Young Carer Mental Health Toolkit

A resource for professional youth workers working with young carers.
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INTRODUCTION

This toolkit builds on an earlier version and has been updated following consultations with young carers. This toolkit was developed for youth professionals who work with young carers from age 12. Please read through some activities are they may be more suitable for ages 15+.

For youth professionals working with young carers, it is important that building resilience becomes part and parcel of the work they do. Factors long associated with mental health and wellbeing, such as achieving goals, having positive relationships, doing well in school, and feeling hopeful, seem to promote resilience and so lead to positive mental health. For many young carers their exposure to the stress of their caring role, family illness/disability or substance use issues, coupled with other risk factors can compromise their ability to remain resilient. For workers it is important that building resilience becomes part and parcel of the work they do with young carers.

Using the toolkit

The toolkit is divided into following sections:

- What is Mental Health?
- Dealing with Emotions
- Wellness Tools

Within each section is a selection of activities for you to choose from. They are not intended to be worked on in a set order, but you can create a weekly programme tailored around wellbeing (or looking after yourself) and pick certain activities each week.

There are also Facilitator Notes (FN) with some suggestions about topics for discussions, or some tips if participants are not sure what to talk about. The Facilitator Notes also contains some reading and other resources if workers want to find out more about the topic and are available as downloads in the relevant activities or sections. Each activity has a code and that code is also attached to the relevant Facilitator Note and any printable resources.

There is no right or wrong way to use the toolkit; it has been designed so that you can choose topics you wish to cover. The activities can be used in a group setting and some of them can be used in one to one sessions with young carers.

Other useful bits of information can be downloaded from following links:

Child Protection
Confidentiality
Working with Groups
One to One Working
SECTION 1
Mental Health
WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

Aim: To introduce the topic of mental health and begin to explore young carers’ experiences of emotional change.

**Sticky notes MH1**

Ask participants to write down words that they think of when they hear the term ‘mental health’ and stick onto a board/flipchart/wall.

**Time**

10 mins

**Materials**

Sticky notes
Place to stick sticky notes

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**Mental, Physical, Social MH2**

1. Split participants into smaller groups.
2. Direct them to draw an outline of a person on A3 paper and write MENTAL on the head, PHYSICAL on the body and SOCIAL outside the outline.
3. In a different coloured pen ask them to write different attributes a ‘mentally healthy person’ would have.

**Time**

20 mins

**Materials**

Paper
Pens

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FN MH1

FN MH2
Facilitator Note MH1

This introduces the idea of mental health and initiates a discussion. Don’t discourage the use of certain words, but take time to explain how some may be stigmatising, hurtful or wrong to use.

Acceptable Words and Phrases

Mind
Head
Emotions
Feelings
Behaviour
Free of illness

All of these are fine and can describe mental health. Remember that when we talk about mental health we are being positive. Our mental health is about how we deal with life and events that happen in our lives, some of which may be out of our control.

Unacceptable, Stigmatising or Wrong Words and Phrases

Loony
Crackers
Nut-Case
Not the Full Shilling

These are very hurtful and stigmatising and should not be used.

Depression
Hearing Voices
Schizo

These are either mental health problems or symptoms of them.

Spastic
Brain damaged
Disability

These are old words in the case of spastic are not used. Brain damaged is just that - damage done to the brain, and disability could be referring to a learning disability which is not a mental illness. Someone can have a physical or learning disability and still be mentally healthy.

Additional Resources

What is Mental Health? | Symptoms of Mental Health Problems | YoungMinds
Facilitator Note MH2

This activity shows young carers that we need a variety of things in our life to maintain our mental and physical health. The idea is to get them to see the whole person and how good mental health is as important as good physical health. Social health is about how we interact with others and our community. It is important in helping us feel valued and able to contribute.

Words that could be used:

Happy; sad; angry - these might appear at the head.

Calm; relaxed; no tension; physically fit; strong - these could appear in the body.

Lots of friends; people I trust; places to go - these can be linked to social.

MENTAL

Happy, enjoys life, optimistic, able to deal with crises

PHYSICAL

Feeling fit, energetic, good sleep, healthy diet

SOCIAL

Good relationships, feels valued, able to learn, work and succeed, feels able to make an impact on the world, feels aware to be creative and expressive.
A Day in the Life Of... MH3

1. Using a large plain piece of paper or lining paper start to mark out a graph of how someone’s mood changes through the day. The graph should show ups and downs as a person’s mood goes up or down depending on what is going on.

2. Discuss that it is normal for our moods to change (this activity highlights the mental health continuum, i.e. mental health is not static but always changing).

3. End the session by discussing what kinds of things could have been done differently to make their day go better (if there have been a lot of low points), or what kinds of things made their day go well.
Facilitator Note MH3

This activity will help young carers recognise that mental health changes throughout the day and be aware that various factors can affect how we feel and cope.

Start by getting participants to discuss a normal day in their life. This could start at 7.30am when they get up for the day ahead. Reflect on how their mood is, it might be low because they have had a disturbed sleep due to their caring situation or worry. Then they head out to school, how is their mood? They might be pleased to be going so mood comes up, or might be worried so mood would stay low. Do this throughout the day and you should get a type of graph which shows how mood fluctuates. This is normal.

Discuss the things that might affect their mood and what they could do about it. Highlight that if mood stays low for more than a few weeks then it could be a sign that they may need to see a doctor or talk to someone.

Mood is ok in morning when waking up

Lunch time so mood is up again

Mood dips because going to school

Mood lowers as mum isn't well
WHAT AFFECTS MENTAL HEALTH?

Aim: To explore the things which can affect our mental health negatively and positively. The following activities are based around things which can affect mental health.

Get Thinking AMH1

1. Split participants into two groups. Ask one group to list all the things they think affect our mental health in a negative way.
2. Ask the second group to list the things they think can affect our mental health in a positive way.
3. Discuss each list with all participants and ask them to think of ways they could prevent the negative things from affecting their mental health and also how to encourage things that allow for more positive mental health.

Wellness Poster/Box AMH2

Follow up the above activity with a creative session encouraging participants to create a wellness poster. They can be as creative as they want. If you have materials then get them to create a box of wellness.
Facilitator Note AMH1

Things that affect mental health negatively. Look for:

- Lack of sleep
- Worrying
- Feeling unsafe
- Poor diet
- Bullying
- Social media
- No friends
- No one to talk to
- Caring

Things that affect mental health positively. Look for:

- Being confident
- Being fit
- Good diet
- Having friends
- Pets
- Caring
- Feeling safe
- Feeling loved

Facilitator Note AMH2

Be as creative here as possible. The box could be filled with things like a stress ball, pen and paper to write down feelings, positive words, pictures that makes someone smile, picture of water etc. It is all the things that help make us feel more positive. Similarly the poster can be full of colour and sparkles or happy pictures/faces.
1. Split participants into three groups and ‘carousel’ the three examples of social media profiles with ranging levels of internet safety.

2. Explain that participants should decide which profile is the worst, middle and best in terms of internet safety. They should also identify the aspects that result in safety being better or worse e.g. school uniform, age, location being on public display.

3. Bring together all groups and discuss results. This should also initiate a discussion on how to keep your social media profile safe e.g. don’t have information about your school (profile pictures and bio) or area you live e.g. GLA or EDI in your bio. You can mention having a private account and accepting requests only from people you know and trust.
Facilitator Note AMH3

There are certain social factors that may result in young people feeling as though their worth comes from their follower count. You can discuss that it is not a follower competition although it can feel like it. Participants should think about why they have a social media account in the first place. Even though they have a private account its main purpose could be their friends and family to see what they’re getting up to and to share certain aspects of your life with them. Seeking validation from social media can lead to negative mental health - you can also discuss cyberbullying with the group.

