

Working as One

How foster carers and schools can work together to achieve the best outcomes for looked after children in Wales







Contents

Foreword	4
Welcome	6
About this guide	6
How to use this guide	7
Finding common ground	9
Dare to hope, dare to dream	9
School aims	10
What really matters	12
– Wellbeing	12
– The five basic needs	13
– 10 principles	16
A friendly school	19
Finding the perfect school	19
Getting to know you and them	22
Knowing the child – assessing their needs	30
More than getting along	33
Learning to learn	33
Skills integral to the four purposes	34
All emotions are OK, not all behaviours are OK	40
The attachment journey	41
Making progress	45
Many faces, one smile	51
How the school can help you and your child	51
How you can help the school	53
What next?	56
Useful contacts	56
How The Fostering Network can help	57
Additional resources	59

Foreword

About the author

Trevor Guy trained as a teacher and worked in further education and secondary schools in England and Wales for 17 years before taking up posts as an educational adviser, firstly in North Wales and then in South Wales where he became chief adviser to the Bridgend, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf local authorities.

Trevor was then head of strategy, partnerships and commissioning in a South Wales local authority, leading on a range of initiatives to promote the wellbeing of children and young people through better integrated working.

Since setting up as an independent consultant, Trevor has taken on various commissions including the roles of interim director of education, consultant on a Welsh Government teacher assessment programme, consultant for Families First, designer of the The Fostering Network's [Fostering Wellbeing programme](#) funded by Welsh Government and the author of several publications, including Aimee's Diary for The Fostering Network.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Andrea Higgins, School of Psychology, Cardiff University; Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council; Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council and Siriol Burford, Central South Consortium.

Foreword from the Welsh Government

The Welsh Government is delighted to support The Fostering Network in Wales in the production of this important Education Guide – Working as One: How foster carers and schools can work together to achieve the best outcomes for looked after children in Wales. It is aimed at those who care and have responsibility for children and young people who are looked after. It highlights the importance of education colleagues, foster carers and social workers working as one to promote and improve educational outcome for children and young people looked after.

The Welsh Government sponsored [Fostering Wellbeing programme](#) aims to improve outcomes for looked after children and young people through multi-agency working across social services, health and education. The programme is being implemented in phases across Wales from 2019 and some of its principles inform the contents of this education guide.



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government



Foreword from The Fostering Network

At The Fostering Network we know that many children and young people in foster care can and do succeed at school. Success isn't just about getting good grades, it's also about making friends, getting involved in extra-curricular activities and developing the confidence that young people need to thrive as adults.

But we also know that too many fostered children and young people fail to get the most out of their education. There remains a significant difference between outcomes for looked after children and other children, with fewer care leavers pursuing higher education and more facing poorer employment prospects and uncertain futures.

It's widely accepted that families have a significant influence on our education, and so for fostered children and young people this responsibility of being 'first educators' will be taken on by their foster carers. Foster carers play a vital role in supporting the children in their care to follow their dreams, and this is most effective when they work hand in hand with education professionals. As a foster carer myself, I know the true benefits of foster carers and school-based staff working closely together in the best interests of children.

We're therefore delighted to publish this guide, with the support of the Welsh Government, which aims to help foster carers to work in genuine partnership with schools. This guide emphasises that learning begins in the home and that it's important to take a holistic approach, ensuring that children's social, physical, emotional, cultural and learning needs are met. It covers practical information as well as offering useful advice and exploring the different perspectives of the school and the foster family.

This guide sits alongside the Welsh Government-funded Fostering Wellbeing programme which The Fostering Network in Wales is delivering across Wales. This recognises that multi-agency working through a partnership framework across social services, health and education is essential to improve outcomes for children and young people.

By foster carers and schools working together, along with birth parents, social workers and the children and young people themselves – the whole team working as one – we believe that more fostered children will build the educational foundations that they need to develop into happy and healthy adults.

Colin Turner

Director, The Fostering Network in Wales



Welcome

About this guide

Have you ever read anything which has given you all the answers to everything you wanted to know? Unlikely! Are you the perfect foster carer? Also unlikely! But, if you are reading this then you are likely to be someone who wants to learn more and, by learning more, improve your skills as a foster carer.

Your learning as a foster carer will go hand in hand with that of the child in your care. If you are caring for a pre-school child, you'll help them to reach their developmental goals such as walking and talking, as well as playing and sharing, being polite and a thousand and one other skills and behaviours. As their carer, you will develop an understanding of how best to help them to learn – when to step in and assist and when to stand back to let them find out for themselves.

With a school-aged child, the situation changes as education professionals play an increasingly important role in formal education. The role of the foster carer also changes as you combine continuing the child's informal learning outside school as well as supporting their formal learning at school.

Of course, there is no rule book for doing this. But this publication aims to be a good guide, offering you a steer on how to make good decisions to support the child in your care to get the most they can out of their education.

You know that raising children in this complex 21st century world is not so much a science as an art form. Genetics has given your child many inherited characteristics. The environment in which your child has been brought up helps to shape them as a person. This nature versus nurture combination is not the whole story in determining who we are, because a third factor can cut across these, and that is chance. However good the child's foster carers and teachers are, a child can be thrown by events that are well beyond everyone's control. Accepting such things can be difficult and it is too easy to attribute blame.

However, throughout this publication, we aim to emphasise the positive and, most importantly, highlight what education professionals and foster carers, in conjunction with social workers, birth parents and the children and young people, can achieve by working together – working as one.

Trevor Guy, author



How to use this guide

The chapters in this guide will lead you through various stages of engaging with your fostered child's school. It is not a factual guide to the Welsh education system, because regulations change and school practices vary. But building a good relationship with a school is as much about the values you and they hold, a shared understanding of what each child needs and the will on all sides to do what will benefit the child.

Time to reflect

In each section there are *Time to reflect* boxes which have questions you can ask yourself, talk about in your families or with your fostered child, and perhaps ask the school to reflect on as well. Reflection is a skill which requires practice. You need to give yourself a quiet moment in a place where you feel comfortable and are not likely to be disturbed. Just thinking is fine but you may prefer to make a few notes – you could write down some key words or phrases, sketch out a mind map (a diagram which links ideas together) or draw a simple picture.

There are no right or wrong answers, but when you think about the issues raised, ask yourself why you have arrived at that conclusion. Think about the evidence, the facts that have led you to that conclusion. And consider your own feelings and the feelings of others. Always bear in mind that someone else might have an equally valid way of answering a question or tackling a particular issue.

Things you might try

Thinking and reflecting are good, but we also have to act upon what we think is right. The *Things you might try* suggestions are exactly that – suggestions. If you think one of them is appropriate for you in your situation, then test it out. It may or may not work. If it doesn't work, ask yourself why it didn't and think about what might work better next time. Taking the initiative is not always easy, but if others can see that what you are trying to do is for good reasons, you are more likely to find that they will support you.



Finding common ground

Dare to hope, dare to dream

If you ask a looked after child what they want, what makes them happy or what they hope to become, you will hear any number of different answers, simply because everyone is different. But what you will definitely hear is that that they all have hopes and dreams.

Some will focus their hopes on things which children with more secure backgrounds may take for granted, such as always having a warm and loving home, or having someone they can really trust to listen to them.

Aspirations do not have to be about the career path they wish to follow or having money in their pocket. However, in the context of school, this is often how aspirations are viewed, and encouraging a child to be aspirational about learning is an excellent starting point for them to have more rounded hopes for their future.

It is well known that care-experienced children tend not to do as well educationally as their peers who have not been in care. Statistics have consistently shown that:

- being in care reduces the chances of a young person achieving well at school and going on to college or university
- changing schools after the age of 11 brings down, on average, the number and quality of GCSE grades achieved
- the difference in educational achievement between those in care and those who are not is already marked in the first phase of formal education (between the ages of three and seven) and the gap widens as they grow older.

The good news is that [research](#) carried out by Cardiff University's Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE), with support from The Fostering Network in Wales, showed that lots of looked after children and young people had high aspirations for their futures – they dreamt of joining the army, becoming teachers and going to university.

However, the same research also showed that, while there are many exceptions, too many teachers and foster carers did not share the same degree of optimism and high aspirations for educational achievement as the children themselves. Young people felt that too many adults had lower academic expectations of them or that they made assumptions about their intellectual capabilities, based on them being in care.

Time to reflect

- 1 What do children and young people living in foster care want and what do they need? What is the difference, if any?
- 2 Look at Principle 4 in the 10 Principles of Wellbeing on page 15 about encouraging positivity and aspiration. How do you put this principle into practice now with (a) your fostered child and (b) with your fostered child's school?

School aims

All schools will provide you with information about what they aim to achieve and the sorts of things which they value. But having aims and making them work in practice are not always the same, although every school will have the honest intention of doing so.

It is always useful as a foster carer to know the values and principles which a school is trying to uphold. So if, for example, you think the child in your care needs some extra help and one of the school's aims is to treat every child as an individual, you will know that you should be on common ground with the school.

So what do schools say?

If you look at the prospectuses for different schools, you'll see the schools' aims set out in phrases such as helping pupils to 'reach their full potential', providing a 'supportive environment', that they 'treat learners as individuals', and so on.

What might I see in practice?

