

Rethink  
Mental  
Illness.

# Young and caring

Accessing  
Support



# Young and Caring

## Accessing Support

**This resource is to help you make sure that you get the practical and emotional support you need, and to support you to think about who else can help you deal with the challenges you face – the answer to this will be different for everyone, so we have developed some tools you could use to work things out for you.**

This resource will look at:

- What is a young carer, who are young carers, and how will I know if I am doing too much?
- Ways to find support
- Working out who I know and what I can ask of them – my network of support
- What to do next
- Links to other sources of help

## Why access support?

### Am I a young carer?

A young carer is: ‘A child or young person under 18 who provides regular and ongoing care and emotional support to a family member who has a physical or mental illness, disability or misuses substances’.<sup>1</sup> Have a think – does this apply to what you do? If the answer is yes, then you may be a young carer – although you might not call yourself this, you may need extra support at times.

### What rights do I have?

When you are a young carer, sometimes you might feel that people give you bits of information but not whole stories – it could be because they are trying to protect you, or see you as young, so do not feel you need to know. You have rights – you have the right to be involved and consulted about the things that affect you and your family before decisions are made.<sup>2</sup> You may know more about what is affecting the person you care about than anyone else. You can use our **“Tool for Talking”** to write down what you want other people to know and use it when talking to them.

**This resource was produced by Rethink Mental Illness for young carers in focus in partnership with:**



1. ADASS, ADCS, The Children's Society 2012 2. Unicef. "Convention on the Rights of the Child." (1989).

## Am I doing too much?

There are guidelines which say when levels of caring are too much. They talk about young people being vulnerable when caring responsibilities become excessive or inappropriate. This might be when they “affect the young person’s emotional or physical well-being or risk impacting on his or her educational achievement or life chances”.<sup>3</sup> It is not always easy to know when we are doing too much, but it is worth reflecting on the impact being a young carer has on you.

As a young carer, your family should have an assessment of their needs, for you as a young carer and the person you care for – do not worry about how this sounds. If your family have not had an assessment talk to your project worker, the support worker of the person you care for, or another trusted adult.

### ACTIVITY



What ways do you think that you are being affected by being a young carer?

- Emotionally (e.g. your feelings)
- Physically (e.g. your body)
- Educationally (e.g. your work at school)
- Socially (e.g. your friendships and relationships)
- Anything else you can think of?

**What things do you do as a young carer? It is useful to make a list, and it would be good to share it with someone you trust.**

**Are you doing too much? In what ways?**

3. Frank, J. & McLarnon, J. (2008).

## What support is available to me?

### Support – what is it?

Everyone needs support from other people at different times of their lives. Anyone with caring responsibilities faces challenges, and getting some support with these is essential to your own well-being and health.

People who care for others may feel that their own needs sometimes come second, or that they can not really find time or strength to look after themselves. So support means for the person you care for – and for you. It is really hard to give care for someone else if you are not getting enough care yourself, too.

### ACTIVITY



Have you ever been on an aeroplane, or seen it on TV? There is a safety announcement that says if something happens, we must put our own oxygen mask on first (that’s before we help anyone else: our families, friends, the child sitting next to us, an ill person – anyone). Once we have put our own oxygen mask on, we can then help other people.

In other words – it is important to look after yourself first, especially if you need the energy to also look after someone else – in fact, it is really important that you look out for your own feelings and wellness first.