Ask participants to raise their hand if they or somebody they know has been a victim of cyberbullying? If so, what happened? This allows participants to share their experiences, if they would like to, and also provides you with scenarios you can use to give advice on what to do if anyone is in those situations.

Examples of advice for if you are on the receiving end of cyberbullying:

- Let others know
- Have your account on private
- Block and report people
- Turn off comments on your account.

Cyberbullying is a form of bullying and can have a serious impact on an individual’s mental health. Inform the group about helplines and support they can access if they are experiencing cyberbullying.

Additional Resources
Cyber bullying | Bullying UK
Taking action on body image - An active citizenship toolkit for those working with young people (publishing.service.gov.uk)
Anna Docherty
You look lost, follow me
S5
GLA
If you want to donate to my fundraiser -
www.fundraiser.org//sam-marathon-cancercharity
EXAM WORRIES

Aim: To explore how exam worries can affect our mental health and the measures that can be taken to reduce exam stress.

Exams can be a stressful time for people. Using the circle outlined here, explain to young carers how our thinking can affect if and how we want to study.

Fear of studying as they will have to face the reality they have not studied

Doesn't want to study

Doesn't Study

In a large group ask young carers what things get in the way of them studying. Then ask them to share ideas or tips that help them study.

Create a study plan using either a young carer's example, with their permission, or make one up to demonstrate how a plan can be made. Encourage young carers to try this and report back any issues they had with it. This can be an ideal activity to do one to one.
Exams can cause young people a lot of stress, and therefore impact their mental health. This can be even more so for young carers, as having additional caring responsibilities can often affect their studies.

A lot of exam worries stem from people not studying and feeling that they do not have the knowledge to do well in their exam(s). Thinking about studying can give individuals a feeling of dread, which then causes them to delay doing it, creating a cycle of not studying. Additionally some young carers may find that studying is difficult to prioritise due to their caring role. It is important to encourage young carers to come up with a studying strategy to suit them.
Study Tips AMH5
Ask participants to share study tips with everyone. They may mention or you can add these:

- Take breaks.
- Put your phone in another room – if you need to use your phone for studying put it on do not disturb and temporarily disable social media apps.
- Eat healthy and drink water.
- Schedule studying - make short-term goals and long-term goals.
- Active Recall – this is a studying technique that helps you to efficiently memorise information. Examples of tools that involve active recall are Flashcards, Kahoot, Quizlet or read your notes, close them and on a separate piece of paper write down everything you remember.

If there are distractions at home suggest that participants can:

- Go to the library.
- Make sure that everyone in the house knows that you are studying.
- Wear earphones.
- Have a study-buddy – go to their house or study together on a video call.

Discuss the support available to participants and who they can go to if they are feeling stressed about exams. They can go to supported study at school, talk to teachers, pastoral care/pupil support teacher.

Emphasise that participants should take breaks and practice self-care (this can be linked to Self-Care and Confidence SCC) in order to take care of their mental health. Going on a walk can clear your mind etc.

Quiz
At the end of the session you can do a Kahoot with participants, quizzing them on what was discussed. This will be interactive and demonstrate how they can use Kahoot as a tool for studying and practicing active recall. Participants can do this individually or in groups.

Additional Resources
Online templates can be found free, just use Google and type in study templates. For more information on Kahoot see kahoot.com.
SELF-CARE AND CONFIDENCE

Aim: To explore steps that young carers can take to improve their confidence and also explore self-care methods they can try to encourage positive mental health.

Introduction SCC1

Have a discussion with the group, begin by asking participants if they know what self-care is and why it is important?

Self-Care Workshop SCC2

Do an activity that you may try when practicing self-care. You can give them a variety of activities to choose from e.g. making bath bombs, baking cupcakes or painting on canvases. All of these include something they can take home with them. Discuss how participating in the self-care activity made them feel.

Additional Resources

Cupcake recipe | BBC Good Food
How to make a bath bomb | BBC Good Food
Facilitator Note SCC1 and SCC2

Self-care is:

“The practice of taking an active role in protecting one’s own wellbeing and happiness, in particular during periods of stress.”

It involves taking time out for yourself and doing activities that you want to do. Relaxation is a part of self-care and helps create an environment for yourself to maintain positive mental health.

Examples of self-care:

- Hobbies – art, running.
- Mindfulness.
- Put on a face mask, paint your nails, take a bath etc.
- Go for a walk.
- Baking.

Due to their caring responsibilities, participants may not even think about taking time out for themselves or if they do it may be difficult for them to. It is important to explain that everyone needs a break from different aspects of their lives and this contributes towards having positive mental health.
Confidence Booster SCC3

1. Hand out paper plates and pens and ask participants to write their name in the centre of their plate.
2. Ask participants to pass around their plates and each time they receive a plate they should write something they like/admire/appreciate about that person who owns the plate.
3. At the end everyone gets their original plate back with their name in the centre but now they have compliments and nice messages added and a way to physically visualise that people appreciate them.
4. They can take the plates home with them.
Give each young carer a sheet of paper and ask them to draw a large tree-shape. Get them to include the roots, a strong trunk and spreading branches. You could also use a photo if it is easier.

2. Cut out the tree and stick it onto the white paper or card.

3. Ask young carers to put their name on it as "X's Confidence Tree".

4. Along the roots young carers write the ways in which they're already growing in confidence, such as 'I can already smile at people I don’t know.' ‘I asked John to play football with me last week.’ ‘I helped Kiri when she dropped her books.’

5. Along the trunk young carers write ‘My confidence is growing in...’ and then ask them to write an area where they would like their confidence to grow, such as making friends, speaking in public, running, playing the recorder, reading, etc.

6. Cut out lots of green leaf shapes. On some of the leaves ask young carers to write one thing they could do to help their confidence grow.

7. Stick these leaves onto the left hand branches.

8. On some of the leaves encourage young carers to write things that other people could do to help them feel more confident.

9. Stick these leaves on the right hand branches.

10. Stick some empty leaves on the tree too, so that they can add other ideas as they think of them, or as other people suggest them.

11. Whenever a young carer notices their confidence has grown, they can write what went well on a red apple shape and stick it onto their tree.

12. Encourage young carers to keep their tree safe and use it to encourage them on their journey as they grow in confidence.
Facilitator Note SCC4

Other ideas:
If a tree doesn’t suit your context, adapt the design to become a sky scraper or other tall building, and write on its bricks instead of the leaves, etc.

This activity could be used in a group setting to show how confident the group is at getting to know one another, or preparing for a trip away etc.
RELATIONSHIPS AND LONELINESS

Aim: To explore relationships and tackling loneliness and their relation to mental health.

Discussion Time RL1

1. Split into two groups.
2. Ask one group to discuss and write down what are some qualities of a healthy relationship? Ask the other to discuss and write down what are some qualities of an unhealthy relationship?
3. Have both groups come together and discuss the suggestions from each side. Pick out the top three key qualities from each side e.g. communication, compromise, respect, and dishonesty, manipulation, unsupportive.
4. Discuss how each of these can strengthen or weaken a relationship.

You can ask participants to think of examples from their own experiences with relationships, what went wrong or right? Having healthy relationships will contribute towards an individual’s positive mental health.