Here are a few examples of some of the common phrases and explanations of what you might see in practice:

School aims	How these aims can be fulfilled
<i>Reach their full potential</i>	Potential is very difficult to measure. Looked after children are unlikely to have had the opportunity to demonstrate their true potential. The school will need to make a full assessment of the child's needs and abilities. Indicators such as current reading age are not necessarily the best guide as they take no account of factors which may have delayed the development of language skills. There are alternatives such as non-verbal reasoning tests, but all have their pros and cons. The foster carer should be invited by the school to contribute to this evaluation of potential by providing insights into the child's abilities and behaviours outside the school context.



School aims	How these aims can be fulfilled
<i>Academic support</i>	Where a child has particular learning difficulties identified, the school should provide additional support to address the issues. This can take various forms, including support within the classroom and intensive coaching. Any additional support requirements will be recorded by the school in the child's individual development plan (IDP). Some children who have missed large parts of schooling may need a catch-up programme.
<i>Pastoral support</i>	The link between the 'academic' and 'pastoral' elements of school life needs to be strong. By caring about a child's social and emotional needs, and actively seeking to meet them, the chances of learning effectively are greatly enhanced. A looked after child often fares better if there is a key adult in school who they can form a strong relationship with, a safe place to go when necessary, and programmes available if they require extra support.
<i>A safe environment</i>	Looked after children can often feel stigmatised and unfairly treated. A safe environment is not just a safe physical place, but a place which offers a sense of belonging, provides the certainty of helpful routines and embraces experimentation and mistakes as opportunities to learn.
<i>Fully inclusive</i>	As some young people in care say, they would be like to be recognised as 'the same, but different'. No looked after child should be excluded from any activity on account of their status. The school should be sufficiently aware of the child's background to adapt lessons as necessary by offering alternative approaches, for example, in relation to anything to do with families. After-school activities can be difficult for a looked after child to access if they have to travel by bus or taxi, so this should be taken into consideration.
<i>A high quality education</i>	This claim is very subjective. A starting point for a foster carer is to look at the latest school inspection report (which you can find at estyn.gov.wales). It will offer a view not just on education standards but also on the pupils' wellbeing and attitudes, teaching, care and support, and leadership. A foster carer will also need to ask specific questions of a school about how they cater for the particular needs of looked after children and their child's needs in particular.
<i>Treat learners as individuals, meet the needs of individual pupils</i>	Just because a child is looked after, it does not mean that their needs will be the same as other looked after children. In a primary school setting where one teacher will take the child for most lessons, children's individual needs are more easily identified and taken into account. In the secondary context, certainly early on, different subject teachers may not so readily address individual needs. This is where, for example, a one-page profile of the child (see page 26), can be useful.
<i>Develop self-respect</i>	To develop their own self-respect, a child needs to know what success looks like and experience success. Self-respect also requires someone to know what they believe in and to have the integrity to stand by their beliefs. Self-respect links into a child's identity and looked after children can often feel they do not belong. Consider how far a school makes all children feel welcome and engenders a sense of community. Ideally, there should be an ethos in the school of reward greatly outweighing punishment.

Time to reflect

- a Do I understand the aims of the school which my child might go to or already attends?
- b How far do I, as a foster carer, agree with the aims of the school?
- c Does the life of the school, as I know it, reflect its aims?
- d If not, what am I going to do about it (if anything)?

Things you might try

- 1 Write down what you think the aims of the perfect school should be.
- 2 Get hold of a copy of the aims of the school your fostered child attends and test them against your 'perfect' school.

What really matters

Wellbeing and learning go hand in hand. If a child does not have a strong sense of their own wellbeing, then their ability to learn will be impaired. On the other hand, if a child is unable to learn, then their wellbeing will be significantly compromised.

'Wellbeing' is a term widely used without a common understanding of what is often meant by it. A standard definition of wellbeing is 'the state of being comfortable, healthy or happy'. In this sense, wellbeing is, self-evidently, 'the state of being well'. If we ask someone, 'Are you well?', we usually intend to ask after their physical health and we mostly reply to such an enquiry in those terms.

However, wellbeing has a much wider scope. The Fostering Network's [Fostering Wellbeing](#) programme, funded by the Welsh Government, which brings together social services, health and education to work together improve outcomes for looked after children, seeks a holistic approach to wellbeing which can be considered in terms of what a person needs in order to be comfortable or healthy or happy.

In this broad sense:

wellbeing is when a person's basic needs are being met.

So, if wellbeing is the result of meeting all our basic needs, we need to ask: 'What are our basic needs?'



There are many models of need, but this one keeps it simple and is known by the acronym **SPECL**:

S Social needs: including being confident and forming appropriate relationships.

P Physical needs: including having a well-balanced diet, suitable accommodation, good health and recreation.

E Emotional needs: including having a positive self-image, managing stress, the giving and receiving of love, being free from abuse.

C Cultural needs: including having a sense of identity and belonging, and understanding cultural norms and behaviours.

L Learning needs: access to formal and informal learning, including developing basic skills, acquiring manual skills, being able to form reasoned judgements and learning how to learn.

The five basic needs are inter-related and when any one of them is not met, there is often a knock-on effect to the others, potentially creating a spiral of decline. An example might be the abuse of a child in the home which leads to a loss of trust in adults, feelings of guilt, lack of self-worth (all unmet emotional needs) and an inability to concentrate in school (a learning need).

Case study: Alice

Alice is 12 and has been in care since the age of six.

Alice was diagnosed as being on the autistic spectrum when she was seven. She attends special school. Alice has no spoken language, poor social skills and needs a lot of attention at home, which has led to tensions within her foster family. She is confused by this and is showing severe signs of distress to her teachers.

For Alice's wellbeing to be achieved, particular attention needs to be paid to her learning needs. However, recent tensions at home mean that she also has critical emotional needs which must also be addressed. The school has a vital role to play in focusing on supporting Alice to learn while being aware of and acknowledging her emotional distress.

Case study: James

James is six years old and lives with his eight-year-old brother and his foster carers.

James is a reluctant learner, he is not very sociable at school and has been bullying his classmates. His attitude in class has held back his language development and, therefore, his ability to fully access the curriculum.

His social, emotional and learning needs are very much inter-related and they must all be tackled if he is to make academic progress.

There is a sixth basic need for the family as a whole which is economic need. The meeting of the basic needs of a child assumes that there is sufficient income in the foster family. It may be that the family cannot afford a computer for the fostered child to help them with their homework, and this could affect the child's opportunity to learn.

The economic need is likely to also apply to care leavers when they become financially independent and have to weigh the benefits of furthering their education against what they can afford. If a young person turning 18 is leaving care and the foster home or staying under When I am Ready arrangements, they will be entitled to claim benefits.

Questions may arise about where mental health fits in to the SPECL model. Mental health issues can be caused by a number of related factors, but usually there is no single need that isn't being met - physical, social and emotional factors can all play an important part. Conversely, someone with a mental health issue will often find it difficult to have all their basic needs fulfilled.

A common language

The terminology of the five basic needs offers a relatively simple common language which can be readily shared between home, looked after child, school and other support agencies. It is understandable that different professions should develop their own terms and abbreviations, though these can be barriers to understanding for those outside that profession. The language of the five basic needs attempts to avoid such technical terminology. While many professionals will encounter the terms of the five basic needs in the Fostering Wellbeing programme as it is rolled out across Wales, foster carers may have to explain the model when talking to teachers, social workers and others.



Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Adverse Childhood Experiences are stressful events that occur in childhood. They are often referred to by the acronym ACEs. They include:

- domestic violence
- having a parent with a mental health condition
- physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- physical or emotional neglect
- having a member of the household in prison
- growing up in a household where adults are misusing alcohol or drugs.

A child in your care may have been exposed to experiences like this, and research shows that ACEs can have a long-lasting impact on children's ability to think, interact with others and on their learning.

During school years, children who have had ACEs may display a heightened emotional state of anxiety and consequently be distracted from education pursuits, resulting in poor attainments.

However, as you know, there are lots of things that foster carers and other professionals in the team around the child can do to offer hope and build resilience in children who have experienced adversity in early life.



The 10 principles of wellbeing

Without strongly held beliefs or principles there is no foundation upon which to build a system of care, let alone the relationships required to make it work.

The 10 principles below have been developed as part of The Fostering Network's [Fostering Wellbeing](#) programme and underpin what, it is hoped, foster carers, teachers, social workers, health professionals and strategic decision-makers are trying to achieve for looked after children and young people.

They apply equally to the children and young people themselves, but also to the adults involved in any aspect of their care. As you will see as you work through the *Things you might try*, on the next page, you'll see that they can be looked at from different points of view and can apply to different people in different circumstances.

- 1** The **whole of the child's** basic needs have to be met.
- 2** Each person's experience and **view of life** will differ and need to be understood.
- 3** What has happened cannot be undone but can provide **lessons for the future**.
- 4** Encouraging **positivity and aspiration** is essential.
- 5** **Good relationships** are at the centre of a person's wellbeing.
- 6** Different roles each require **appropriate behaviours**.
- 7** Engaging in **shared, practical activities** promotes positive values, attitudes and skills.
- 8** Learning to **help oneself** builds confidence and relationships.
- 9** **Shared values and attitudes** underpin good decisions.
- 10** **Equality of status** is central to good and enduring relationships.