**What thoughts and feelings do you have about that?**

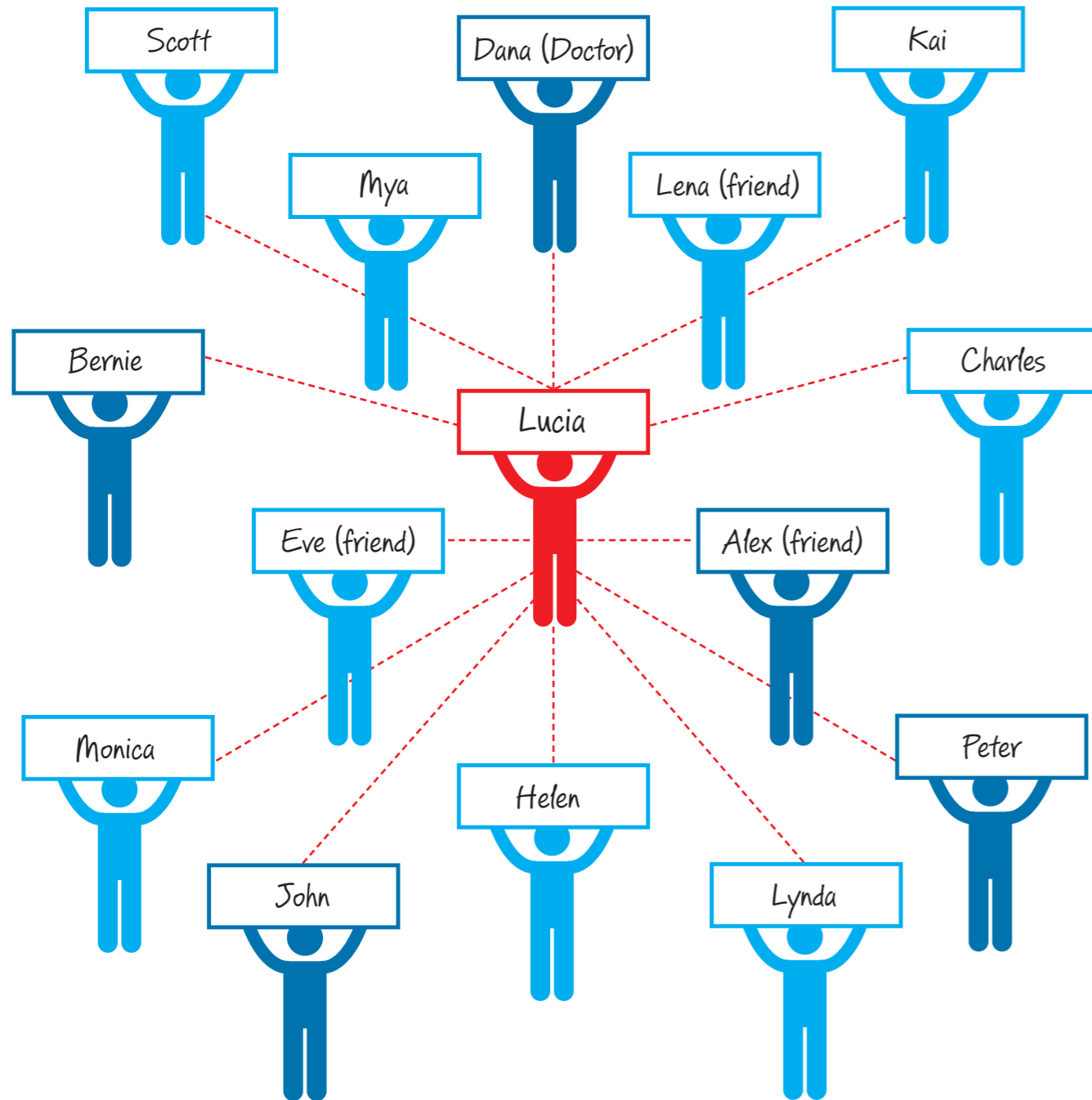
**Scribble them down here:**



## My networks

What do you think of when you hear the word 'network'? We have all got networks of people in our lives – the person you care for will have one, and so will you. As a young carer, you can use this network for different types of support – emotional, physical and practical.

Different people in the network might be able to offer different types of support, for example: your friends are different from your GP, but they're all part of your network. Here is an example of a network:



When you are a young carer, it is possible to feel quite alone, so it is really important you identify and develop your networks – and make sure that people are talking to each other and know who's doing what. We have developed some activities that can help you work out who is in your network.

## ACTIVITY

## Who knows I have caring responsibilities?

Have a think – who knows that you are a young carer? Do they know enough?