Back-to-Back RL2

1. Split the group into pairs, ask them to decide who will be the listener and who will be the speaker. Ask each pair to sit back-to-back.
2. Give each speaker an image, the listener cannot see this image nor discuss it with the speaker.
3. Each speaker will describe the image to their listener whilst the listener draws what they think the image looks like from the speakers’ description.
4. After they have finished, they can face each other and show the image and drawing to each other.
Facilitator Note RL2

This is a good activity to encourage communication. Communication is key to relationships but sometimes we need to practice it. Completion of this activity creates a segue for many important communication topics. What’s the role of a listener in good communication? What happens when a speaker isn’t careful? How might they be misunderstood? Humans are generally social people but also sometimes need time for themselves. However, excessive time by yourself can result in an individual feeling lonely.
Friendship RL3

1. Introduce topic and have general discussion about why it is important to have friends.
2. Encourage young carers to discuss who they have as friends, why they have them, how it makes them feel to have friends.
3. Make notes on a flipchart covering some of these.
4. Allow general discussion about what it would feel like not to have friends and how they could help someone who did not have friends.
5. Split into pairs or small groups and give out worksheet ‘Making New Friends (RL3a)’.
6. Give them some time to complete. Tell them they can write on it or draw their responses.
7. Take feedback and discuss.
8. End with a fun activity.
Facilitator Note RL3

For people they already know or would like to get to know better suggest that participants reach out to them, give them a call/text, just say you would like to catch up, ask them out for a cup of coffee or any activity. This will help to build upon on existing relationships which may be currently weak, hence leading an individual to feel lonely. Allowing this growth increases the strength of the inner bubble.

Volunteering somewhere or joining a club or society allows young people to meet completely new people with similar interests and make new connections. You can also suggest getting a pen pal – you can choose to write them letters, email them and video call – just make sure to be safe by contacting them from a reliable place.

Young carers may feel lonely as they might feel that the people around them cannot relate to their life, so it is important to suggest places where they can meet other people with similar experiences.
Making New Friends Worksheet

Friend:

How I met them:

What I liked about them:

How we became friends:

How we stay friends:

Why this friendship is important:
Eco Map RL4

1. Give each participant a copy of the **worksheet**.
2. Ask each one to place their name in the middle of the worksheet.
3. Encourage them to identify important people in their life, e.g. parents, brothers, sisters, teachers etc, in the circles.
4. Draw lines between the circles where connections exist using the different types of lines indicated on worksheet.
5. Discuss with the group the people they have put in the circles and why.
6. Encourage participants to keep this sheet in a safe place where they can refer to it if they need to remind themselves of people they can go to for help or support.

Example:
Facilitator Note RL4

This activity can help a young carer identify what people they have in their life and then to work out if that person is a strong link for them or is it someone who they like being around but wouldn’t really ask them for support. Work with the young carer on how best they could handle the situation and the person. Remember that part of looking after ourselves is about having good, healthy relationships with those around us, including friends.

Part of having good self-esteem is about feeling secure with those in our lives. That may mean that some people are not that “healthy” for us so we need to look at ways of managing this and reducing the impact that person has on us.

Sometimes for young carers, the person causing the stress can be the person they care for. In this situation it is not easy for the young carer to remove themselves from that person. In this case, you could help the young carer look at ways of reducing the stress this person causes them, encourage the young carer to come up with coping strategies for dealing with the person. It might be that extra help for the young carer is needed to look after the person, or the young carer may just want to have someone to talk to when things get bad.

This activity can also be used in a group setting to look at friendships, especially where circles of friends could be damaging to the person, e.g. causing them to be involved in gangs or anti-social behaviour. You can encourage the participants to look at who in their circle of friends they find the most stressful to be around and what can they do to reduce that impact. Another use for the activity can be to build a network of support and the links can identify the strongest places or people to go to for help, right down to those places or people that are the weakest at providing support and help.
**Problem Solving RL5**

1. Split into smaller groups if need be.
2. Give each group a **problem page letter** and ask them to discuss it between themselves.
3. Ask participants to write a response to the letter, encourage them to come up with suggestions of help, people to talk to, what kind of advice would they give to the person etc.
4. On a separate piece of paper ask the group to write their reply.
5. Share responses with the rest of the participants and discuss answers.
6. End session with an exercise whereby the participants write out a letter about what is of concern to them and then ask them to think about how they would respond to this.

**Facilitator Note RL5**

The idea of this activity is to get the young carers discussing possible places and people they can go to for support. Sometimes people find it easier to think about this if they are responding to made up scenarios rather than thinking about their own situation.

All the sample problem letters (RL5a and RL5b) centre around young carer situations. You can alter these and come up with different scenarios. Another way of doing this activity could be to ask the participants to think about what advice they would give to their best friend if they were experiencing a problem. Encourage the young carers to think about how people manage problems differently and that, for some problems, there might not be simple solutions, or indeed any solution. Encourage them to think about how they would handle such a situation, who would they talk to, how would they feel if they couldn’t sort out an issue, where would they get extra help or support etc?
Dear Agony Aunt/Uncle,

I am a 13 year old girl who lives with my mum and little brother. My little brother doesn’t sleep at night, he’s always running around and shouting and wanting to play. Me and my mum take turns to stay up with him, because if we didn’t he would put the fire on or the cooker. He’s too noisy anyway, he always keeps me awake.

I get so tired and I find it hard to go to school because I’m too sleepy. Sometimes my wee brother draws all over my homework if I don’t hide it in my bag. I want to know if I should tell the teacher about him. They don’t understand and I keep getting into trouble. I don’t know what to say to them. My mum doesn’t want the school to know so she won’t speak to them.

Can you help me?

Dear Agony Aunt/Uncle,

I’m a young carer. I help to look after my mum who has depression. My dad works long hours as a policeman and I have to make sure my sister gets out to school and all that.

My mum has been told she needs to go into hospital because they want to change her tablets. She doesn’t want to go in and has started to cut herself cause she gets so angry. She doesn’t tell my dad or the nurse that comes to the house.

I don’t know what to do as I’m scared she won’t come out of hospital, my pal told me people went into mental hospitals and never come out again. Should I tell my dad about her cutting herself? I feel so sad and always crying. I feel it’s all my fault.

Can you help me?
Dear Agony Aunt/Uncle,

I want to go to university but I’m a carer for my dad. He doesn’t keep too well and is in hospital quite a bit. He says I should go and that he will be ok but I don’t know whether I should leave him. How will I know he’ll be alright? We live really far away in the country and my young carer group only meet once a month so I don’t always have the chance to speak to anyone about what’s going on.

My teachers say I’m good enough to go to uni but it will mean moving away from home. I’m worried about the costs of it as well as we don’t have much money. I am 17 and just about to sit my Highers at school and have applied to start uni this year but I’m thinking of just leaving school and trying to find a job and still be here for my dad.

Can you help me?
SECTION 2
Dealing with Emotions
DEALING WITH ANGER

Aim: To explore the emotion of anger and methods that can be used to deal with it.

Anger is a natural emotion that everybody experiences at points in their life, an important thing to think about when we are angry is how we display/deal with our anger.

Anger Thermometer E1

1. Hand out the anger thermometer sheet (E1a) and then explain to group, or individual, how to use the thermometer.
2. 10 is when they are most angry. Ask how that feels, what would they do or think they could do at that stage of anger?
3. 1 is no anger at all. Again ask what that feels like, are they happy, talkative etc?
4. Then encourage them to think about a situation recently and mark it on thermometer. It will be normal for participants to be somewhere in the middle depending on situation.

References
Facilitator Note E1

The anger thermometer is a technique that will help young carers learn about their anger symptoms and warning signs, and how these progress as anger escalates.

An anger thermometer is a 10-point scale where ‘10’ represents peak anger, and a ‘1’ represents no anger. Symptoms of anger e.g. balled-up fists, argumentativeness or frustration are recorded on the anger thermometer at the point they begin at. You may choose to use the anger thermometer to discuss anger triggers, as well. On the thermometer record triggers based upon their intensity. This is a helpful way to associate specific symptoms and reactions with triggers.

Tip: Instruct young carers to begin by filling out the two extremes of their anger thermometer. What are they like at their most angry, at 10, and at their least angry, at 1? These extremes tend to be the easiest to fill in and they set the limits that all other symptoms will fall between.