Time to reflect

Think about each of the 10 principles in turn. Do you agree or disagree with each one? Why or why not?

Things you might try

- 1** For each principle, write down one thing you currently do in your role which supports the principle.
- 2** Share the 10 principles with someone else such as another foster carer or a member of staff in your fostered child's school, and what you have written. Open up a discussion on what you both believe about caring for looked after children and young people.



A friendly school

Finding the perfect school

When a child arrives with a new foster family, it is often appropriate for them to stay at the school they already attend. This can be a helpful way to continue friendships, relationships with trusted teachers and provide some stability during a time of change. However, some fostered children will have to move schools for a variety of reasons.

The Welsh Government's [Code of Practice on Looked After and Accommodated Children](#) states that local authorities are required to '*ensure that appropriate arrangements are made for a child's education or training before any placement is made. These arrangements must meet their needs and be consistent with their personal education plan.*'

However, in practice, finding an appropriate school place can fall to the foster carer who should still have a leading role in the process. If you as the foster carer are involved in the choice of school, you need to ask a number of questions, and some will have a greater priority than others. The more these questions are answered positively, the more likely it is that you and the school staff can work together successfully in the best interests of the child.

Delegated authority for foster carers

Delegated authority enables foster carers to make common sense, everyday decisions about the children and young people they care for, to help give them as normal lives as possible.

With delegated authority, foster carers can take responsibility for many things related to education, including attending parents' evenings and signing consent forms for school trips. This means that children don't miss out on things by having to wait for consent to arrive from someone who doesn't see them every day.

Holders of parental responsibility (the local authority and/or the parents) delegate authority to foster carers to undertake such tasks and make these decisions. Clarifying when authority is delegated depends on many factors including the age of the child, legal status and care plan.



Time to reflect

- a** What are your priorities in selecting a school for your fostered child?
- b** Bearing in mind that no school will be absolutely perfect, what concessions might you be prepared to make?

Things you might try

- 1** Copy, print and cut out the question cards on the next page. Use them to start a discussion with other people such as your fostered child, the child's social worker or a fellow foster carer. You can rank them in order with the most important question for you at the top.
- 2** If there is a choice of schools, you could use the questions on the next page as a checklist, scoring the answers.

1. How keen is the school to accept a looked after child?

2. Will the school make a detailed assessment of the child's learning needs? How?

3. Is the school willing and able to understand the needs of looked after children?

4. How much are foster carers encouraged to be involved in their child's education?

5. Are there good systems in place for sharing information between home and school?

6. Does the school reward good behaviour and provide support when behaviour is unacceptable?

7. Does the school have the right resources to meet the child's learning needs and are there enough of them?

8. Do all staff have high expectations of and aspirations for the child?

9. What specific provisions are there for looked after children?

10. *Add your own question*





Getting to know you and them

It is vitally important to build a good working relationship at an early stage between foster carers and key people in the school. Foster carers should not assume that the school will always make the first move in establishing that relationship. It may be necessary for you as a foster carer, whatever your experience of dealing with fellow professionals, to make the initial contact and set out what needs to be discussed and agreed.

Who's who in the school?

You need to know which key professionals will be working with your fostered child in the school: their names, job titles and responsibilities, exact role in relation to the child and their contact details.

It's often useful to agree one professional to be your first point of contact in the school so that you avoid trying to communicate with a number of different people who might or might not be relevant to the point you wish to discuss.

Different schools will have different staffing structures, and there will be variations between primary, secondary and special schools. The roles which are likely to be most relevant are as follows:

Headteacher: has responsibility for ensuring that all the necessary arrangements are in place and working effectively to support looked after children. In a smaller school the head may also carry the designated person role themselves.

Deputy/assistant headteacher: has oversight of the wellbeing of all children and more of the day-to-day responsibilities, such as managing situations that have had to be escalated to a senior member of staff.

Designated person for looked after children: all maintained schools are required by law to have a lead member of staff who promotes the educational experience of looked after children. Every foster carer needs not only to know who the designated person is, but to make contact with them as soon as it is known that their fostered child is to attend that school. (See box for more details about this important role.)

Class teacher: in primary schools and in some special schools a child may spend the majority of their time with one teacher who will need to be well briefed on the needs of a looked after child. The class teacher will be the most knowledgeable about the child's wellbeing and educational progress on a daily basis.

Head of year/key stage: in a secondary school, this member of staff is usually best placed to have a good overview of the child, rather than the form tutor.

Additional learning needs (ALN) co-ordinator: many looked after children have a recognised additional – or special – need. The ALN co-ordinator is responsible for ensuring that needs are properly identified and that an individual development plan (IDP) is drawn up to meet those needs.



Teaching/classroom assistant: works to support learning within the classroom or by taking pupils outside the classroom for more individual attention. Some larger schools have a teaching assistant specifically to support looked after children and to liaise with foster carers and support agencies.

Nominated governor: Welsh Government advice to schools is to nominate one of the governors to take a special interest in looked after children. (It is a statutory requirement for there to be a governor for additional learning needs.) A nominated governor for looked after children should be accessible to foster carers, represent any issues raised to the governing body and keep them informed of what the school is doing to support the children.

Any one of the above members of staff, except the nominated governor, could be the first point of contact for foster carers and this needs to be agreed with the school.

The designated person for looked after children

The designated person for looked after children has a central role to play in promoting the wellbeing of looked after children in their school. Their role is complex, with a number of key functions. These include:

- Keeping accurate and comprehensive records about all children in their school who are in care.
- When a new looked after child arrives at the school, ensuring a smooth and welcoming induction for the child and their carer, noting any specific requirements, including care status.
- Ensuring that a personal education plan (PEP) is completed as soon as possible (at least within 10 days if a child is entering care on an emergency basis or 20 days if a child is entering care in a planned way).
- Maintaining an up-to-date PEP, setting out how each looked after child will be supported in school.
- Acting as an advocate for the looked after children within the school and being a source of support for them.
- Allocating a safe place in school, for example, a room where a child can go if they are distressed.
- Attending looked after children's reviews and providing written information as necessary.
- Encouraging looked after children to participate in extra-curricular activities and out of hours learning, where feasible.
- Ensuring speedy transfer of information between individuals and other relevant agencies and to a new school, if and when a looked after child transfers.
- Seeking urgent meetings with relevant parties where a looked after child is experiencing difficulties and/or is in danger of being excluded.



And also:

- Having had specialist training about attachment to help them understand and manage pupils competently.
- Knowing how to manage data protection and confidentiality.
- Maintaining an effective referral system with other agencies.
- Ensuring all staff at their setting receive relevant information and training.
- Acting as an advisor to other staff members.

Adapted from *Children Looked After Friendly Schools* (Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil Local Authorities, 2017)

Time to reflect

- a How far do you wish to be involved with the school in the shared endeavour of helping your fostered child be happy and do well?
- b What qualities and skills do you have to make partnership working a success?

Things you might try

- 1 Find out who the designated person for looked after children in the school is and ask to see them, ideally with your fostered child.
- 2 Prepare a list of questions you need answering which will help the child, you as foster carer and the school work successfully together.





Share essential information about your fostered child

Teachers and other school staff can be helped by knowing about the needs of your fostered child.

A **one-page profile**, as shown on the next page, can be invaluable in enabling other professionals to see what is important to your fostered child, what there is to like about them and how they prefer to be supported. The profile doesn't necessarily have to explain that the child is in foster care, but, without going into detail, it could be enough to explain that, for example, the child has undergone trauma and suffered loss and that various issues result from this, such as difficulty in forming attachments or mistrust of adults.

The one-page profile helps others to understand the child more fully and, most importantly, it involves the child in its creation.

One-page profile template

The simplest one-page profile allows a child to say three basic things about themselves. You can add other boxes if you wish, such as their photo or the date of their birthday, but they must contain positive statements rather than negative ones.

- 'What is important to me' can include, for example, people, things, experiences, likes and dislikes.
- 'What other people like and admire about me' can only be filled in when the child has asked other people that question.
- 'How best to support me' is about the help the child needs and what works for them.

See next page

Agree how to exchange information quickly

The way that you exchange information with the school is not terribly important – as long as it is done.

If possible, face-to-face discussions are always best. A brief discussion with the teacher when dropping off or collecting the child from school works well for some; for others having scheduled meetings gives certainty. If this is not possible, a home-school book, or email, or even text can work. Telephone calls are not always convenient to make or receive.

If one member of staff has been set up as a single point of contact, there also needs to be a back-up person to contact in case there is an emergency and the first contact cannot be reached.



All professionals working in education and social services will be familiar with the need for confidentiality around children. As a foster carer, you may wish to have more information yourself from social services to help you to care for the child; discussion with your supervising social worker and/or the child's social worker should assist in being as informed as possible.




An example of a one-page profile

_____ 's

ONE PAGE PROFILE




What other people like and admire about me...



What is important to me...



How best to support me...





This discussion also needs to offer a steer on how much information about the child should be and needs to be shared with the school to enable the school and support services, such as the educational psychology service, to assess and respond to the needs of the child as promptly and effectively as possible.

When building your relationship with the school it is, of course, vital to be a reasonable person!

Being reasonable can mean different things to different people. A good school will always welcome a carer who takes a real interest in making the life and learning of their child better.

