

Step 6

Tool 2: Running a peer support group for young carers

Purpose

This tool aims to support Young Carers' School Operational Leads to set up and run a young carers' peer support group. It provides key information about:

- What is a young carers' peer support group?
- What can young carers gain from participating?
- What is the difference between a young carers' peer support group and a young carers' forum?
- What to consider when setting up a peer support group
- Top tips for the facilitating the first session

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What is a young carers' peer support group?

Young carers' peer support groups enable pupils who have caring responsibilities to get together on a regular basis to:

- Socialise
- Have a break
- Have fun
- Share worries and concerns and achievements with each other
- Gain advice and support from their peers and the adult facilitating the group.

Whilst the group will need to be facilitated by a member of staff, this adult should encourage the participating young carers to take ownership and decide what they want to use the meetings for. This could involve hanging out, playing games, doing activities such as arts and crafts or sports, or talking about young carer issues. Groups have also been used to provide additional homework support or to learn life skills.

Why run a young carers' peer support group?

Young carers often feel different or isolated from their peers, have limited opportunities for socialisation, and a quarter of young carers in the UK said they were bullied at school because of their caring role (Sempik and Becker, 2013). Stress is also a common problem for young carers.

Running a peer support group specifically for young carers will help ensure they can:

- Get to know others in a similar position
- Find space and time to relax
- Develop and use interpersonal skills within safe boundaries
- Find someone who listens and understands them
- Discuss issues they are facing and be supported to solve them
- Increase their confidence.

The adult facilitating the group will also be able to signpost young carers to relevant organisations.

What is the difference between a young carers' peer support group and a young carers' forum?

A young carers' forum brings together young carers specifically to discuss and help develop the school's provision for pupils with caring responsibilities (see **Step 6 Tool 4: How to run a young carers' forum**) rather than to relax, have fun and access support.

Your young carers' peer support group may wish to use one of its sessions per term as a "forum" meeting to discuss, influence and improve the school's provision but to achieve the potential benefits of running a peer support group, it is important that young carers also have the opportunity to do other things during their peer support meetings.

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What to consider when setting up a peer support group

- **Timing:** Peer support groups should meet frequently so that pupils get to know each other and establish relationships and therefore should be run on a weekly or fortnightly basis. Remember young carers may find it difficult to attend sessions run after school as they may have caring responsibilities at home.
- **Meeting room:** Meetings should be held in a room which enables young carers to talk in private. As the groups also meet to have fun and relax, comfortable furniture and space to carry out activities, such as arts and crafts, and/or play music would be ideal.
- **Funding:** Funding may be required for refreshments and/or activity costs. Many young carers are eligible for free school meals and pupil premium funding. Speak to your Young Carers' Senior Leadership Team Lead to find out how this fund may be used.
- **Creating the right culture:** Most successful peer support schemes are those where there is a school culture of talking about issues fostered through, for example, PSHE lessons, the curriculum, assemblies. Young carers need to be used to seeking help within the school or they will find peer support an unfamiliar concept.

Top tips for facilitating the first session

- Play an icebreaker to get pupils to introduce themselves to each other.
- Introduce the aim of the group, when it will meet and establish that pupils get to decide what to talk about and what to do at the session.
- Create some group rules. Encourage pupils to use more "we will" and only a few "we will not" type of statements to ensure that the contract, as well as the attitude of the group, starts out on a positive note. Make sure you agree grounds for confidentiality.
- Get pupils to make a wish list of things they would like to do at the peer support group.
- Wrap up - pupils say what they learned or liked or what they hope for about the group.

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