Anger Warning Signs

Oftentimes, people feel that they “snap,” instantly going from having no anger to having a full-blown outburst. Using an anger thermometer can help young carers recognise their anger warning signs. Anger warning signs are the earliest symptoms of anger, which often go unnoticed, but can be used to alert a person when their anger is growing.

It’s important to help young carers take note of even the most subtle warning signs (the ones that appear when their score is below a “5” on the thermometer). Be thorough when completing the lower half of the anger thermometer, because recognising these symptoms can be the deciding factor in stopping anger, or letting it grow out of control.

Anger warning signs are different for everyone, but often include some of the following, feeling irritable, mind goes bland, face goes red, paces about room, clench fist, punch doors or walls. For more information go to www.mind.org.uk
Coping Strategies by Anger Level

Use the completed anger thermometer to plan coping strategies according to anger intensity. At what point should someone use a relaxation skill, and at what point should someone simply walk away? What coping skills should be used in the case of extreme anger, when a situation has grown out of control?

For example, if a person’s “3” on the anger thermometer is “becoming argumentative”, a good coping strategy may be to practice deep breathing. It is likely safe to practice a relaxation skill at this low level of anger, and deep breathing is an incompatible behaviour with arguing (you cannot argue while practicing deep breathing).

However, if the situation escalates to a “5” and is at risk of escalating further, it may be best for the person to walk away. At an “8”, it is probably more appropriate to make a plan to call a friend, or get some professional help from a GP etc.

Keep in mind that the best coping strategies vary from person to person, but using an anger thermometer provides an excellent framework for discussion.
ANGER THERMOMETER
Anger Jar E2

1. Give participants one of each sheet of anger cards (E2a and E2b) and ask them to cut around the cards.
2. Then they should glue the matching sides together.
3. Then they should put all the cards in their jar.
4. Explain that whenever a participant feels angry, they should take a card out of their jar and try the activity written on the card. Once they have used all the cards, they can continue using the jar or they will now have an idea of which activities help them to control their anger.

You can ask participants to each bring a recycled jar into the session before this one in preparation. You can also bring a few extra yourself as well.

Additional Resources
Problems with anger self-help guide | NHS inform
Clench your fist  
Breathe in and out  
Do some exercise  
Do a hobby  
Random  
Count to ten  
Walk away  
Talk to someone  
Write about feelings  
You decide
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clench your fist</th>
<th>Count to ten</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clench your fist for 3 seconds then unclench for 3 seconds. Keep repeating this.</td>
<td>Close your eyes and count to 10.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breathe in and out</th>
<th>Walk away</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Try and relax and focus on your breathing, breath deep down into your belly. Breath in through your nose for the count of 5 then slowly breath out through your mouth for a count of 5. Don’t worry if you can’t get to 5, just breath</td>
<td>Walk away from the situation. If there is nothing to walk away from, you can go for a walk.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do an exercise</th>
<th>Talk to someone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical activity of any kind is good for you. It releases happy chemicals into your body and helps you feel calmer. Doing a sport like boxing can help release tension.</td>
<td>Talk to someone you trust. They could be a teacher, friend or a young carer worker.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do a hobby</th>
<th>Write about feelings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have a go at doing something that you enjoy. Whether that’s painting, football or photography.</td>
<td>Sometimes it helps to write down how you are feeling. You can throw it away once complete or you can think of solutions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Random</th>
<th>Come up with your own</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Pick a random technique that you have previously used in the past. | Come up with your own anger strategy activity. Examples:  
- Take a shower/bath  
- Go for a run  
- Go for an ice-cream  
- Bake a cake |
Effects of Stress E4

1. In a group discussion, ask what participants know about stress, and ask them what they think causes stress.
2. Draw out each of the shapes (E4a) on separate pieces of flipchart paper.
3. Explain the connection between what we think, the effects it can have on the body and how our behaviour (or actions) are influenced accordingly.
4. Using the pre-printed cards ask the group to decide if it is a thought, an effect on the body or an action.
5. Discuss what the effects of not dealing with stress could be.
6. End the session by facilitating a discussion about what triggers stress and how participants react to that. You could try some relaxation exercises to end this session.
Facilitator Note E4

Stress is our natural response to challenging circumstances. To have some stress in our lives is normal and, indeed, unavoidable. While stress can’t be avoided entirely, levels of stress should be kept to a minimum. We should all be aware of how much stress we are under in order to better manage causes of stress. Too much stress damages physical and mental health and can be a trigger for more serious problems. When working through the activity discuss common stressful situations that young carers experience. Encourage them to think about the effects this has on them, their body and their behaviours.

You can refer to www.youngcarer.net information pages about looking after your mental health which provides some ideas about de-stressing and making sure you don’t take on too much. Encourage young carers to learn some relaxation techniques or try the download exercise. Work with young carers to help them identify what triggers their stress and how do they react to it. Use the Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviour sheet to help them identify how their thinking can affect how they feel and that can impact how they behave.

Help them come up with coping strategies to reduce stress. Some of these can be written down in their school homework diary for example. As this is something most young school age people have, it may serve as a reminder to them about how to reduce stress, or how to deal with a particular situation.
Thoughts, Feeling and Behaviour
On pieces of flipchart paper draw the following shapes:

Thoughts

Effects on Body

Actions

What are the effects of not dealing with stress?
Effects can include mental health problems such as anxiety and depression, physical health problems such as backaches and headaches.
And Relax E5

1. Get group members to sit on a chair or lie on a mat.
2. Ask participants to follow these instructions.
3. Breathe in, tense your right hand and notice the tension in your hand.
4. Breathe out, relax and notice the difference.
5. Breathe in and tense your left hand, notice the tension in your hand.
6. Breathe out, relax and notice the difference.
7. Notice how comfortable heavy and warm your hands and arms feel when you let them relax.
8. Breathe in and clench your thighs and buttocks, notice the tension.
9. Breathe out and relax, notice the difference.
10. Breathe in, bend your feet up, notice the tension in your legs and feet.
11. Breathe out, relax, notice the difference.
12. Breathe in and point your toes, notice the tension in your legs and feet.
13. Breathe out and notice the difference.
14. Repeat these steps several times.

Notes:
Carry out activity slowly and in a calm tone to enable participants to feel relaxed during the exercise.

You can also ask your local Health Promotion Department if they have relaxation CDs or try and download free ones and encourage their use.
Traffic Lights of Stress E6

1. Position each colour of the traffic lights (**E6b-d**) in a corner of the room (if working with an older group of young carers you could just place the cards on a wall). Go to coping suggestion cards and cut these out.

2. Ask participants to stand in middle of room and begin to hold up the coping suggestion cards (**E6a**).

3. Each participant has to move to the colour which reflects how they feel about the suggestion, RED meaning strongly disagree that it is a good way of dealing with stress; AMBER meaning they are not sure; GREEN strongly agree that it is a good way of dealing with stress.

4. When participants are on a particular colour they have then got to discuss why they chose to move to that colour and then persuade the others to join them. Give each group a few minutes to persuade the others.

5. After a few minutes ask participants to move around to another colour if they have changed their mind.

6. Make a note of where the cards are being placed, either in good, not sure or bad strategies. Repeat until all cards are used. Go over the lists and discuss why some strategies are considered good or bad and have discussion over ones that they were not sure about.

7. At end of the session encourage participants to pick one of the good suggestions for looking after mental health and ask them to plan how they are going to incorporate that into their daily life over the following week. Ask them to report back if they have been able to do it and how it felt.

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**Time**
1 hour (depends on size of group)

**Materials**
Cards created from **E6a**
Print-outs of **E6b-d**
Facilitator Note E6

Be prepared to discuss the use of illicit drugs, alcohol and smoking as part of this exercise. It may be worth taking the time to find out about the problems of using these substances as ways of coping with stress, anxiety etc.