If you find it difficult to communicate with the school and the needs of your fostered child are not being met, you should make the relevant senior member of staff – such as the headteacher or deputy head – aware of the problem. The nominated governor could also be approached. If all else fails, the school will have a formal complaints procedure which you can follow.

Time to reflect

- a** Is confidentiality sometimes a barrier to sharing information with the school which would help meet the needs of your fostered child?
- b** How can you be an advocate for your fostered child without the school feeling overly pressured by you?

Things you might try

- 1** Try filling in a one-page profile for yourself before working on one with your fostered child.
- 2** Make a list of things you would wish the school to know about your fostered child. Consider whether you can share all of it with the school.





Knowing the child – assessing their needs

Improving the wellbeing of your fostered child and helping them to learn are crucial responsibilities of you as a foster carer.

But, as we saw earlier, these cannot be carried out without knowing and understanding the full range of your fostered child's needs – social, physical, emotional, cultural and learning. As a foster carer, you will have some insight into all of these needs from what other professionals have told you, what the child has told you and what you have observed for yourself. Your knowledge of the child's needs is critical to understanding how they can best be met.

It is important to recognise that the school will have various means by which they assess and record a child's progress in different aspects of learning. Professionals from other specialist services will also have their own methods of assessing a child and identifying their needs.

Teachers will use their professional judgement to note achievement and progress across the curriculum, through activities such as observation of pupils in class, checking pupils' work, talking to pupils to ensure understanding and, if appropriate, assessment at the end of a period of work. Schools may use a number of ways to assess pupils' progress in reading and numeracy, and these will include online personalised assessments (see box).

Diagnostic assessment is used to identify a child's strengths and areas for improvement. The personalised assessments (see box) are a form of diagnostic assessment. However, when a child is thought to have additional learning needs, more specific diagnostic assessments may be carried out.

These could be done by the additional learning needs co-ordinator or a specialist, such as an educational psychologist, and could cover general areas where difficulties with learning are suspected such as:

- speed of mental processing
- working memory
- attention span.

More specific assessments can be carried out for conditions such as:

- attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)
- dyslexia
- dyspraxia.

The highest incidence of additional need for looked after children is behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. These may or may not be a consequence of a mental health issue and a specialist diagnosis may be required. If so, a referral to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) can be made.

Personalised assessments in Wales

Assessments common to all schools in Wales are the online personalised assessments in reading and numeracy for pupils in years two to nine. Schools may also use other standardised forms of assessment too.

From the 2020/21 school year, there are three personalised assessments: two to assess number skills (numeracy) and one to assess reading skills. In the personalised assessments, the questions are selected based on a pupil's responses to previous questions, so the assessment is tailored for each child. Through these assessments, the child and their teachers can gain an understanding of what they can do, the things they need to work on, and possible next steps.

Schools decide the most beneficial time for their pupils to take the assessments. Children can take the personalised assessments individually or in small or large groups, depending on the schools' preferences and facilities. Schools will share feedback and reports with parents and carers showing their child's skills and progress over time.

More information about the personalised assessments is online [here](#).

Time to reflect

- a** Observing what a child can and cannot do is relatively straightforward when compared with evaluating what they might achieve – their potential. What do your own observations tell you about your fostered child's potential?
- b** Consider what unmet needs may be getting in the way of your child's learning and how you might work with the school and others to remove these barriers.

Things you might try

- 1** Find out more about the assessments the school carries out for all pupils and for those with particular needs.
- 2** Ask the school what information you could provide which might help in assessing your child's learning needs.



More than getting along

Learning to learn

No foster carer, parent or teacher can learn for a child – but they can learn with them. Helping someone else to learn is a learning process in itself. Learning is about acquiring knowledge, growing understanding and developing skills.

All of these are necessary if you, as a foster carer, are to know what needs to be learnt by your fostered child, how to understand and apply that knowledge and have the skills to enable the child to learn. In effect, your contribution is to help them to learn how to learn and to motivate them to do so. And, as we saw earlier, encouraging children's aspirations rather than expecting them to fail is crucial too.

The Curriculum for Wales from 2022

The new Curriculum for Wales and how it is assessed is designed to support and encourage learning. A series of statements termed 'achievement outcomes' will describe what a student can do as they progress through the five 'progression steps' at the ages of five, eight, 11, 14 and 16.

It will have six 'areas of learning and experience'

- 1 Expressive arts
- 2 Health and wellbeing
- 3 Humanities
- 4 Languages, literacy and communication
- 5 Mathematics and numeracy
- 6 Science and technology.

It has four purposes, which should be the starting point and aspiration for schools' curriculum design. Ultimately, the aim of a school's curriculum is to support its learners to become:

- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

Details of the new curriculum, which is due to be fully introduced from 2022, can be found at gov.wales/new-school-curriculum-overview



Learning will become more of a process, with a strong focus on the steps required to make progress and a recognition of what a child can do.

The new curriculum also takes greater account of the need for a child to be ready to learn, with 'health and wellbeing' being one of the six 'areas of learning and experience' which define the content of the curriculum.

Every teacher knows that a child who enters the classroom anxious, distracted, lacking in self-confidence and with no motivation cannot learn effectively. Encouraging a love of learning is a daunting task but this is a shared enterprise between home and school. The curriculum states that education professionals will be expected to work with carers to achieve this:



An inclusive approach will require agencies and professions to work together and draw on the widest range of experience and expertise, including that of parents/carers and communities.



No carer or parent can be knowledgeable about everything a child will learn at school. In addition to the curriculum content, there are many wider skills which schools will have to nurture in their learners and within these are skills and attitudes which foster carers can help develop. They include critical thinking, creativity and organisation, and the curriculum emphasises that they are necessary to prepare for modern life and the workplace.

Skills integral to the four purposes

The four purposes are also underpinned by integral skills which should be developed within a wide range of learning and teaching. At the heart of these skills is the importance of learners recognising, using and creating different types of value. In this context, value means worth and importance in a range of contexts, including financial, cultural, social and learning value.

These skills are noted below.

Creativity and innovation

Learners should be given space to be curious and inquisitive, and to generate many ideas. They should be supported to link and connect disparate experiences, knowledge and skills, and see, explore and justify alternative solutions. They should be able to identify opportunities and communicate their strategies. This should support learners to create different types of value.

Critical thinking and problem-solving

Learners should be supported to ask meaningful questions, and to evaluate information, evidence and situations. They should be able to analyse and justify possible solutions, recognising potential issues and problems. Learners should become objective in their decision-making, identifying and developing arguments. They should be able to propose solutions which generate different types of value.



Personal effectiveness

Learners should develop emotional intelligence and awareness, becoming confident and independent. They should have opportunities to lead debate and discussions, becoming aware of the social, cultural, ethical and legal implications of their arguments. They should be able to evaluate their learning and mistakes, identifying areas for development. They should become responsible and reliable, being able to identify and recognise different types of value and then use that value.

Planning and organising

Where developmentally appropriate, learners should be able to set goals, make decisions and monitor interim results. They should be able to reflect and adapt, as well as manage time, people and resources. They should be able to check for accuracy and be able create different types of value.

The development of these skills allows learners to work across disciplines, providing them with opportunities for both synthesis and analysis. There is particular potential for innovation in making and using connections between different disciplines and areas.

When developing these skills, learners should:

- develop an appreciation of sustainable development and the challenges facing humanity
- develop awareness of emerging technological advances
- be supported and challenged so that they are prepared to confidently meet the demands of working in uncertain situations, as changing local, national and global contexts result in new challenges and opportunities for success
- be afforded the space to generate creative ideas and to critically evaluate alternatives – in an ever-changing world, flexibility and the ability to develop more ideas will enable learners to consider a wider range of alternative solutions when things change
- build their resilience and develop strategies which will help them manage their wellbeing – they should be encountering experiences where they can respond positively in the face of challenge, uncertainty or failure
- learn to work effectively with others, valuing the different contributions they and others make – they should also begin to recognise the limitations of their own work and those of others as they build an understanding of how different people play different roles within a team.

Welsh Government. Curriculum for Wales. Available from: hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/designing-your-curriculum/developing-a-vision-for-curriculum-design (accessed May 2020)



It is not within the scope of this publication to cover the many ways in which children's skills and attitudes might be developed, but the following suggestions for how to think about the words and phrases you use at home, and Common Third activities, give you some ideas to promote a positive attitude to learning. Also your school will be able to offer guidance on what can be done outside of school time to support children in their work during the school day.

Language for learning

Language is the key to unlock much of the learning which has to take place. Creating a rich language environment in the home will reflect and reinforce the child's experience in school. By encouraging a love of language, you add to both the pleasure and the skills which help a child to learn. There are many ways in which foster carers can assist in the development of language, such as:

Using the right words: introduce new words to develop the range of vocabulary a child can draw upon. For example, being able to give a name to a feeling will help the child to express themselves better, such as 'satisfied', 'relieved', 'frustrated', 'annoyed' rather than 'happy' or 'sad'.

Speaking in sentences: model well constructed sentences to avoid any confusion about what you mean.

Using positive language: children respond better if, instead of telling them what not to do, we focus on what we do want. For example: *'Don't snatch'* becomes *'If you would like to play with the Xbox, ask Lisa if you can have it after she has finished playing with it.'*

Seeing words: having books, magazines and newspapers around the house puts a value on the written word. Having a memo board on the wall where anyone can write what they want, without being judged, carries risks but signals the importance of communication and how a few written words can spark an important conversation.

