

QUESTIONS TO ASK

Young Patients Who May be a Caregiver



HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

It can be difficult to know what questions to ask young patients concerning illnesses, and diseases, how they are feeling both mentally and physically, and many other aspects as a healthcare professional. Due to the difficulty surrounding this line of questioning, the Young Caregivers Association has put together this non-exhaustive list to assist in bridging the gap, building rapport, and facilitating discussion with young patients.

As this is such an incredibly broad topic, this resource gives basic or generalized topic points that can be repurposed to better fit individual needs.

Depending on the age group of the youth in question, the line of questions varies greatly, as the knowledge and understanding of the child may not be up to the level of their older peers. Due to this, we have broken down some example questions/ideas into age groups.

3 to 5 years old

As this is the youngest demographic that can successfully grasp and respond to questions, this is where we will begin. This age group can be incredibly challenging due to their lack of experience and knowledge, but they make up for those challenges by being very direct in their responses and their eagerness to learn/improve.

- Some tips for conversing and questioning would be to keep the question very concise and in simplified language.
- Questions directly relating to the individual are very important, for instance asking if their arm hurts, following this with showing their arm and your own to ensure that they are fully understanding the questioning.

- Simplicity is the key to this age group, for instance, simply asking if this makes them sad or happy is most likely to get a proper response as most have a rudimentary understanding of emotions and their portrayal.
- Questioning their knowledge on the topic can allude to their knowledge of what is currently happening and allow you to decipher an entry point for further questioning.

6 to 11 years old

Within this age bracket, there is a considerable amount of variation in the knowledge behind each individual patient.

- Staying concise and to the point is still best practice, but concepts can be elaborated upon. For instance, as the understanding of the patient increases, they will be better able to elaborate on their emotions to describe what they are feeling. For example, *"I am very sad that my mother is sick"*.
- With a greater understanding of their bodies, they will be much more likely to identify problem areas and converse about the spots that may hurt.
- Some examples may be:
 - *"How are you feeling today?"*
 - *"How does the arm feel after the surgery?"*
 - *"How are you holding up mentally following what's happened?"*
 - *"Can you elaborate or expand upon how you are feeling?"*

12 to 18 years old

This is the age group where things get easier in certain aspects, while getting more complicated in other aspects. The youth's understanding and knowledge have grown considerably, and they are now easily able to explain their physical ailments. But at this same time, they are going through their formative brain and emotional development. Heightened emotions and a troubling ability to express or control their emotions are very common among this age group.

- As always being direct is some of the best practices as you will get the most direct answers.
- Helping them come to an understanding of the emotions they may be feeling can be troubling as many will withdraw into themselves.
- Encouraging conversation while not prying is a difficult line to walk, but one that will be present within this age group.
- Giving time to process information is key as they may need time to decompress and assess the situations at hand.
- Some examples of questions to ask may be:
 - *“How are you feeling today? Any change or increase in specific emotions?”*
 - *“How has your asthma been while doing walks around school?”*
 - *“Do you have or need anyone to decompress with?”*
 - *“Are you maintaining yourself (Self-care) during this time?”*

KEY TAKEAWAY:

These are just some of the suggestions that could be thought of, but each and every situation and individual is completely unique. Should more assistance be needed, there are resources available online and through programs provided by service providers.

To learn more about how you can help provide support to a young caregiver, visit YoungCaregivers.ca/KnowledgeCentre