attendance (missing classes and showing up late)
- Increased drop-out rates and unenrollment
- Incomplete or poor completion of assignments and tasks
- Limited participation in academic and social activities

Financial effects

- Unlike older caregivers (45-64), there are no financial resources or benefits available to student carers
- Most bursaries require academic excellence and do not support the full academic year
- Student carers may work while attending school, in order to provide for their education and the person(s) receiving their support

Social effects

- Difficulty maintaining and creating friendships or relationships
- Limited time to keep up with activities or participate in new hobbies
- Conflict with family members or individuals receiving care

How faculty and staff can support students who are young caregivers:



1

Be Approachable

Create a space where young carers feel comfortable sharing their identity. Offer these students the appropriate support and encouragement they may need to continue their education.



2

Raise Awareness

Share the term “young carer/caregiver” with other staff, faculty and students. Describe the experiences of young carers on campus and describe the impacts of this role. Help create a group identity.



3

Find Resources

Locate services, resources, and other supports on and off campus that may be inclusive to student carers in your area. Offer these resources to young carers that you meet and explain how they might be accessed. Consider providing a way for young carers to self-refer for support.



4

Keep an Open Mind

Young caregivers come from a variety of backgrounds. A carer may need to feel heard and know that they are in a safe space to share their thoughts and experiences without judgment or pity. Do your best to provide positive feedback.



5

Be Flexible

Be understanding when a student carer shows up late or is unable to attend a class or appointment. Provide extensions on deadlines when a young carer is experiencing an emergency. Support academic accommodations where possible.



6

Advocate

Collaborate with other postsecondary institutions, services and community organizations to raise awareness of young carers. Advocate to integrate a new framework on campus that supports young caregivers.



Watch the Webinar

To learn more about supporting international students, be sure to watch the webinar recording at: <https://campusmentalhealth.ca/webinars/caregivers/>

Credits for this collaborative webinar and content go to our speakers: Andrea Breen, Assistant Professor of Family Relations and Human Development at the University of Guelph and Michaella Miller, a student at the University of Waterloo who is part of the Young Carers Working Group at The Change Foundation.



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