

MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

Mental Health & Wellbeing

- > **Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy**
- > **Mental Health & Wellbeing resources**
- > **The Mental Health and Wellbeing Team**
- > **Collaboration and Initiatives**
- > Online Resources

Support for Carers

As a student, caring for a loved one while studying at university can be challenging. Some days caring brings great joy, but some days it might feel a bit lonely, tiring or overwhelming. Working out how to balance your responsibilities and care for yourself as you care for your loved one will help make caring and study more manageable.

On this page:

- [Who is a Carer?](#)
- [Strategies for carers](#)
- [Caring and my studies](#)
- [University support](#)
- [Community support](#)
- [Resources](#)

Who is a Carer?

A carer is someone who regularly provides unpaid, ongoing care and support to a family member or friend who has a disability, medical condition, mental illness, or is frail because of old age.

There are more than [2.65 million carers](#) in Australia- nearly 11% of Australia's population. Carers can be any age, and people who are under 25 and provide care are called 'young carers'- 11% of carers are young carers.

Caring can include providing support with:

- Daily activities like dressing, moving around, toileting, preparing meals and managing medication
- Help around the house and in the community, such as with transportation, medical appointments, shopping, or housework
- Emotional and social support
- Other types of support, such as help with banking and finances, or dealing with emergencies

Some carers provide support for a few hours a week, while others provide support all day, every day. Carers can provide care in their home, someone else's home, or in another location.

Impact of caring

Caring can be both meaningful and challenging. Many carers value the relationship they have with the person they care for, the opportunity to provide support to someone they love, and the skills they gain from caring that can be valuable in other areas of life. Caregiving can sometimes be stressful, tiring, upsetting or overwhelming.

Caring can make it hard to fit in other activities such as work, study, and doing the things you enjoy, and can impact physical and mental health, sometimes resulting in stress, anxiety, low mood, increased fatigue, and body pain.

Strategies for Carers

It can be hard to fit time to care for yourself around your caring and study responsibilities. However, taking care of yourself is just as important as taking care of the person you care for.

Looking after yourself can help you manage stress and avoid burnout- consider trying one, two or a combination of the below strategies. Try to dedicate some time to each of them and see how you go.

Strategies for providing care:

- **Focus on what you can control:** Caring can come with many worries about the person you care for and many responsibilities. Thinking about the future is normal but try taking things one day at a time and focus on what's happening now. Similarly, focusing on problems and choosing how you react to them will give you a better sense of control than thinking about things outside your control.
- **Schedule time to address your own needs:** Take time out to go for a walk, do something you enjoy, or take a moment to rest. Reflect on how you feel and what your needs are in the present moment. Having time for yourself allows you to assess your emotional wellbeing and know when it is time to seek more support for yourself.
- **Seek help** when you need it and think of ways others can provide support. Try to build your own network of those who can support you as you support the person you care for.
- **Share the caring role:** This could look like accepting help from friends or family, using respite or government services, speaking to medical professionals, or something else. Sharing the carer role can help give you a break and make it easier for you to provide support to your loved one.
- **Talk to others who understand:** This could mean chatting to others who help you provide care, chatting to friends or family who 'get it', or talking to someone like a counsellor or psychologist. They can listen to you, acknowledge your efforts, and provide encouragement.
- **Join a carer support group:** Caregiver support groups are increasingly available, and they can provide a shared sense of understanding, practical guidance and emotional support.

Self-care:

Taking care of yourself as a carer is just as important as the support you provide the person you care for. Making sure your needs are met is an important part of being able to care for another person.

- **Socialising:** It can be easy to drop out of contact with friends when you're busy with caring. Try to organise to catch up with friends for coffee or plan regular phone calls.
- **Mindfulness:** Worrying about the future is a natural response to stress. Practicing mindfulness by focusing on the present moment can help reduce stress and can positively impact how you face challenges and feel about life- try using the Smiling Mind app or the Mindfulness for Carers booklet in the resources section below.
- **Exercise:** You might be short on time; however, exercise can have a big impact on your mood and physical health. [Try incorporating movement](#) into your daily routine- even little bits of movement can add up.