Reading: is not a passive activity. Very young children need to be read to and engaging them in the story or pictures starts them thinking about what they hear and see. It is good to follow up reading a book with a related activity (see the Common Third diagram). If you did not share in the reading of a book, particularly for older children, ask basic questions about the plot and the characters. Ask also how they felt about people and events and pick up on any issues the book raised such as about friendships, adventure and risk.

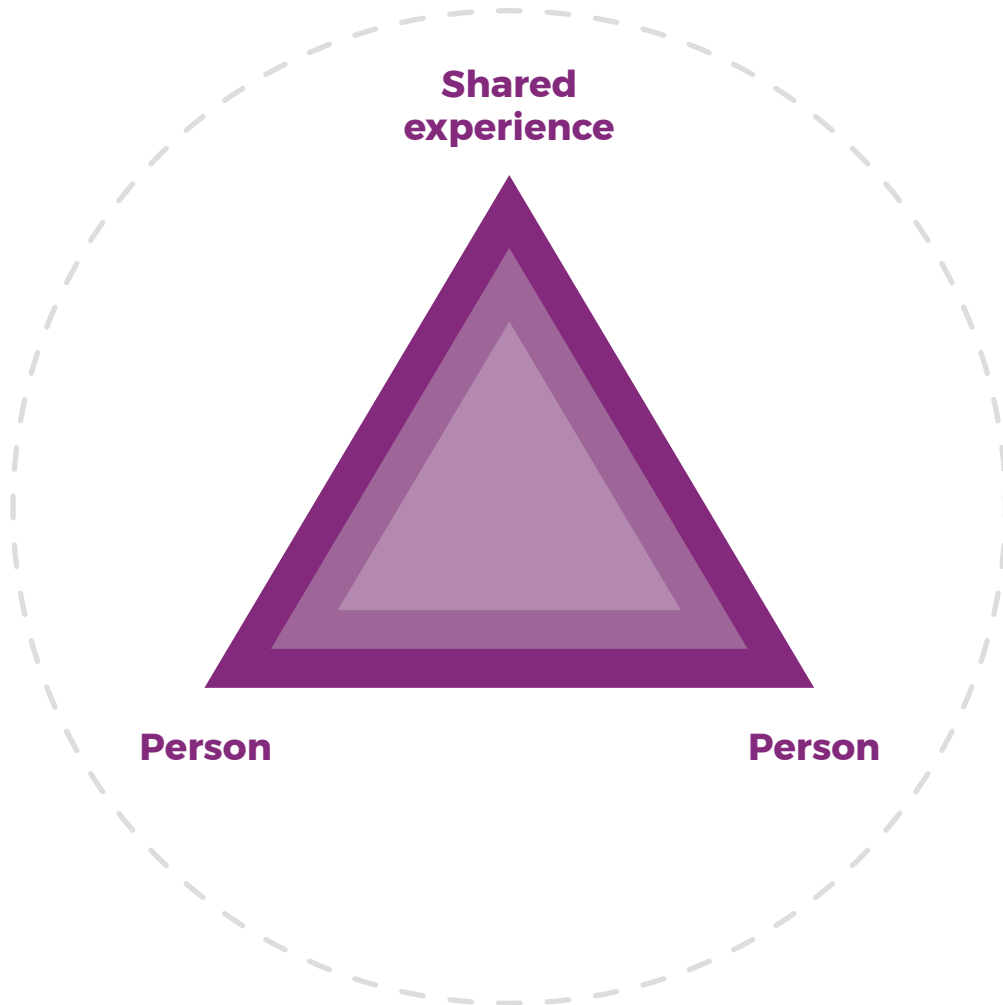
Using technology: reading on a tablet, researching on the internet and writing (safely) to others on social media are all ways of extending the opportunities to engage with language. The content and context are important so that the child understands that different forms of language need to be appropriate to the situation.

Asking questions: is good, but some types of questions are better than others. To develop thinking and conversation, ask open-ended questions rather than ones which are more easily answered in one word.



Common Third activities

The “Common Third” is about using an activity to strengthen the relationships between the foster carer (or another professional) and the child, and develop new skills. Most of us will do something like this when working with children. Common Third activities are common experiences and shared learning opportunities where all participants are equal, and where all achieve.



The Common Third relates to a task or activity that is common to the child and the carer, and that is chosen as a result of thinking carefully about how to help the child develop through their relationship. It can be as simple as following a new recipe to bake cakes together, or more complex such as creating a piece of art or building something outside.

The model supports relationship-building between foster carer and child. It builds on existing skills and interests, and develops new ones to incorporate in the carer’s practice and the child’s life.

A Common Third activity works best when:

- there are just two or three people involved
- the activity is a shared enterprise and experience
- no one person takes the lead, except to suggest the activity; everyone has equal status
- the activity has not been done by any of the participants before
- it contains a sense of adventure – you're both entering the learning zone
- there is a tangible outcome
- a number of senses are brought into play.

Learning can be hard

Very few of us find all learning easy. We each have our particular talents, but being good at everything is not realistic. Much is written about how people learn and, while we may have a preferred learning style, we also have to bring a range of strategies to bear when trying to learn something, including trial and error. A very simple model of learning is one based on:

- Seeing (visual learning)
- Hearing (auditory learning)
- Doing (kinesthetic learning)

In practice, we often need to employ all three so for example, having **heard** someone give you directions you then need to **see** the route on a map. When you have walked the route – you have **done** it – then that learning may have become embedded in your brain.

In helping your fostered child learn to learn you can:

- See whether they have a preferred learning style by observing them and asking them questions.
- Suggest different ways of approaching a problem without giving away the solution.
- Make resources available to help them discover more, such as a dictionary, internet connection, library books, craft materials or specialist sports equipment.
- Engage in Common Third activities where you learn something new together.
- Learn alongside your child.
- Celebrate when learning occurs.
- Praise what the child has done to achieve the success more than the end product. So, for example, don't say, 'That is a great picture', but instead say, 'I really liked the way you spent time on getting the shapes and colours and tones right.'
- Turn mistakes into valuable learning experiences.
- Share your own experience of learning as a child, what worked and what did not.
- Talk to the school about their expectations for what sort of learning should take place outside of the classroom.



- Ask the school for help if you suspect your child has additional learning needs.
- Get out and about with your child, being observant and chatty.
- Be aware of your child's feelings about learning and focus on what comes next rather than past disappointments.

Things you might try

For younger children: Talk about their favourite foods and what they have noticed about the foods other members of the family really like. Plan a simple meal together based on what everyone will like. If you have time, go shopping together for the ingredients. Share the tasks, as appropriate, in preparing and serving the meal. Afterwards, talk about what you have both learned and what you might do differently next time.

Devise a Common Third activity which involves reading a book. For example, you could read *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* by Michael Rosen. Then decide on a follow-up activity with your fostered child's input, such as setting up bear hunt obstacles in the garden or a park, and chanting the verses while putting movement to them (see the author's [YouTube](#) video for ideas).

For older children: Together, find out about places in your area which neither of you have visited before and agree on one of them to visit. Plan how you will get there, what you would like to do there and how to record your trip. Afterwards, video a short presentation about your visit on a smartphone which can be shared with friends or family.

For any age: Create a time capsule to include objects, writing and pictures which say something about you both now and what you hope for or dream of in the future. Decide together where you will keep it, or bury it, and agree how long it will stay hidden.



All emotions are OK, not all behaviours are OK

Here is an important principle: All emotions are ok, not all behaviours are ok.

Do the staff at your fostered child's school also accept this principle? We know that children who have experienced trauma and loss will feel a wide range of emotions and are unlikely to be positive about themselves.

A child who has developed a 'secure attachment' to a trusted adult is more likely to:

- manage their own behaviour
- build a stable circle of friends
- achieve better at school
- bounce back more quickly when things go against them
- be more confident and independent.

As we mature, we mostly learn to moderate how we behave and understand that allowing our emotions to rule our actions is not always good for us, or others.

