

Young Carer Wellbeing Sessions

This document outlines 4 wellbeing session plans delivered to young carers in their school setting. Each session focuses on a specific theme, with chance to share experiences and feelings relating to their caring role, in a group with others who have similar experiences, enabling peer support and tools to encourage coping mechanisms and wellbeing strategies.

Introduction to each session

Begin each session the same way for consistency, ensuring that ground rules are covered, and everyone has a chance to share at a stage comfortable for them.

Welcome the group into a private space, away from distractions.

Using the emotions rug, invite each child to stand on an emotion which represents how they are currently feeling.

Begin with introductions, starting with yourself, explaining the purpose of the group, acknowledging that everyone here is a young carer and highlighting the definition of a young carer. Ask each child to introduce themselves and, if they feel comfortable doing so, who they care for and why/how. Using name tags may help.

Set ground rules agreed by the group, ensuring things like "safe space, confidentiality, respect" are included. Specific mention around safeguarding and your duty of care if something someone says suggests there is a risk to another person.

Ask if each person in the group recognise that they are a young carer. Then ask if they knew someone else in the room was a young carer. If applicable, give a reason for them to relate to you, either yourself being a carer yourself or talk about someone close to you briefly.

Ending each session

Again, for consistency, it's good to end the session the same each time if time allows.

We include a 5-minute guided meditation story for young carers to relax and follow along. If choosing another method, this should still be consistent and allow for reflection of the session and any discussions which have happened within it.

Thank everyone for coming and try to include a brief explanation of what will be covered at the next session.

Session 1

Positives and negatives of being a young carer

Introduction

Begin with standard session introduction

Positive and negative feelings

Explain that we all get different feelings, and some are positive, and some are negative, and that is ok. Roll out a big piece of paper, (big enough for a child to lie on.) Draw around a child and then repeat the process. Put a happy face on one and a sad face on the other. Get the pens/pencils out and ask each child to put their positive and negative feelings on the relevant sheet, reminding them to think about their specific feelings in relation to their caring role. Tell them this is just for you to understand their feelings to help them. It is a good idea to talk to the quieter ones at this point to gain trust and confidence. Explain that you can write it down or draw it if they don't want too. Remember to praise each child on their contributions.

Reiterate that these feelings are perfectly normal, and the negative ones will pass, ask if anyone wanted school to know about any of the things they have written/drawn.

Skills developed through being a young carer

Acknowledge that, even though it may be hard to be a young carer and that they may feel different of that they miss out on things compared to their friends who don't have caring responsibilities, young carers gain incredible skills through their role, well before any of their friends might.

Use the large role of paper to ask the children to highlight which skills they think they have through supporting the person they care for. Guide the discussion by giving examples such as helping to cook meals, reminding someone to take their medicine, telling another adult if the person looks poorly or needs extra help, helping them get dressed, being able to calm them down if they get angry or overwhelmed. All of these are amazing skills to have!

Ending the session

Follow the suggested mediation story, allowing everyone a space to either lie or sit down, or another relaxing activity of your choice to wrap up.

Session 2

Keeping ourselves and the people we care for healthy

Introduction

Begin with standard session introduction

General conversation around health

Explain that we are discussing about what health means to us and why it is important to be healthy. Ask them to draw or write how they can stay healthy as a young carer.

If these topics come up explore further

- How many fruits and vegetables should you eat.
- How much water should we drink.
- How much exercise should we do per day/week.
- Toilet – explain that a lot can be said about the colour of our urine and our bowel movements.

How do we keep the person we care for healthy? – Why is this important?

Same as above

Healthy diets

While the children are busy with the activity, prepare the fruit. Section the fruit out in separate colours. Choose fruits that are a little more adventurous and the children may not have tried.

Fruits – strawberry, grapes different colours, melon, watermelon, blueberries, mango, pineapple

Once the children have finished ask them about the fruit salad that you have created, see if they can spot that they are separated into different colours. Ask what each colour makes them feel.

Try the fruit, explain that they can try some or all the fruit and dish it out onto their plates. (Have an empty plate/container just in case someone doesn't like the piece of fruit they have tried.)

Ask how many children have tried a new fruit, how many of these children like the new fruit.

Mindful Mouthful

Next is mindful mouthful with chocolate (use an alternative if required for dietary reasons).

Explain that the children are not allowed to eat the chocolate until you say chew slowly, if they manage to do this then they can have another bit of chocolate afterwards.

Begin by giving the children a piece of chocolate.

- What does it feel like?
- What does it look like, colour/texture/shape, is there any writing on it?
- What does it sound like, put it to your ear and listen, (hot hands make a ssssss noise)
- What does it smell like? Give it a good smell, can you imagine yourself eating this chocolate, do it again.
- What does it taste like? THIS IS THE HARDEST ONE. Put the chocolate on the tip of your tongue and once everyone has theirs in the same position slowly start counting to 10. Once you have counted to 10 say chew slowly. Feel the chocolate melting, feel it on your teeth.