It may be a good idea to get some information sheets or leaflets of places to go for help or further information if participants want to find out more. You can also contact your local drug and alcohol services and some may be willing to come along to groups to speak with them. Other places to try are:

- Crew 2000, [www.crew.scot](http://www.crew.scot)
- ASH Scotland, [www.ashscotland.org.uk](http://www.ashscotland.org.uk)
- NHS Inform, [www.nhsinform.scot](http://www.nhsinform.scot)
- Scottish Families Affected by Drugs and Alcohol, [www.sfad.org.uk](http://www.sfad.org.uk)

In ending the session it is always worthwhile to look over those suggestions which can help deal with stress etc. Those suggestions should include the following cards: Work out what is causing problem; Sleeping well; Looking after your body; Talking; Dealing with problems.

Encourage participants to explore why these are good for their mental health and who they can safely talk to about their problems.
Healthy and Not so Healthy Coping Strategies

Put each of the topics below onto a separate A4 piece of paper and use as prompt cards. Make the print as large as possible so it can easily be seen by whole group. It might be worthwhile laminating each of the cards for further use.
YES
I Agree
MAYBE
I'm Not Sure
I Disagree
Bag of Worries, Concerns, Feelings

1. Would be useful for participants to spend a session creating their own decorated worry bag or box.
2. Give participants sticky notes or index cards to write down a couple of worries, issues or concerns.
3. Ask them to place these in their bag.
4. In turn participants share a worry/issue with group.
5. Encourage discussion around this.
6. Use these questions as prompts to ease discussion along; how would it make someone feel? How would we cope with this worry? How might such a concern make us act/behave?
7. Encourage the group to find possible solutions or options for where participants could get support.
8. Tell participants that the bag of worries is theirs to use at any time.
9. Encourage them to throw the worry away in the bin if they feel it has been dealt with.
Facilitator Note E7

In advance of this activity it might be worthwhile getting participants to make their own bag for putting in their worries or concerns. This can be done either by sewing pieces of fabric together to make a bag with an opening, or by using paper and glue to construct a bag/container. When a worry comes into their head they can write it down on a piece of paper and put it in their bag. At the end of the day they can take out one or more and make time to speak to someone about it. That person can be a parent, young carer worker, friend, schoolteacher or someone else they trust.

It is best to try and keep activity as light as possible. The idea is to encourage young carers to stop and think about what is worrying them and break that down into manageable steps in order to deal with it.

At the start of session discuss with participants that generally worries fall into one of the following:

- Things you worry about but that never happen
- Things you don’t like but cannot be changed by anyone
- Things that can be sorted out by others
- Things that can be changed by you.

This list contains things which we cannot change (that is the first two points). We cannot change them because they are out of our control. An example of this could be your eye colour. There isn’t much that a young person can do about the colour of their eyes.

The last two are things which can be changed either by talking to someone about it or by getting help for the person to sort out what is causing the worry.

Be aware however that this activity can be quite difficult for some young carers, so try and be sensitive about handling situations; keep it quite light if you think it could cause problems or anxieties within the group.

The bag of worries can also be used as a tool when doing one to one work with young carers. If someone is finding it hard to talk about how they are feeling you can encourage them to write it down and put it in their bag of worries and bring it with them when you meet.

Places of support or further information:
- Young Scot
- Young Minds
- Clear Your Head
Feelings and Behaviour Balloons E8

1. In advance, blow up balloons and add a statement (E8a) in each one.
2. Introduce the activity by asking participants if they think that we all have different feelings at different times.
3. Encourage participants to name as many feelings as they can.
4. Ask them to state what feelings they have about being young carers, encourage some positive and not so positive feelings. Explain that these are normal feelings.
5. Ask participants to describe how they behave when they are feeling a certain way. Explain that how we feel can affect how we behave.
6. Ask a participant to come up one at a time and burst a balloon, to make it more fun tell them that no hands or feet can be used. Ask person to read out statement and act out how they think someone may behave.
7. Repeat this until all participants have had the chance to burst a balloon.
8. Discuss how each of us has different feelings and that this is normal and healthy for us. Encourage the participants to realise that it is important that we talk about how we are feeling and we get help in dealing with how we are feeling.
9. Ask the group to form a circle and say one positive thing about being a young carer or a young person. This then ensures that the session ends with a positive note.

FN E8
Facilitator Note E8

This is a fun activity, and can be quite noisy! It is intended to get participants talking about feelings and how our behaviour is affected by them.

Make as many statements up which incorporate feelings. The aim is to focus on the feeling and why the young carer might feel like that, how does it make them feel and how do they handle it. In a follow up session you can use the mental health wall to start to build up support that young carers can access to help themselves. Encourage the group to add to the wall with any tips or support they found helpful.

Adjust statements to suit age and stage of development of your group and always try and end on a positive note or with a game or music and time out for participants to have fun.

You can start the activity by having a general discussion about feelings and what we mean by these. Create scenarios about various situations to get the discussion going, or use something which has happened to you or another participant (but only if they are ok with sharing, try and keep the topic light). Staying on some positive situations can help to build the confidence of the group along with their understanding of how feelings affect behaviour. You can gradually build up to other feelings as the group gets more confident.

As an alternative to using balloons, you could obtain some plastic egg containers (good craft shops should be able to help) and put the statements in these. Then hide the eggs and ask participants to go and find them and carry on activity as stated.

All health board areas in Scotland have health and improvement teams, or some maybe called health and wellbeing teams. These may be good places to find extra resources to use. You will find information about them from your local health board.
Feelings and Behaviour Balloons, Statements

Emotions which can be used are:
Angry; happy; jealous; proud; sad; lonely; excited; frightened; worried; anxious.

Some statements you could consider:

“I shouldn’t be angry because I’m a young carer”

“It’s ok to feel sad”

“It’s ok to be happy”

“I hate not being able to go out with my pals”

“I’m jealous of all the attention my brother/sister gets”

“It’s almost the school holidays”

“I’m worried about leaving them to go to school”

“I loved spending time at the cinema”

“What a cute little dog”

“I don’t understand what he is talking about”

“The nurse won’t let me sit in with my mum”

“I am so angry with you”

“I really miss my friend”
EXPLORING HOW EMOTIONS CAN AFFECT PHYSICAL TENSION

Body Flipchart E9

1. Split into smaller groups if required (about 4-6 in each group).
2. Ask the group to nominate a person to act as model for activity.
3. Ask person to lie on flipchart paper/wallpaper and another person to draw an outline of their body.
4. Ask the whole group to use arrows to indicate parts of the body that may be affected by emotions (i.e. stomach, arms, head).
5. Ask participants to tell you how the body might be affected by emotions (you are looking for things such as sore throat, feeling hot, shaking legs).
6. Feedback to whole group.

Source: RUOK pack; Managing Your Wellbeing Resource Pack
Facilitator Note E9

Encourage participants to think of situations and how they feel when faced with them. Think about the behaviour that sometimes goes with how we are feeling.

Examples that could be used as prompts with groups:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Going on a roller coaster</th>
<th>Night before Christmas</th>
<th>Night before a big test or exam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visit to the dentist</td>
<td>Visit to the doctor</td>
<td>Moving house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to a new school</td>
<td>Start of new term – new teacher</td>
<td>Travelling on your own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falling out with your best friend</td>
<td>Going to a party or celebration</td>
<td>Going to your first gig</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to highlight that these reactions are normal, some are listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thoughts</th>
<th>Effects on Body</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can’t concentrate</td>
<td>Fast heart rate</td>
<td>Can’t sit still/relax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t do this</td>
<td>Feeling Faint</td>
<td>Bite your nails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m going to mess this up</td>
<td>Butterflies</td>
<td>Make more mistakes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Naming the Emotion E10

1. Arrange the group as you feel necessary; it might be that you want to have smaller groups or one large one.
2. Explain to participants that you will read out a scenario (E10b) to them and ask them to use the emotion cards (E10a) to show how they feel.
3. Once you have read out the scenario, ask participants to chose an emotion card which best represents how they feel.
4. Discuss with them why they have chosen the card and what kind of feelings they have when they look at the card.