- **Sleep:** It's common for carers to experience poor sleep. If you're finding it hard getting to sleep or staying asleep, [practicing good sleep hygiene](#) can help.

Caring and my studies

The time and energy that caring takes can affect your university study and other parts of your personal life. You may begin finding it difficult to spend time fulfilling your studies, meeting deadlines, or taking part in face-to-face classes. However, there are lots of strategies you can use to help balance your responsibilities and make it easier to do the things you want and need to do.

- **Keep organised:** Try using lists to help organise things you need to do and a calendar or a planner to visualise the commitments you have toward your loved one and your studies. This can help provide clarity on your day and help you find pockets of time where you can schedule in time for study, catching up with friends or personal time out for yourself. You might find an online calendar like [Google Calendar](#) or one of the [planners](#) designed around the WSU calendar helpful. To-do apps like [Microsoft To Do](#) or [Todoist](#) can also be helpful for keeping on top of responsibilities.
- **Plan your semester:** Think about what will make studies easier for you and try to plan your semester as best you can around this. Your course advisor can help think through your options- see WSU help and resources below for more information about this.

Some things to consider include:

- If available, whether to enrol in on-campus classes or online classes
 - Whether to attend lectures in person or watch lectures online from home
 - Whether to study full time or whether to consider a reduced study load
 - When to schedule classes- you may find it easier to try to spread your tutorials across the week or to try to keep them to a few days, or perhaps to have them at a certain time of day.
 - Check out Western Sydney University's study resources: [Are you coping with study?](#)
- **Set aside time and space for study:** For some people, working on assignments from home might be helpful for balancing study and caring, while others might find the library is less distracting. Wherever you choose, try to schedule in the time you'll need to get your work done, and set up your environment for success- bring the materials you'll need with you to the library, or set up a study space in your home instead of working from your bed or in front of the tv.

Carer Verification Statement

If you care for someone with a disability or chronic health condition that is outlined in the Carer Recognition Act 2010, you might be eligible for a **Carer Verification Statement (CVS)**. A CVS is a document from the [Student Welfare Service](#) which confirms a student's caring responsibilities and can allow you to have extensions for assessments and changes to your timetable. The CVS can help provide the flexibility you need to support managing your caring and study responsibilities. Having a CVS allows you to ask for support from teaching staff without needing to explain the details of your caring role each time- you are only required to provide this information when you apply for or renew your CVS.

How to apply?

The Welfare Service can help you apply for a CVS or answer any questions you might have about this document. Complete the online application and attach a carer registration form which has been completed by a registered health professional. Alternatively, you can provide a carer allowance statement or Centrelink carer payment statement. The CVS needs to be renewed every 12 months by submitting a new online application.

University support

If you would like to access some support, the WSU [Counselling Service](#), [Disability Service](#), or [Student Welfare Service](#) may be able to help.

- **WSU [Counselling Service](#).**

Students can access free, short term, confidential counselling services. Face to face, Zoom or phone appointments can be made by telephoning 1300 668 370. Our office hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am - 4:30pm. Alternatively, or email counselling@westernsydney.edu.au

- **WSU [Disability Service](#).**

The Disability Service is free to access with Disability Advisors assisting students to meet their full potential. If you have a diagnosed physical, psychological or medical condition that impacts on your studies, you may be eligible for an [Academic Integration Plan \(AIP\)](#), developed by the Disability Service. Contact the Disability Service on 1300 668 370, email disability@westernsydney.edu.au or make contact via [WesternNow](#).

- **WSU [Welfare Service](#).**

Academic, Personal and Financial Hardship, International Support and Accommodation: 1300 668 370 or via [WesternNow](#).

- **Multifaith [Chaplaincy](#)**

Multifaith Chaplaincy can provide confidential conversation and care, support for stress management and anxiety with links to religious groups and faith communities. For more information, please call Daniel Jantos on 0402771543 or email d.jantos@westernsydney.edu.au.

- **WesternLife**

[WesternLife](#) - Join thousands of students at Your Virtual Community to share experiences, learn new things, connect with new friends, and engage with events or discussions that interest you!

- **Disruption to Studies**

Consider applying for [Disruption to Studies](#) and [Requests for Extension](#) if you feel as though your studies have been significantly impacted.