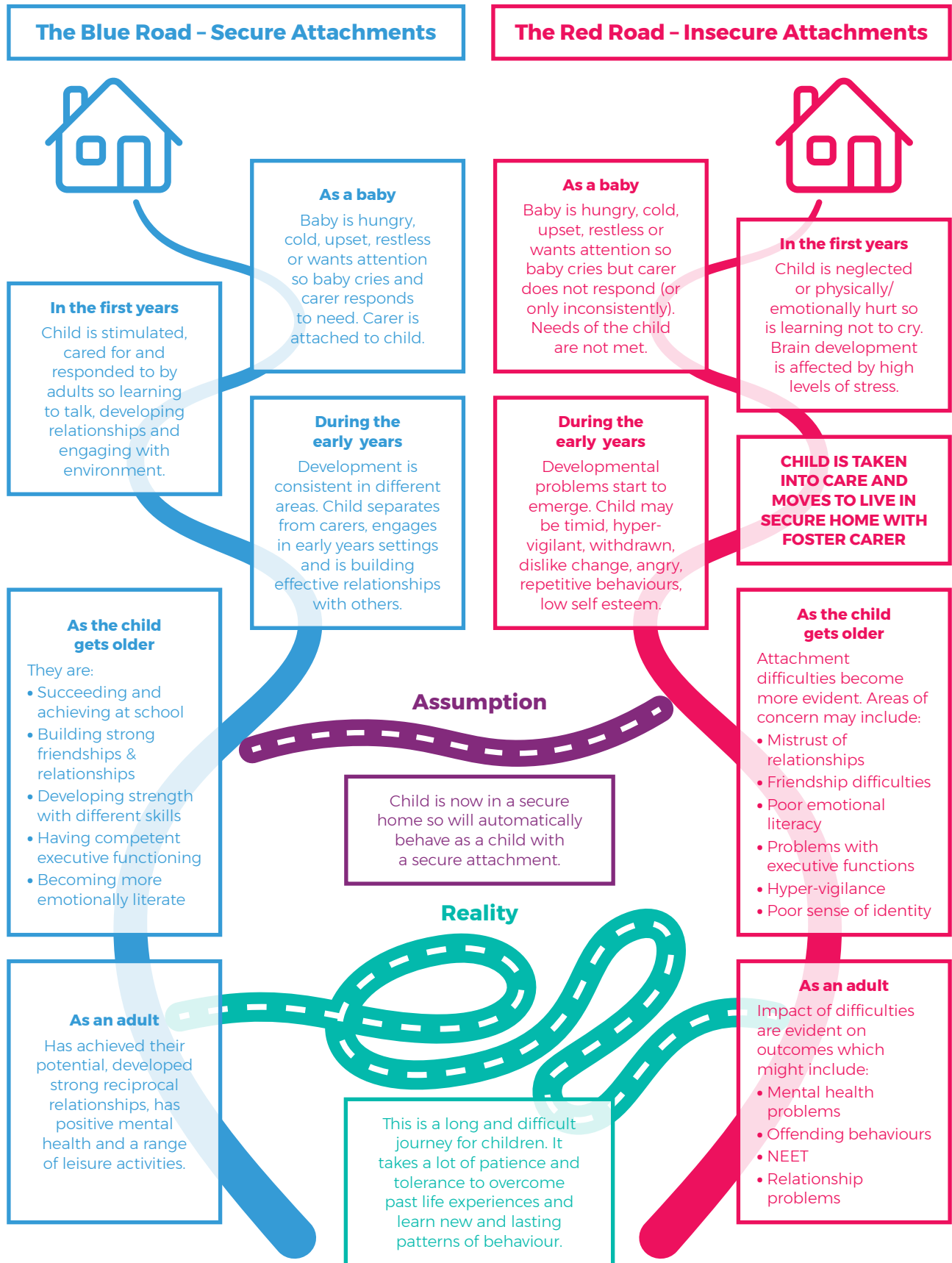
However, foster carers know that looked after children often have attachment issues, making it harder for them to regulate their behaviour in the way that some other children can.

When criticism or reprimand is needed, it is important to target the behaviour, not the person. It is better to avoid saying, 'you...' and instead explain the consequence of the behaviour, or say, 'Let's try...'. Staying calm but assertive helps to model appropriate behaviours.

Attachment issues are often impediments to learning, and just because a child has come into care, it does not mean that their attachment issues will disappear, even though a school may assume that to be the case.

The following diagram tracks the journeys of children who have and have not formed secure attachments. Note that there is a difference between the assumptions which can easily be made once a child enters the care system and the reality. Negative experiences in the past often continue to resonate well into adult life and this is often evident in the lower performance in examinations of looked after young people, with fewer continuing into further or higher education and a disproportionately high number entering the criminal justice system.

The attachment journey



Children Looked After Friendly Schools (Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil Local Authorities, 2017)



Time to reflect

- a** How hard is it for you to separate the behaviour of your fostered child from them as a person? Try to think about some specific recent experiences where you and the school have been presented with challenging behaviour and how you both responded.
- b** Consider whether you might benefit from looking back at notes from training that you've had about trauma, attachment and behaviour or whether you might need more specific training.

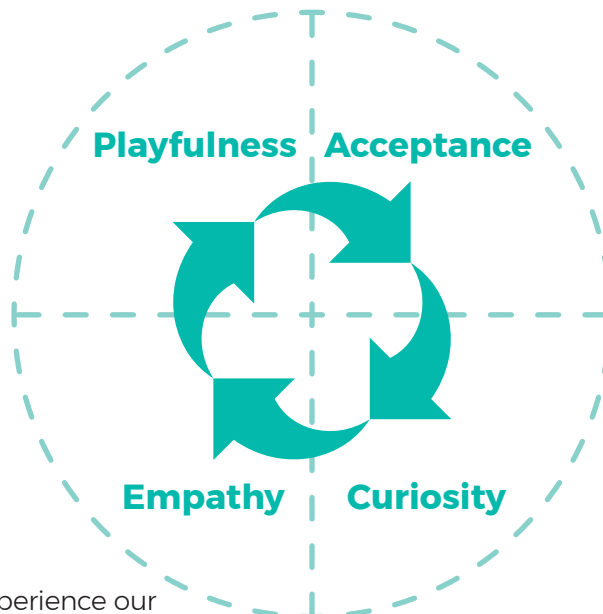
The PACE model

Some schools are training staff in the PACE model. As a foster carer, you will be able to relate to this model as a means of working with your child to help manage their emotions and behaviours. It was developed by psychotherapist Dan Hughes and is a way of parenting that emphasises the four qualities of playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy.

There is more information about the PACE model on the website of the Dyadic Developmental Practice Network, founded by Dan Hughes, [here](#).

- At times, jokey or playful interactions can help children feel engaged and a part of a relationship. It helps children to enjoy a little fun.
- A light-hearted, relaxed and fun attitude that does not pose a threat to the child.

- Provides the foundation of the experience of safety for the looked after child.
- Understanding and accepting what children say and do.
- The adult needs to try to accept the behavioural choices the looked after child is making and the feelings that underlie them and then ensure that the child understands this.
- Acceptance does not mean ignoring or excusing extreme behaviours, but putting the focus on the person rather than what they have done.



- Children need to experience our empathy if they are to understand and trust that we value them and want to support them.
- True empathy is not just saying we understand. It is more reflective, showing that we are aware of what they are thinking and feeling.
- The adult becomes attuned to the child's experiences and reflects this back to the child in many different ways, including eye contact, facial expression and tone of voice.

- The starting point for building a relationship with a child is helping them to learn to understand the reasons behind their feelings, but without shame or fear.
- This includes exploring with the child the reasons behind their behaviour in the spirit of curiosity rather than confrontation. Sometimes curiosity means making a guess at the reason and then trying to think it through with the child.

Adapted from *Children Looked After Friendly Schools (Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil Local Authorities, 2017)*

Top tips for the effective management of behaviour

- Establish routines in the home which help you and your child to be well organised, especially on school days.
- Be aware of your own emotions. If you are stressed or tired, what can you do to be kind to yourself?
- Build relationships based on mutual understanding and consent rather than taking control.
- Have a few clear rules that you apply consistently.
- Praise often, making clear what qualities in the child are being praised.
- Think about the non-verbal messages you give by your own behaviour such as smiling/frowning, whether you are calm/agitated, the hand gestures you use.
- Use positive language, saying what you want and what you don't want.
- Take the heat out of conflict situations through your own calm behaviours, reassurance that a solution will be found together and, if possible, humour.
- Try to understand the purpose behind negative behaviours. Why is your fostered child doing what they are doing?

Adapted from Children Looked After Friendly Schools (Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil Local Authorities, 2017)

When rules are broken

Any school needs systems and rules to run smoothly. But children with complex emotional and social needs may not always easily fit in to such an ordered community and may have particular challenges conforming to school norms and rules. Explaining such needs may need persistence and patience in some cases, but most schools will be receptive. It is an important part of a foster carer's role, along with the child's social worker, to liaise with the school to help them better understand why the child in their care may struggle to conform.

As a foster carer, you can also work with the school to find strategies which work for your fostered child. For some, the provision of a safe, time-out space in a school, not seen as a place of detention, is often effective in helping a child reflect and feel supported rather than humiliated and banished. Some children may need extra support, such as counselling, emotion coaching, working with the school's emotional literacy support assistant (if they have one) or a referral to the educational psychology service or other mental health support.

An exclusion of a student from school, whether for a fixed term or permanent, should be a last resort. An exclusion can be on the grounds of:

- a serious breach of the school's behaviour policy; or
- posing a risk to the welfare or education of other learners.



A fixed term or permanent exclusion requires a formal process to be carried out by the school. A school should not ask a carer or parent to remove their child from the school for a few days; this 'informal' exclusion is not legal.

For more information about exclusions, see the Education Wales guidance [here](#). A leaflet for pupils is available [here](#).

Things you might try

- 1 Find out if PACE training is available to foster carers in your area. Ask your supervising social worker.
- 2 Work with the school to find strategies which work for your fostered child if their behaviour is holding back their learning.
- 3 Check with the school to see if all of your fostered child's teachers are using the same strategies to manage behaviour. A consistent approach is invaluable.
- 4 Ensure your fostered child's personal education plan, and individual development plan if they have one, reflect accurately the emotional and social needs of your child and how to address them.