People who know I am a young carer	How do they know?	Do they know everything I want them to? (Yes/No)	What else would I like them to know or understand?

What about people who do not know? Is there anyone else you'd like to talk to?

Name of person	Would it help if they knew? (Yes / No)	How could I tell them and when?

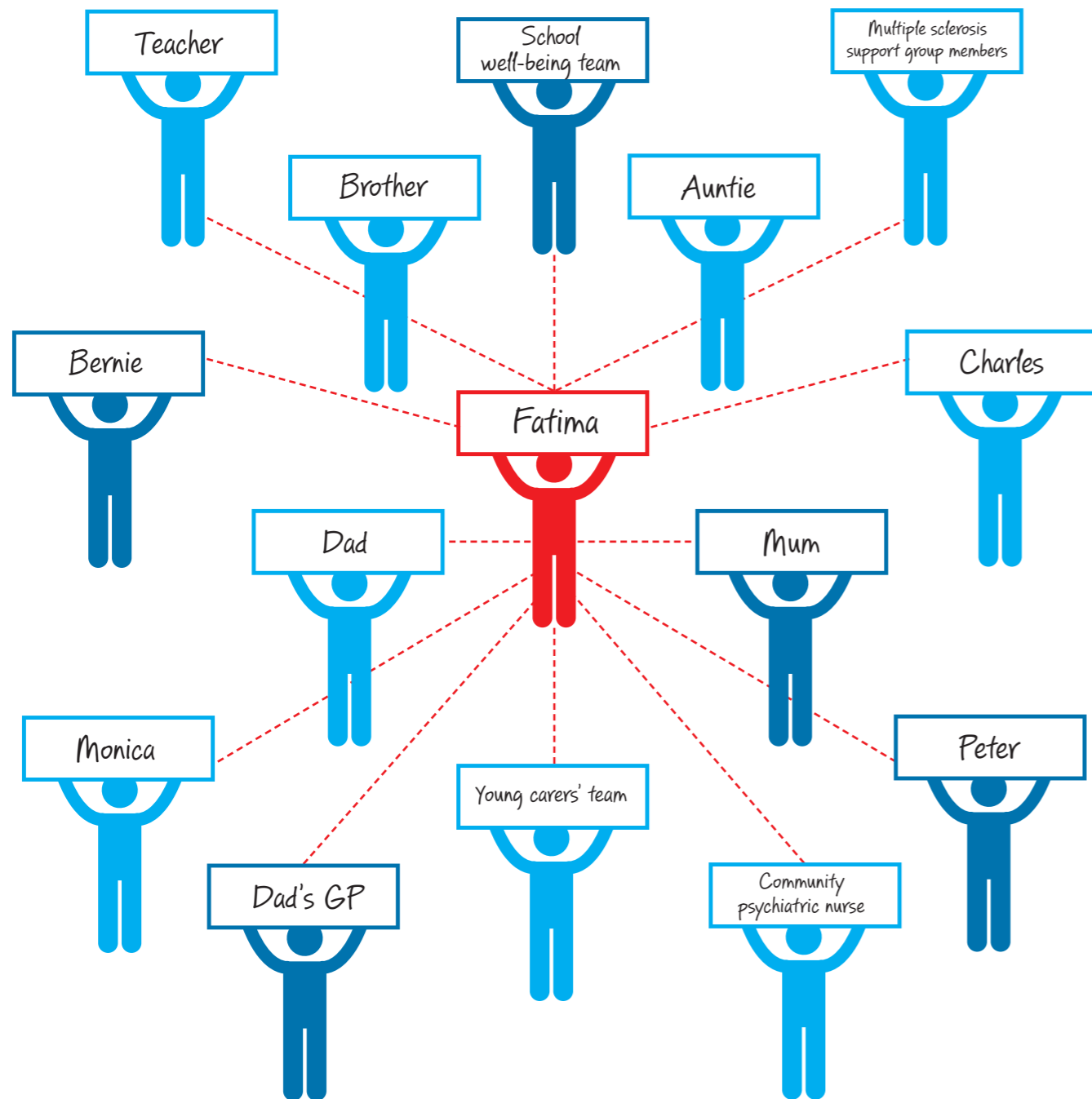
Working out all of the people who are available to help both you and the person you care for, can be a good idea. It is not so important how many people are in your network, what matters is how strong the links are, and what they do. Think of your social network (it might be huge but not so useful!) versus real life friends.