FN E10
Try and be as creative as you can with the scenarios for this activity. Encourage participants to discuss how they feel when they chose an emotion. Discuss how emotions affect our physical health as well, e.g., when anxious we might feel sick or have wobbly legs.

This activity can be used in conjunction with the Body flipchart as a way of discussing emotions and how they make our body feel.

Part of the general discussion can be around how the participant deals with their feelings. If they are feeling angry how do act? What kinds of things can they do to reduce their feeling of anger? What is it that makes them angry? You can do this with most of the emotions. Highlight to the group that it is normal to feel a range of emotions throughout the day depending on what is happening at the time.

Discuss with them the importance of talking through with someone how they are feeling. Talking through our feelings helps us deal with them and the situations which gave cause to these feelings.

These are examples of emotions you could use:

- Happy
- Angry
- Sad
- Embarrassed
- Jealous
- Worried
- Nervous/anxious
- Excited
Here are some example scenarios you can use. Alternatively come up with some of your own, which you think may be more relevant to your group.

“*You have been chosen to play in the school football/netball team*”

“*You have been told that you are to stay in tonight to look after your wee brother/sister*”

“*Your friends have gone to the cinema without telling you*”

“*Your best friend has a new boyfriend/girlfriend*”

“*You have been given a birthday card with £20 in it*”

“*Your mum and dad are away at the hospital again with your brother/sister*”

“*Your friend has the latest new phone*”

“*Your favourite pet has died*”

“*You have been told you can’t get tickets to see your favourite band*”

“*Your teacher gives you detention because you were late for class*”

“*Your teacher takes away your mobile phone*”
Dealing With Conflict E11

1. Discuss with the group possible times when they have had to deal with situations which caused them to feel stressed.
2. Make a list of the things which cause most stress for young carers in the group.
3. Discuss some of the methods people can use to deal with stress.
4. Split group into two smaller groups and ask one to observe the other.
5. Read out scenario 1 (E11a) and ask the group to role play how they would deal with that.
6. After the role play, ask the observer group to comment about what they had observed, i.e, what was the body language like; how did people react in the situation; would they have done anything differently?
7. Repeat the activity using a different scenario and swapping the groups over.
8. End session by looking at ways of relaxing which young carers could try.
Facilitator Note E11

Emphasise that it’s okay to react differently in different situations and recap that people show stress in different ways.

Go over some of the advantages and disadvantages of dealing with conflict in certain ways. You can role play alternative ways of dealing with potential conflict.

Generate a discussion around ways of dealing with conflict and share these with the group.
**Scenario 1**
Ask one group to pretend they are sitting waiting to go to the Head Teacher’s office because of poor attendance.

**Scenario 2**
Ask the other group to pretend they are with a group of friends queuing outside a McDonalds when someone walks into the restaurant in front of them.

**Scenario 3**
Ask one group to be out with friends when some other people start shouting at them to get away from their street.

**Scenario 4**
Ask one group to be with the person they care for in a GP surgery and when the appointment is due the young carer is asked to wait outside.
DEALING WITH SITUATIONS

Best Options E12

1. Either in small groups or individually, hand out sheets of paper and ask the participants to make three columns on them. One column marked Strategy; one column marked Advantages; and one column marked Disadvantages. An optional column can be marked Best Options.

2. Read out a scenario for each group. Ask them to think about it, discuss how it makes them feel (angry, tense, sad, stressed, annoyed).

3. Ask them to devise strategies for dealing with the situation and list them in the strategy column.

4. Then ask them to think about one or two advantages of the strategies they have come up with, and one or two disadvantages. Write them down in the relevant columns.

5. Discuss which strategy would work best; what would the consequences be for each strategy; which is the best one to use in the situation?

6. In the Best Option column ask the group to write up the strategy they consider to be the best for dealing with the situation.

7. End with discussion about how group feel about the activity, what have they learnt, how they will use this technique.

8. The activity can be built up over several weeks with the group so that people start to get the idea of looking at alternative ways of dealing with certain situations.

FN E12
Facilitator Note E12

Make up scenarios to suit the group of young carers you are working with. Make them as realistic as possible to situations young carers are likely to face.

An example of how the activity can look is:
Example: Teacher doesn’t give you help when you ask for it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
<th>Best Opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shout back at teacher and argue with them for help</td>
<td>Gets rid of my anger</td>
<td>Get into trouble with school and parents may find out. Won’t help in the future</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last column “Best Option” can be optional and can be completed once the group have discussed the consequences of carrying out the strategy they come up with. In this case, it might be that the group decide the best thing to do would be to speak to another teacher and ask for help in explaining things to the first teacher.

For each scenario there can be a number of strategies and participants should be encouraged to go through each strategy and look at the advantages and disadvantages of each and then come up with one they consider to be “Best Option”.

This activity can also be used in one to one work with young carers who may be struggling to deal with certain situations. It can also be used if the group are planning an outing, for example, as it can get the group into a way of working out best options that suit majority of the group etc.
Here are just a few suggested scenarios to get you started. Make up more relevant ones which will suit your group, or get another group to come up with some scenarios.

**Scenario 1**
Your little brother became upset during the night and kept you all awake.

**Scenario 2**
Your best friend doesn’t reply to your text message and says they do not want to speak to you.

**Scenario 3**
Your mum is suddenly taken into hospital.

**Scenario 4**
Your teacher doesn’t listen to you when you try to explain what is happening at home.

**Scenario 5**
Someone jumps in front of you at the dinner queue at school.

**Scenario 6**
Two of your friends have asked you to go on holiday with them at the same time.
THE POWER OF THOUGHTS

Doing, Thinking and Feeling E13

1. Have a general discussion around negative thoughts and the effect they can have on our health.
2. Give each participant the Doing, Thinking, Feeling worksheet (E13a) and ask them to complete it.
3. Ask them to think about something they have done recently. Write the answers in the relevant box.
4. Take feedback and discuss some of the situations and how people felt during these times. Can they identify patterns of negative thinking? What was going on at the time to make them think negatively?
5. Following on from that part of the activity, use the Thought Challenger worksheet (E13b) and explain that it is time to start to look at turning negative thoughts into positive ones.
6. Get participants to complete the worksheet. It may take a few sessions to do this, or it may be better done in one to one sessions.
Facilitator Note E13

In this activity young carers are beginning to look at ways of turning negative thoughts into positive thoughts.

Explain to participants that they are thinking negatively when they fear the future, put themselves down, criticise themselves for errors, doubt their abilities, or expect failure. Negative thinking damages confidence. Negative thoughts tend to come into our consciousness, do their damage and then go away again, leaving us to deal with their harmful effects.

Encourage young carers to become aware of their thoughts. That’s why writing them down is important; it allows time for the person to look at the thought and work through how best to deal with it.

If participants find it difficult to look at their negative thoughts, get them to imagine that they are their best friend or someone they admire or look up to. Ask them to think about how they would challenge these thoughts. This might help them realise that there are ways of turning around negative thoughts.

Use the Thought Challenger (E13b) worksheet to help young carers to start thinking about challenging their negative thoughts. This can be used in group settings or one to one work. You may need to work with participants to get them to look at all the evidence surrounding their thoughts and come up with a more rational and balanced thought, but it is something which, once learned, can become a way of natural thinking for the person. This activity is probably best suited to an older age group, maybe 15+.

If this activity brings about discussions around suicidal thoughts or thoughts of self harm, please see this guidance.
Think of a situation you have been in recently. Write it down here:

- 
- 
- 

Now complete the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What were you THINKING?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What were you DOING?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What were you FEELING?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thought Challenger Worksheet

Identify the unhelpful or negative thoughts you hear most often.