Making progress

If you have established a good working relationship with the school, you should already have regular feedback on the progress your fostered child is making and you should be feeding into the school information which will help them fulfil their role. But what should you know? Essentially, there are both formal and informal checks on progress.

Formal progress checks

These are statutory assessment, recording and reporting instruments and will include:

- A personal education plan (PEP).
- A regular review of the care and support plan by the independent reviewing officer, which will include a progress report from the school.
- An individual development plan (IDP) if your fostered child has additional learning needs.
- An annual school report.
- Reports each year giving feedback on skills and progress in reading and numeracy, from the personalised assessments for pupils in years two to nine.
- At least once during the school year, a report about a pupil's progress sent to their parents/carers.



Informal progress checks

These are more frequent, non-statutory updates on achievements in class, behaviour, homework, extra-curricular activities, etc. They can take a variety of forms, including:

- notes in a home-school record book or the child's homework diary
- text messages
- emails
- regular phone calls
- meetings at the start or end of the day
- teacher comments in your child's work books.

Seek regular feedback from the school on progress

You are entitled to know how well your child is doing at school, academically and in other ways too. A large number of looked after children have additional learning needs, often related to social and emotional issues. It is therefore reasonable to have more frequent updates on progress and information on the specifics of which learning strategies are working well and which are not.

In this way, you can support the school by sharing your detailed knowledge of your fostered child and helping to ensure that there is a consistency of approach between home and school. Ask what you can do to support your fostered child's learning at home.

Meetings

As a foster carer, you will no doubt attend your fair share of meetings. For school age children these will include parents' evenings and involvement in developing personal education plans. Sometimes you might need to share or coordinate attendance at these meetings with the child's birth parents. If the child has additional learning needs this can expand to include review meetings and discussions of their individual development plan.

To get the most from these meetings:

- 1 Be clear on what the purpose of the meeting is and what outcome you want from it.
- 2 Be an advocate for the child, a positive voice.
- 3 If necessary, take someone with you to help make sure that everything gets covered – and remembered.
- 4 Be prepared. Make a note of what you want to say, and ask; know how you might deal with any areas of disagreement.
- 5 Look for common ground; the others present will also want the child to succeed. Find the things you can agree on and build from there.
- 6 Ask for specific examples, of both good and bad events, strengths and areas for improvement. Generalisations can arise from stereotyping of a looked after child.
- 7 Make sure there is a written record. If no-one is taking minutes, send an email yourself afterwards, thanking people for the meeting and the actions they and you have agreed to take.



- 8 Agree deadlines, monitoring and feedback. How will you know things have changed, who will keep track, and when will you meet again to review progress with the agreed plans?
- 9 Look for the positives. Even a crisis can be an opportunity to make a change.

The personal education plan (PEP)

As the foster carer, you can contribute significantly to any review about your fostered child's education. All looked after children and young people should have a personal education plan and foster carers, the school, the birth parents, social workers and the child should all be involved in its development. This is an essential tool for the child, for you and for the school because it will record the particular needs of the child and how you will work together to meet those needs. It is also required by law.

Some children and young people may also have an individual development plan (IDP) if they have additional learning needs and/or a pastoral support plan (PSP) to help manage social and emotional issues. From the age 15, the various plans should be brought together in a pathway plan (see page 48).

The completed personal education plan must be available for the first statutory review meeting of the child's care and support plan, 28 days after the child becomes looked after. While review of the personal education plan is part of the statutory review of the care and support plan, it is best practice for the personal education plan to be reviewed separately beforehand by the school. You should very much be part of any process which creates and reviews such plans.

What is a review meeting?

Once written, the personal education plan is then a living document so it is vital that it is properly reviewed on a regular basis. You will work through your child's strengths, both academic and non-academic to ensure that good progress is continuing. Any areas of learning which need support will also be considered to assess progress and see if any further or different sort of help is required. The purpose of the plan is to ensure that your child has all of their needs properly identified and, where those needs are not being met, that appropriate action is taken.

Who should attend a review meeting in school?

A review meeting should bring together the school staff who know your child well and have direct responsibility for their education. This can vary, but may include the class teacher (in primary school), a form teacher or head of year/key stage (in secondary school), the designated person for looked after children, and a senior member of staff. Also, you as the foster carer and the child should be active participants. The child's advocate, if they have one, should also be present.



What information needs to be available?

You should have a copy of the latest personal education plan, which is part of the care and support plan. The personal education plan should not be seen in isolation from other parts of the care and support plan, but instead it should be seen as complementing those parts which cover health, emotional and behavioural development, identity and family and social relationships. Take along any record of your dealings with the school which can feed into the discussion such as a home-school book, emails, school reports and your own notes on your child.

Timing and venue for the meeting

Welsh Government guidance states that a review or re-writing of the personal education plan should take place at least twice a year. If changes are proposed or made by the school at other times, the foster carer should be involved. The meeting should take place out of lesson time so as not to detract from the child's education. In no circumstance should your child have to be excused from a lesson and so give the impression that they are different in any way from other pupils. The meeting will usually take place in an area of the school which offers some privacy and quiet. A comfortable and informal layout to the room with access to refreshments always helps.

Preparing yourself for the review

You will have an in-depth knowledge of your fostered child's needs, likes, dislikes, trigger points and so on. Therefore, you will have a valuable contribution to make to the review and be on an equal footing with the school staff. Prepare questions that you and your fostered child have for the school. Be ready to show your appreciation for what the school has done well in supporting your child and to express any concerns you may have, backing up your comments with constructive suggestions.

Preparing your child for the review

The degree to which your child contributes to the meeting will be dependent upon their age, communication skills and levels of confidence; and how well whoever chairs the meeting encourages their participation. Before the review, talk through the issues in the personal education plan with your child and what is being done to address them; this can help to give your child the language and the confidence to say how they think they are doing. One idea is to work with your child on producing a one-page profile (see page 26), or an update of a previous one, which they are happy to share at the meeting. This will give more of an insight into what is important to them, positives which can be built upon and how they would prefer to be helped in future.

The review meeting

The views of all those present should be sought, particularly those of the child. As the foster carer, you should be made to feel welcome and your contributions valued. If any dispute arises, this should be taken up outside of the meeting when the child is not present. Make your own brief notes on what is agreed.

After the review you can expect an updated version of the personal education plan (or other type of plan being reviewed). Make sure you are happy with its content and contact the school to let them know and thank them for a positive experience. If there are ongoing issues, speak to the author of the personal education plan in the first instance.

In summary, the best personal education plans:

- are shared
- referred to often
- are updated regularly
- reflect the child's needs
- record the child's strengths and areas requiring improvement
- are relevant to the age of the child
- contain short and longer-term goals with actions and timescales
- are aspirational
- are backed up with a one-page profile.

The pathway plan

When a young person is 15, the local authority must start preparing a pathway plan to assist with the transition to adulthood and leaving care. The plan will cover the time from age 16 to at least 21 and may still be relevant up to the age of 25. The pathway plan will build upon the child's existing care and support plan, which will become part of the pathway plan. The PEP, health plan and any individual development plan should be part of that overall pathway plan.

An important aspect of the pathway plan is education, training and employment to help with preparation for a career. Advice should be made available and a personal adviser appointed to guide the young person through the maze of options open to them.

Time to reflect

- a How are you learning what does and does not work for your fostered child in terms of getting tasks done and behaving appropriately?
- b How are you sharing this knowledge with the school?

Things you might try

Record events which give insight into your fostered child and how they might best be helped at home and in school.



Many faces, one smile

How the school can help you and your child

The concept of 'working as one' means that each person or organisation involved in the care of children is ready to help in as many ways as they can and to make sure what they do complements others' actions. Working as one also means that what one person is doing should not conflict with what someone else is doing.

The themes below summarise many of the points already made, looked at from the school's perspective. A foster carer can regard this list as a series of constructive suggestions, drawn from best practice, for improving the working relationship with the school, if that is needed. It is an agenda for discussion, not a list of demands!

Welcoming

- A good experience for child and carer on their first visit.
- Being met by a senior member of staff with responsibility for looked after children.
- Showing knowledge and understanding of the child's needs before they start in the school.
- Giving support to learn school routines and fit in.
- Meeting and greeting each day, at least for the settling in period.
- Budgeting for special provision for looked after children.

Listening

- Readiness to engage with foster carers.
- Listening to the child and responding positively.
- Having a main point of contact for the child in school (key adult).
- Having a main point of contact for the foster carer, if not the key adult.
- Acting upon constructive suggestions.
- Being aware of what delegated authority the foster carer holds.

Informing

- Informal but frequent updates on progress in learning.
- Communicating successes, small and large.
- Always offering constructive comment on how to improve.
- Ensuring that the chosen form of communication is two-way and effective.
- Making any communication personal and accessible.
- Allowing reasonable time for authorisations to come back from the home.



Sharing and involving

- Involving child and foster carer in the development and reviews of the personal education plan.
- Suggesting what social, emotional and cultural needs may have to be addressed to accelerate academic progress.
- Being honest with foster carers about how they might help the child to make progress.
- Being proactive in encouraging the child to take part in extra-curricular activities.
- Inviting foster carers to social events and learning events in the school which are specifically for those with looked after children.
- Seeking foster carers' views on use of the Pupil Development Grant for Looked After Children, funding given to regional consortia to help looked after children achieve their full potential.