- **Deferred Exam**

[Deferred Exam](#) – You can apply for a Deferred Exam no later than 5.00 pm on the second working day after your scheduled exam if you are unable to attend a final exam due to serious illness, misadventure or other exceptional circumstances beyond your control. Submit a [Student Form](#) and attach supporting documents online for application.

- **Withdraw Without Academic Penalty**

[Withdrawal Without Academic Penalty](#) is an option available after the Census Date of the teaching term provided that you meet eligibility.

- **Leave of absence**

A [Leave of Absence](#) is a temporary break from studying. Once you have completed one or more subjects in your enrolled program, you can apply for a Leave of Absence. A Leave of Absence can be taken as either six or twelve months. The maximum amount of leave you can take during your program is twelve months. Please note, you must submit your application before the relevant census date

If you are considering any of these options, please reach out to the counselling service for support and guidance. If you are an international student, please make sure you seek advice particularly if you are considering withdrawing without penalty or taking a leave of absence as these may have [implications for your visa conditions](#).

Community support

- [Lifeline](#)

Lifeline (24 hours crisis counselling) - **13 11 14**

Lifeline SMS Counselling Service - between 6pm- Midnight you can text **0477 13 11 14** and somebody will text you back! You can find more information [here](#).

- [Mental Health Telephone Access Line](#)

Available 24/7 to everyone in NSW on **1800 011 511**. Provides professional help and advice and referrals to local mental health services.

- [Carers NSW](#) contains information, resources and training for carers, including the [Young Carer Program](#).
1800 242 636

- [Carer Gateway](#) provides access to information, counselling services, and [tailored support packages](#) which may include financial grants for education expenses, respite care, and cooking and cleaning services. 1800 422 737.

- [Young Carers Network](#) provides information, support and referrals for Young Carers, including the [Young Carer Bursary](#) which is a scholarship available to young carers to help support their studies.

- [Emerging minds](#) offers young carers program to make a difference in young carers' lives. Services include counselling & emotional support (1800 242 636) access to forum and community area, leadership programs and variety of workshops.

- [Centrelink](#) has two payments available to support eligible carers- carer allowance and carer payment.

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[My Aged Care](#) and the [NDIS](#) are other government services which are able to provide supports and respite services for carers.

Resources

- [Websites](#)
- [Podcasts](#)
- [Videos](#)

- [Apps](#)

Websites

[Relax the Mindful Way](#): A workbook designed for carers which introduces the benefits of mindfulness to reduce stress and has some examples of mindfulness activities to try.

[Radical acceptance](#): A worksheet which provides an introduction to the concept of 'radical acceptance'. This is a technique associated with a therapy called Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and can help with coping with challenging situations.

Apps

[MedicineWise](#): A free medication and healthcare management app designed for people who take regular medications and those who care for them. It allows you to create medicine and other health reminders, record important health information, and store details of healthcare professionals.

[Smiling mind](#): A free, evidence-based mindfulness and meditation app designed to help you fit mindfulness activities into your day. Mindfulness meditation has been shown to help manage stress, resilience, anxiety, depression and improve general health and wellbeing.

Podcasts

Carer Conversations

This podcast contains interviews with experts and carers who share specialised information and inspiring stories about the caring role.

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/carers-conversations/id1643641981>

YC Bytes

This podcast aims to raise awareness of young carers across New South Wales. Each episode will feature different guest speakers, including young carers, to bring lived experience and insights to the conversation.

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/yc-bytes/id1640164368>

Videos

[Am I a carer?](#)

[Health and happiness](#)

Still struggling?

If you are still struggling, reach out to the WSU counselling team for support and advice. If you prefer to seek support from a service outside of the university, it may be helpful to speak to your General Practitioner regarding a [Mental Health Care Plan](#) and referral to a psychologist, or you can speak to a counsellor or other health professional. Remember you are not alone and there will always be someone out there who is willing to stay with you through your hard times.

Please find the attached PDF document [here](#).

References

[Carers Australia – Who is a Carer?](#)

[Carers NSW Australia](#)

[Emerging Minds – Young Carers NSW](#)

[Young Carers Network](#)