Now complete the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My most common negative thought is:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Look at all the evidence, a more balanced thought is:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Whenever you notice this negative thought:

- Say STOP to yourself
- Repeat your balanced thought two or three times – this will help to turn down the volume of the negative thought.

It is useful to practice balanced thinking. As you get up each morning, repeat your balanced thought to yourself. Do not just listen to your negative thoughts. Challenge them.
SECTION 3
Wellness Tools
This section is about helping young carers to look at some things they can do to improve their wellbeing. In this section be as creative as you can. You can encourage young carers to create cartoons or dramas around looking after themselves. Some people may find this a better way of coming up with ideas for their wellbeing. Combine with other parts of the toolkit, for instance the problem solving activity, to create some interesting scenarios and ideas for promoting wellbeing. Young carers can also keep a 'Wellbeing Journal' to keep a record of their wellbeing and complete activities within it.
Positive Vs Negative Thinking WT1

1. Either in one large group, or in two smaller groups, read out a scenario and ask the participants the questions.
2. Encourage discussion around how the person might feel, what kinds of things can be done differently etc.
3. One suggestion might be to take the scenarios and role play them for others in the group to discuss.
4. Introduce the Positive Vs Negative Sheet (WT1b) and explain that it is sometimes very good to write down positive thoughts which the person can return to when they start to have negative thoughts.
5. Encourage young carers to change the negative thoughts written down into positive ones. Ask them to write a few thoughts which are personal to them and which they could try and think about in a positive way.
6. Explain that this sheet can be kept in their Wellness box (if using one).
7. To end, gather group in a circle. Throw the ball to someone in the circle and ask them to say one positive thing about themselves. If the person struggles with this, get the others to suggest something positive about that person.
8. Encourage the participants to write down in their journal what they have said or heard about themselves.
Be creative when thinking about helping young carers to see that most negative thoughts can be changed to positives, or at least positive things can be found in most situations. Be careful though with the topic being discussed. Further places of support, or people the young person can talk to should be provided if required. Try and keep topics a third party; this way you can save personal experiences or stories being shared inappropriately. You may have to spend some one to one time with a young carer, if the activity raises issues or concerns. Again think about this before you start the activity and think about how you could give examples of negative thinking or situations which can readily be turned into positive ones as a means of illustrating the objective of the activity.

It might be best to explain the purpose of this activity is to look at changing negative thoughts into positive ones, that way any young carer who may find it challenging to discuss certain issues can opt out.

The Positive Vs Negative worksheet can form part of the Health Journal and participants should be encouraged to keep it safe and refer to it as needed. You can use this tool in one to one work if necessary.

Another way of carrying out the Positive Vs Negative activity could be to have the young carers compete to see who comes up with the most positive thing in response to a negative statement or situation. They could do this by writing answers on post it notes and placing on an answer sheet either as a group or individual, or they could try and persuade others that their way is the best way to describe a positive thought. This encourages confidence in asserting the their views, and further gives them time to think about advantages of seeing things in a positive light.

The scenario examples are only guides. Make up more relevant ones or encourage the young carer group to come up with examples to discuss. Ensure that no one feels under pressure to discuss themselves and remind group about ground rules etc.

There are no answers provided for the scenarios but please use your own judgement and common sense when discussing possible solutions. The idea is to encourage positive thinking. The young people in the scenarios could be young carers, but do not have to be, there could be other reasons why Sophia is not attending school or doing well in her exam. This can let young carers see that all young people may, at times, struggle with schoolwork etc.
Scenario Sheet

Sophia is 14 years old. She has been feeling really down lately and has just failed an important end of year exam. She has missed a lot of school and didn’t study too hard. Her teachers regularly give her a row and tell her she “needs to pull her socks up” and that she “could do better”. Sophia thinks she is useless and hated by everyone.

- What kind of thoughts do you think Sophia has? Are they likely to be positive or negative?
- What things could be going on with Sophia to make her feel the way she is and act the way she does?
- What would you say to her to make her feel better?
- What sort of things could you suggest to Sophia so that she changes her negative thinking into positive thinking?

Alan is 16 years old. He is really good at sport. His passion is to play for the school football team but the team has been picked and he is not in it. Instead, he has been chosen to represent his school in the 100 metres. He reluctantly agrees but he does not think he is good enough for running. He also doubts he is good enough at football now and thinks all the other boys are making fun of him because he can’t get into the football team.

- What kind of thoughts do you think Alan has? Are they likely to be positive or negative?
- What things could be going on with Alan to make him feel the way he does and act the way he does?
- What would you say to him to make him feel better?
- What sort of things could you suggest to Alan so that he changes his negative thinking into positive thinking?
**Positive Vs Negative Thoughts Worksheet**

Look through the following and change them into positive thoughts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEGATIVE and UNHELPFUL</th>
<th>POSITIVE and HELPFUL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am useless at everything</td>
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<tr>
<td>I hate the way I look</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nothing good ever happens to me</td>
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<tr>
<td>No one ever listens to what I say</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hate this school</td>
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<tr>
<td>I will never learn this</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What’s the point in doing this?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ll never go to college/university or work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t do that</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Try and think of more positive ways you could say the above. We all have bad days when we think negative or unhelpful things about ourselves or the situation we are in. But if we try and look for positive or helpful things about ourselves, or our situation, we can then learn to deal with things better and not allow things to get us down.

Whenever you think something negative or unhelpful about yourself or a situation you have to deal with, write down the negative or unhelpful thought and then try and change it to a positive one. Try and find something positive, good or helpful about yourself or the situation you are in. Use the box below to record these thoughts. You can get someone to help you fill in the positive side if you find it difficult. Look back at these positives when you feel things aren’t going well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEGATIVE and UNHELPFUL</th>
<th>POSITIVE and HELPFUL</th>
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Aim: To encourage young carers to make time for relaxation

Outcome: Participants will understand the role of sleep and relaxation in maintaining good mental health.

Sleep and Relaxation WT2

1. Lead discussion around the kinds of things young carers do to relax. You could keep a chart of the most used techniques for relaxing and keep this on the wall and encourage participants to try out some of the suggestions and feedback each week on progress.
2. In small groups make a note of why we need rest and sleep. Make a list of the effects of not getting enough sleep, short and long term.
3. Discuss top tips (WT2a) for good sleep.
4. Ask participants to go into pairs and each pair to complete worksheet (WT2b)
5. Take feedback on what the recommendations are and how they think they could carry them out.
6. End with some relaxation (E5) activity or have a guest in who could carry out some relaxation work.
Top Tips for Good Sleep

- Exercise – during the day or early evening.
- Eat well but not in the two hours before bed.
- Drink less at night time.
- Cut down on caffeine (in coffee, tea and some fizzy drinks) especially at night.
- No smoking (nicotine is a stimulant and can keep you awake).
- No alcohol (people may think that a drink helps them sleep, your body will soon learn when it’s you again in 2-4 hours).
- Routine – go to bed at the same time and get up at the same time, your body will soon learn when it’s meant to be sleeping.
- If you are not asleep within 20 minutes or so, get back up and try again when you are sleepy.
- Relax – have a bath, read a book, listen to music, chill out.
- Worry time – if you are worrying when you go to bed then try to set aside a different time to worry and tell yourself “I’m not allowed to worry after 8pm. I’m going to get a good night’s sleep”.
- Try to resolve arguments before going to bed.
Relaxation Questionnaire

Ask your partner...