**Here's an example:**

Fatima is 15, and cares for her father who has multiple sclerosis and depression. Her mum works long hours in a local hospital, and has unpredictable shifts. Fatima's elder brother left home a few years ago.



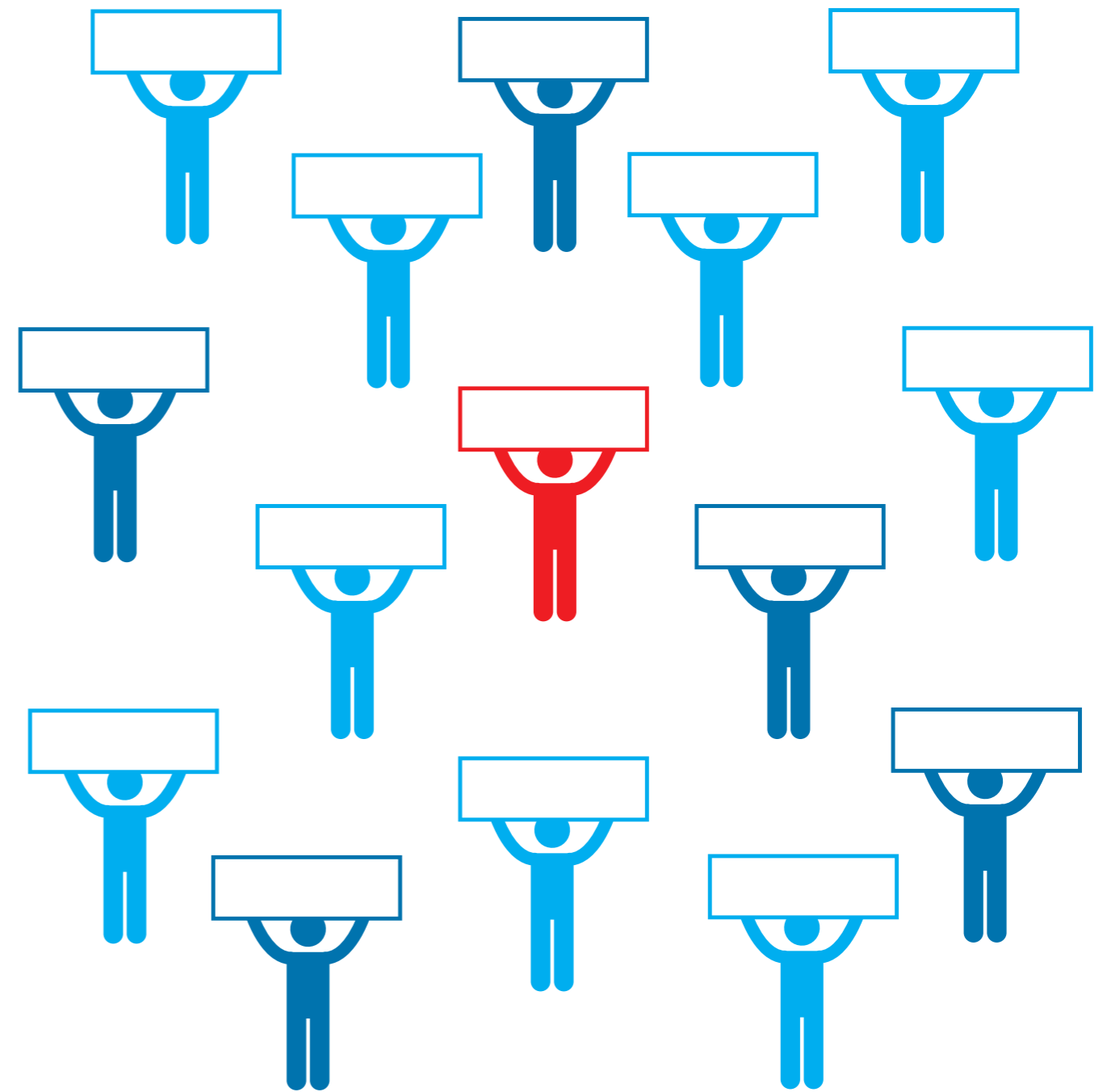
**Fatima's network**



You might notice that Fatima has put the people that support her the most closer to her in the network.

