

CONCERN CARDS

CONCERNS OF YOUNG CARERS

The Concern Cards contain statements about the experiences and life of young carers. Here, young carers refer to all children, adolescents, and young adults who are close to someone who has fallen ill and for whom there is reason to suspect that the close person's condition causes stress or concern for the young person. This may involve a physical illness, mental health challenges, a disability, or excessive substance use. A young carer does not always have knowledge of the close person's diagnosis, nor does the person close to them necessarily have a diagnosis.

In the cards, we primarily use the term close person to refer to a young person's ill, symptomatic, or affected parent, sibling, friend, partner, or other close individual about whom the child or young person is concerned. The cards are particularly suitable for situations where the home environment or the close person's condition is relatively prolonged and burdensome. The cards are designed for use with young people aged 13 and older.

The goals of the cards

1. To make visible the concerns and responsibilities carried by the young person and the resulting burden that extends to various aspects of their life, both for the young person and the professional.
2. To normalize the experiences and emotions related to the young person's situation and to facilitate their recognition and articulation.
3. To support discussions with the young person about the nature and extent of the burden they experience.

Before using the cards

Before using the cards, it is important to discuss the young person's family or life with a strengths-based approach. The young person can be encouraged to talk about the people who are important to them and what their family is like. Tools such as a network map or family strengths cards can be used to support this discussion. In this work, it is essential to focus on protective and positive factors and to keep them present throughout the entire process.

Talking about burdens can be difficult and intimidating for the young person, especially when they feel love and a sense of protectiveness toward their parent or other close person. It is important to discuss with the young person that even negative emotions are allowed. Recognizing and acknowledging such feelings can be challenging for them, which is why articulating and normalizing these emotions and experiences in a safe environment is crucial.

It is particularly important to note that the cards are not a measurement tool but a means to facilitate discussion. The number of cards selected does not assess the young person's well-being nor automatically lead to further actions. The purpose of the cards is to serve as a mirror for the young person's own experiences, a prompt for reflection, a tool for facilitating discussion, and a means of fostering a

sense of shared understanding. The topics on the cards reflect common experiences of young carers. The statements have been created by other young people who have lived through similar situations. It is important to share this with the young person. The cards may evoke many thoughts and feelings in the young person so it is crucial that the professional has sufficient time to address and process these reflections and emotions with them.

Using the cards

There are 100 cards in total, each containing a single statement. The cards are divided into six different categories, each identified by a specific colour:

- Impact on one's own role and relationship with a close person
- Impact on practical responsibilities and tasks
- Impact on emotional life
- Impact on social life
- Impact on school
- Sources of joy in life

1. The cards are laid out on the table, one category at a time.
2. The young person is asked to select the cards from the relevant category that they find relatable.
3. Once the young person has selected the cards from one category, they are discussed. What thoughts and feelings do the selected cards evoke in the young person? Does any card stand out particularly?
4. Each card the young person has selected is reviewed individually: Why did they choose this particular card? What thoughts does it provoke? In what situations or how often has the young person experienced this? Has the young person discussed the issue with their close person or someone else? Does the young person desire a change in this matter? What would that change require?
5. All areas of burden are reviewed in a similar manner.
6. The discussion always ends with the Sources of joy in life card.

Application and further work

The handling of the card categories can be spread across several sessions. However, it is important to cover all categories. The cards can be used as a tool to monitor the young person's perceived burden during ongoing work. During the process, the professional may develop concerns about the young person and their growth conditions. After the card-based work, it is important to ensure that the young person receives the support they need and that they are not left alone in their situation.

The Concern cards were developed with funding from STEA as part of the Ask the Young project and the ALISA project, in collaboration with young carers and professionals from the social, health, and education fields. The cards are also based on both international and domestic research and experiential knowledge collected from young carers.

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