Ask the children if it was hard, give them another piece of chocolate. Also ask if chocolate is healthy? Discuss the fact that treats are fine in moderation and can support positive wellbeing, too.

Explain the purpose of this exercise is to slow down when we are eating. As a society we are constantly distracted by our surroundings. (eating in front of the tv, computer, on our phones) try and explain we need to appreciate our food more. And make good choices to support our health.

Hygiene for staying healthy

Invite the group to discuss why hygiene is important, especially for those who are caring for someone with a long-term illness. What things can we do every day to make sure we have good hygiene?

Science experiment.

Have a large bowl of water on the table with lots of pepper in it. Ask the children to put a finger in it. When the finger comes out it will have lots of pepper on. Explain the pepper represents germs which we come into contact with every day through touching surfaces etc. We can't see germs on our fingers normally, but they are there. How do we get the germs off? Get the children to wash their hands properly, ensuring their hands get a good covering of soap, give hand sanitiser if you wish. Next get them to repeat the process of putting their finger into the 'germs'. If their hands are washed properly the pepper should not attach itself to the finger. Explain this is why it is so important to wash our hands, as the soap acts as a barrier for germs and gets rid of any already on our hands, so we don't pass these germs on. Talk about when we should be washing our hands?

Ending the session

Follow the suggested mediation story, allowing everyone a space to either lie or sit down, or another relaxing activity of your choice to wrap up.

Session 3

Introduction

Begin with standard session introduction, covering what this session includes.

Coping strategies for young carers to manage their emotions

Start by recapping emotions, challenges and positives which were shared during session 1. Explain we will be creating a tool to help manage emotions when they may become big or overwhelming, or to be used as a way to relax.

You will need

- Table cover (it gets messy)
- Small jars with lids - enough for one each and an example which the session lead will use to guide activity. Make sure there are no cracks in the jars
- Water in a jug or bottle
- Clear glue – no more than 3 squirts to begin with
- Glitter – thicker glitter works better
- Posca pens or stickers

Show them how to make a glitter jar. – [Watch our video on the website](#)

Let them up to choose up to 3 colours they would like, you can relate this back to colours which they associate with feelings they experience often. Take it in turns and keep an eye on how much the children are putting in.

Add in 3 squirts of glue, the more glue added, the slower the glitter will move around.

Explain that when we are feeling upset/angry/frustrated etc, our bodies and minds can feel “fizzy”, and all our emotions can mix (demonstrate this by shaking the jar). It takes around 2 minutes for our minds to calm down when experiencing hard feelings, when giving ourselves time to calm. This is roughly how long it should take for the glitter to settle to the bottom of the jar, if it's faster, add more glue.

Explain they can use this when their emotions are heightened, shake the jar, and watch the glitter settle to the bottom of the jar. By doing this our bodies naturally settle, our heart rate and breathing slows, making us calmer and more relaxed.

Decorate the lids and a little bit of the jar, but make sure they can still see the glitter through the jar (or send children away with some stickers so they can decorate in their own time, if they'd like to).

Ask the children if they have any other strategies which help with their emotions that they'd like to share with the group.

Ending the session

Follow the suggested mediation story, allowing everyone a space to either lie or sit down, or another relaxing activity of your choice to wrap up.

Session 4

Hopes and dreams & feedback

In this session, we have given two activity suggestions which can suit young or older children.

Introduction

Begin with standard session introduction

Primary – DIY dream catchers

Make a dream catcher for their school. Pre thread the dream catcher, have different colours hanging down from the bottom to thread the feathers on.

Give each child a wooden feather and ask them to colour one side. Write on the other side what they would like to be when they are older (remember this can be related to a job or more general spiritual suggestions like "happy, brave, kind". Pass the dreamcatcher around for them to colour it in.

Ask each child what colour string they would like to be on and what colour beads they would like.

Thread the beads and feathers on to make the dreamcatcher. Display the dreamcatcher on your young carer display board.

Secondary

Make macrame feathers and use this time to have open discussions with the group about their aspirations and any elements which may support them or be a barrier. Could school support with anything which is raised?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dajlBYfgBPA>

Conversation guidance for both aspiration activities.

During this activity there will be plenty of time for open discussion. Try and direct the conversation to aspirations, something the young carers would like to focus on as they get older. This can be focused on careers, or generally how they will manage their life whilst continuing their caring role. Both positive ambitions and worries around barriers can be discussed here. This can be a good opportunity to discuss with the children how school can help with barriers or enable them to pursue their ambition.

For years 9 – 11, you can refer to UCAS and specific universities who give specific young carer support and bursaries to show that they can still achieve higher education goals whilst managing caring responsibilities.

Ending the session

Follow the suggested mediation story, allowing everyone a space to either lie or sit down, or another relaxing activity of your choice to wrap up.