1. Do you sleep well?
   
   Always  Most times  Sometimes  Hardly ever

2. How many hours do you spend asleep/in bed?
   
   Weekdays____________________________hrs
   
   Weekends____________________________hrs

3. How do you relax?

4. How many hours a week do you spend relaxing?

5. How stressed do you think you are?
   
   Not Stressed  A little but I can cope  Quite a lot  Very Stressed

6. How often do you feel unwell?
   
   Often  Quite Often  Rarely  Never

7. Recommendations (what do you think you should do)?
Discuss what health means to the group. Explore with them some activities they use to look after their health, both physical and mental health. Note these down on the flipchart.

In a large group discuss what kind of things they would do to look after their health, both physical and mental.

Using flipchart start to look at how young carers could plan to maintain their health.

Use the template sheet (WT3a) and ask participants to complete. This can form the basis of an action plan to be taken forward as one way of looking after their health. Build on discussions in one to one sessions if appropriate.
Facilitator Note WT3

Encouraging young carers to set goals and plan how to achieve these is a valuable process in motivating them to get the changes they want. The idea behind this activity is to encourage this approach when looking at the question of health and how to maintain it. Use this approach to help young carers plan out other areas of their life, for instance moving on from school.

Encourage young carers to think about what health means to them; what kinds of things they enjoy doing that look after their health; and what things would they like to do? Reinforce that health is about physical health as well as mental health. You could also look back to earlier exercises in the toolkit “What is Mental Health?” (MH1) and use this as a way of introducing the topic. It’s also important that you encourage young carers to think about people and places they could go to for further help or support. Use other activities in the Wellness section of the toolkit to enhance this one. Activities such as “List of Comforts” (W5) and “This is My Life” (W6) can be combined to create an action plan or create ideas for an action plan or goal setting.

Support the participants to go through the health plan. Encourage them to make the plan as creative as possible. The idea given is only a suggestion. Get participants to create their own health plan and encourage them to keep it somewhere safe for them to look back at and amend.

When setting goals on the health plan, remember that goals should be:
- Positive
- Broken down into small, achievable steps
- Specific and realistic

Get participants to spend some time thinking about the goals they want to achieve. Then pick a small number of really significant goals on which to focus. Make sure that the goals being set are ones that the young carer genuinely wants to achieve and not ones that their parents, family, teachers might want. That way they are more likely to achieve them. Once the participants have started on their plans, keep the process going by reviewing and updating the to-do list (or future plans section) on a regular basis. This could be used in one to one sessions.

When a young carer achieves a goal, encourage them to take the time to enjoy the satisfaction of having done so. If the goal was a significant one, encourage the young carer to reward themselves appropriately. All of this helps build self-confidence.
My Health Plan

What is my health like now? Think about your physical health and mental health. You can create a mind map or write points down.

Which areas would I like to improve short term?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which areas would I like to improve?</th>
<th>Why?</th>
<th>How?</th>
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How long will I give myself to work on these?

What is my plan?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action</th>
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</table>
How will I know I have made a difference or am noticing change?

Which areas would I like to improve long term?

Date | Action
Wellness Poster/Box WT4

1. Would be useful for participants to spend a session creating their own decorated box.
2. If making wellness posters, hand out pieces of flipchart paper.
3. Reinforce aim to participants.
4. Ask participants to put in their box/or on their poster the things or people or places that make them feel happy, relaxed, supported etc.
5. If helpful you could encourage participants to write down a list of supporters or people and phone numbers they could use when they require help, support or advice.
6. When everyone has completed the activity, spend some time asking them to share some of the things they have put in their box or on their poster. Ask them what these things mean to them, do they make them happy, relaxed etc?
7. End activity by explaining that this box or poster can be kept somewhere that the young carer can go back and look at it when they are feeling down, worried or stressed and it could help them get through that period, or it could remind them who to turn to for support or help. Explain that the box or poster can be changed or added to at any time, and things can be removed when they no longer prove useful.

Source: Manage Your Wellbeing, NHS Ayrshire and Arran
Facilitator Note WT4

In advance of this activity, explain that the purpose of it is to start to look at what kinds of things we can put in place to help us feel good about ourselves. This resource can be used repeatedly by the young carer and it belongs to them. It can be a place where they can escape to when they need to. It is also a good place to put a list of important phone numbers and contacts for people they can go to for help or support. These contacts could include friends, other family members, young carer worker, GP, social worker, nurse, police, Childline, Samaritans.

This can also be a good way of conducting one to one sessions with participants. You can ask a participant to bring in their box or poster and discuss some of the contents if they feel comfortable doing this. It can also be a good way of getting a young person to start opening up about issues they may have.

Always have suggestions of places to go for further help and people they could talk with.

Use this activity over a number of weeks so that young carers get used to the idea of thinking about positive things they can do to stay feeling good or less stressed.
Lists of Comforts WT5

1. In a large group ask the participants to call out the ways they would comfort someone who is upset or sad. Write them down on the flipchart.
2. Encourage a discussion about what people think would be helpful ways of comforting someone.
3. Using the sheets of card, get participants to create their own list of things which would help them when they are sad or upset.
4. Explain that this list can be like a menu, full of choices for participants to try at times when they feel sad, upset or stressed.
5. Encourage people to keep these lists in a safe place and to look at them when they need some ideas to help if they are sad, upset or stressed.
Some things to encourage discussion could be:

- Think about a time when someone comforted you in a way that really helped you to feel better. What was the best thing about the way they comforted you?
- When do you think you need comforted most?
- How can you make sure that you’re comforting each other in the best possible way?

Other ideas:

- Design a menu or list on a computer. Create a space on the list where people can show what their favourite comforts are.
- Create a graffiti wall in your centre where people can add their favourite things to do to feel better/happy.
- Another idea could be to create a comfort quilt. Invite people to write their favourite ways of being comforted on different squares of lightly coloured or patterned paper. Arrange the squares into a patchwork-style collage and stick them onto a larger sheet of paper or thin card to make a piece of comforting wall art.
WHO AND WHAT ARE IMPORTANT TO ME

This is My Life WT6

1. Explain that the idea is to make a journal which will be about their life so far. Explain that they can be as creative as possible with this journal, and use whatever materials they wish to colour it in, draw on it, stick labels, sequins etc to it.
2. Alternatively, you can encourage the participants to create a poster depicting their life, or you could use a paper plate and ask them to draw or write on this about what is happening in their life.
3. Another way of doing this may be to have the participants draw themselves in the middle of the page and then draw a circle close to themselves, then a circle further away and then one even further away. The closest circle represents the people and things most important to them and the furthest away represents people and things of least importance to them.
4. Get participants to create a wishes page (if using the journal idea), or to create a shape to represent a wish on their poster or coloured in plate.
5. On the wish page (or using a separate representation on poster) get them to think about how they can go about working towards that wish. Some work may need to be done here to help them sort out realistic and achievable wishes.
6. Build onto this work with follow up sessions on goal planning. This can be a good thing to do in one to one sessions or as a general discussion in groups around how to set goals.

Time
30 – 60 minutes
(can be done over several sessions)

Materials
Paper to make journal; flipchart; pens; pencils; craft material
Facilitator Note WT6

This activity can be used with young carers to help them discuss what is going on in their lives and who or what are the important things they need or would like to have in their life. From this exercise you can get a feel of what the young person values and it can also be used as a starting point for looking at goal setting and action planning with some young carers.

The creation of a journal means that the young carer can use this to note things down which are of concern to them, or which they found useful. The journal can allow them to reflect on achievements or progress made. It can be used in one to one sessions, as well as a way of reflecting on progress or for planning ahead. For older young carers, it might be a good exercise to look at moving on from school and what kind of supports and plans they might need to put in place for doing this.

When looking at the people and things of importance to young carers encourage them to think about:

- My best friend
- My family
- My pets
- My favourite music/pop group
- My favourite film
- My pets
- Things I’m good at
- My school
- My best achievement
- What I do to relax
- Where I go at weekends
- My qualities as a friend
- My favourite holiday.
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