**ACTIVITY**

Now draw your own network...



**Remember**

You can come back to this drawing to remind you who can help when you need support. Think about the strength of the people and the relationships, not the number of people.

There are key areas of support for young carers, and you have the right to ask them for help. We have talked a bit overleaf about GPs and schools to give you some ideas.

## The Role of the GP (Doctors)

**“We can encourage [carers] to look after their own health and ensure that they receive the right support to stay healthy, [and] maintain a life of their own...”**

Dr Clare Gerada, Royal College of GPs

One of the people who you might ask for support is your GP (your family doctor). They may or may not also be the GP of the person you care for. Either way, you are still entitled to get support from them. GPs can direct you to support for your emotional as well as your physical health. Being a young carer can be hard, and it is understandable you might need some help.

We all know that GPs are busy people – and sometimes a ten minute appointment just isn't enough. How can we make sure we make the most of our GP?

- Ask for a double appointment when you call, and be clear about why you want this (for example, you might want to talk about the person you are caring for and also how you are feeling).

**Q: Why do you think a longer appointment could be a good thing for you?**

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- Write down the things you want to discuss with your GP before you go.
- Take a notebook with you, and write down the key things that are discussed.

We have created a **“Tool for talking”** to help you plan for an appointment or you could use the notes or diary part of your phone. Take other information to help in your meeting, for example we have top tips for GPs, and top tips for school on [www.makewaves.com/ycif](http://www.makewaves.com/ycif)

- Think about whether it would help to take someone you trust with you to the appointment.

**Q: Who could this be?**

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- Ask for a follow up appointment if you think this would be useful.

Use the resource to make notes on what you want from a follow up appointment.

- If it is difficult to get out of the house to go to an appointment, find out if your GP offers home visits, or do a different type of appointment.



### ACTIVITY



**What do I want from my GP?**

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## Further support

Here are a few websites which you could have a look at for some more information and help. It would be good to look at these with one of the adults who supports you.

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk) or call **0800 1111**

Childline provides online information for young people about all aspects of their life, and a helpline to call for support.

[www.babble.carers.org](http://www.babble.carers.org)

Babble is an online forum for young carers managed by the Carers' Trust.

[www.nhs.uk/Conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/Pages/young-carers-rights.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/Pages/young-carers-rights.aspx)

NHS information on what young carers' rights are, and information on how to get an assessment.

[www.childrensociety.org.uk/youngcarers](http://www.childrensociety.org.uk/youngcarers)

[www.makewav.es/ycif/c/mentalhealth](http://www.makewav.es/ycif/c/mentalhealth)

Information on being a young carer and the Childrens' Society projects.

[www.rethink.org/carers-family-friends/support-for-young-carers](http://www.rethink.org/carers-family-friends/support-for-young-carers)

Information from Rethink Mental Illness to support the emotional well-being of young carers.

[young.people@rethink.org](mailto:young.people@rethink.org) – please contact this email address if you have any further questions about this resource or an issue relating to being a young carer.

We hope you have found this resource useful, and will use it to get some extra support. It is worth reflecting back over the contents at different times to see how things have changed, or what other support you might want.



# Tool for talking

As a Young Carer, it is important that you feel able to talk about your situation, so as people in your network can give you any extra support you might need. You could use this tool to help you decide who you want to talk to, what you want to say, and what help you want.

What do I want to say?	Who to?	By when?	What did they say?	What happens next?





**Leading the way to a better quality of life for everyone affected by severe mental illness.**

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