Supportive staff

- The school ethos is such that all staff are respectful of all children and young people.
- Staff know the needs of a looked after child, have that knowledge and act upon it.
- The key adult has time for the child.
- Staff are not quick to judge the child.

A safe place

- There is somewhere in the school where the child can go when in need of a refuge and a sympathetic ear.
- School feels like a place where the child can belong.

Effective learning support

- The child's learning, and related needs are carefully assessed and recorded.
- Support, relevant to need, is in place.
- The child is not assumed to need a certain type of support simply because they are looked after.
- The type of support is consistent across the curriculum.

Emotional support on hand

- Good behaviour which aids learning is recognised and praised.
- Unacceptable behaviours are not tolerated.
- The school offers a 'safety valve' to the child in the form of a person or place they can go to at times of emotional crisis.
- The school seeks to understand the reasons for unacceptable behaviour.
- Strategies to address unmet emotional needs are in place in the school and children and young people who are looked after can readily access them.
- Referral systems are good when more specialist support is required.



Recognition of identity

- The individuality of the child is recognised and understood by the school.
- No child is singled out or embarrassed in class because of their status as 'looked after'.

Governance

- The foster carer and child are aware of roles and the chain of responsibility in the school.
- Foster carers have access to senior members of staff if necessary.
- The school welcomes comments on how well it cares for and teaches its learners.
- There is a member of the governing body who is nominated to take a special interest in looked after children.

How you can help the school

Just as the section above sets out how the school can help you – the foster carer and your child – so this section is how you can help the school.

Give time

- Recognise that all relationships take time to build.
- Make patience, determination and diplomacy some of your best qualities – schools will appreciate your interest in and commitment to your child.
- Support school events, such as sports days and Christmas fairs, and volunteer to help if you can.

Share information

- Be open and honest with school staff.
- Be clear on where the boundaries of confidentiality lie.
- Pass on helpful notes, such as whether a contact visit with family is imminent for your fostered child, if they are anxious about a forthcoming test or if they are really enjoying a particular lesson.
- Include the child in information-sharing with school. For example, if you need to send a note to their teacher, discuss with the child what it should say.

Negotiate

- Recognise that not all school policies and practices work well for looked after children, so discuss how the school might accommodate your fostered child's range of needs.
- Work constructively with the school, being clear and open without appearing confrontational.
- Talk to the designated person and governor for looked after children if you think a policy change is needed.



Network

- Ask the designated person for looked after children if they are prepared to invite other foster carers into school to discuss the possibility of setting up a network. This, initially, could be a social occasion.
- If there are very few foster carers in your school, see if one school will host the group, drawing in other associated schools.
- Explore with the school extending the purpose of the foster carer network to use it as a forum for dialogue with educational professionals in the school. Its members could, for example, examine how best to manage home to school communication, online safety and supporting homework.
- Consider shared activities involving the school, foster carers and the children and young people such as craft sessions or a theatre trip.
- If you are a member of a local Foster Care Association, ask if any other members have children at the same school as yours.
- You could consider joint activities with the school involving foster carers, children and school staff, such as social events and learning sessions.

Thank the school when things go well

- A school will welcome feedback which will help to reinforce any positive steps they have taken in support of your fostered child.

Time to reflect

- a Your fostered child spends by far the greatest part of their life in your home and in school. Are you content that you and the school are providing consistent standards of care and guidance?
- b What are your TWO priorities for improving further the home-school relationship?

Things you might try

- 1 Ask if you can work with the school to try developing a school-based networking group for foster carers.
- 2 Choose one of the areas from the above list of how you can help the school to focus your energies upon as a starting point.





What next?

Useful contacts

The Fostering Network in Wales continues to work with the Welsh Government and its key partners to bring improvements to the educational aspirations and attainment of looked after children.

To find out more about the work of our partners please visit the following websites:

Adoption UK: support for adoptive families.

AFA Cymru: training, consultancy, professional advice and information relating to fostering and adoption.

CASCADE – Children’s Social Care Research and Development Centre at Cardiff University: research into improving the wellbeing, safety and rights of children and their families.

ExChange Wales: a hub for social care practitioners, service users and researchers to share expertise and experience. It includes the **Care and Education Key Contacts** resource which contains contact details for schools and the looked after children and education co-ordinators for each region in Wales plus other useful organisations.

National Youth Advisory Service (NYAS): a rights-based charity for children, young people and adults.

Snap Cymru: information, advice and support for parents, children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities.

TGP Cymru: support, advocacy and counselling for vulnerable and marginalised children, young people and families in Wales.

Voices From Care Cymru: upholds the rights and welfare of care-experienced children and young people.



How The Fostering Network can help

The Fostering Network website

The [Fostering Network website](#) is an essential source of information, while our online community for members brings together foster carers for peer support and advice. You can log in to share your experience and get advice from other foster carers. Our online community is a safe and secure area to discuss foster care matters.

Resources from The Fostering Network

[Aimee's Diary](#)

A fostered young person's journey through secondary school told through the fictional diary of Aimee, with notes for teachers, social workers and other childcare professionals. The aim is to support childcare professionals to work together to improve educational outcomes for looked after young people.

[Safer Caring: A new approach](#)

This book challenges foster carers and children's services to share responsibility for safer caring and towards a focus on the ever-changing needs and circumstances of children and young people. It includes practical guidance, real life case studies and thought-provoking discussion. Key concepts are explored, including delegated authority and attachment, as well as the role of the team around the child.

[Fostering in a Digital World: A common sense guide](#)

This book helps foster carers develop a better understanding of what it means to foster in the digital age. It covers the following areas:

- Facts versus myths: putting the issues into perspective
- Helping children and young people stay safe – the general principles
- What children and young people really do online
- What to do if things go wrong: reporting online abuse and inappropriate material.

[Thrive – The Fostering Network's magazine for young people in care](#)

This free magazine, published by The Fostering Network, provides information and guidance to young people in foster care. A special edition shares the findings of research undertaken by CASCADE focused on their educational experiences.

[A Foster Carer's Guide to Education in Wales](#)

A free guide to help foster carers understand how the education system works in Wales, so they are better equipped to support the children and young people in their care.

[Making it Happen](#)

This magazine complements A Foster Carer's Guide to Education in Wales (see above) and aims to inspire foster carers to help the children and young people in their care raise their ambitions and fulfil their potential in education. It also supports foster carers to consult, challenge and collaborate with schools as an integral part of the team around the child.



Greater Expectations

This magazine draws on the lessons from research into children and young people's experiences of education and aims to help foster carers understand more about the challenges that fostered children face at school. It also gives foster carers practical ideas for steps to take to help children in care aim high and fulfil their potential.

Working Hand in Hand

The Fostering Network in Wales teamed up with the Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE) to produce an education magazine for foster carers, Working Hand in Hand. This magazine draws on the voices of young people and foster carers and aims to provide an overview of some of the main challenges that fostered children face at school. It also offers ideas for how to support fostered children and young people to do well and enjoy their education.

When I am Ready FAQs

The Fostering Network has developed a Frequently Asked Questions guide to When I am Ready, the scheme that gives all young people living with foster families in Wales the right to stay with their foster carers after they reach 18 years of age. The resource – which is only available to members of The Fostering Network – will enable professionals to understand what is expected of them in relation to When I am Ready.

The Fostering Wellbeing programme

Fostering Wellbeing is an innovative programme, funded by the Welsh Government and delivered by The Fostering Network, designed specifically for professionals in Wales working with looked after children and young people. This includes recognition that foster carers are a key part of the team around the child alongside teachers and social workers as they play an important role as 'first educators'.

Fostering Wellbeing creates a shared language for multi-agency professionals, a shared framework from which to operate, and contributes to workforce development. The programme operates at a regional level to deliver learning, bring people together, and share best practice across service boundaries with an aim to embed a shared approach across the region. This in turn leads to foster carers developing a greater knowledge and confidence in advocating for their child and accessing education support services.

Fosterline Wales

The Fostering Network provides unrivalled information, advice and support to foster carers and other professionals through the free bilingual Fosterline Wales helpline, open from 9.30am to 12.30pm Monday to Friday. Call 0800 316 7664.

Training and consultancy from The Fostering Network

The Fostering Network training is designed to meet the identified needs of the team around the child, supporting children and young people who are looked after in Wales to achieve their best possible outcomes. We are constantly updating and adding to our portfolio of courses for foster carers, supervising social workers and professionals in the education and health sectors.

All of our training can be delivered in-house for your organisation and jointly or regionally commissioned, while our most popular subjects are included in our annual open course programme.



Our highly skilled and experienced associate trainers will also develop bespoke training and consultancy programmes for your organisation.

For more information please see our [training pages](#) or email wales@fostering.net or call 029 2044 0940.

Additional resources

[Making a Difference: A guide for the designated person for looked after children in schools](#)
(Welsh Government, 2017)

[Children Looked After Friendly Schools](#) (Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil local authorities)

Photo credits

Front cover: monkeybusinessimages/iStock/Getty Images Plus
Page 1: monkeybusinessimages/iStock/Getty Images Plus
Page 7: Diamond Dogs/iStock/Getty Images Plus
Page 17: DGLimages/iStock/Getty Images Plus
Page 24: DGLimages/iStock/Getty Images Plus
Page 26: monkeybusinessimages/iStock/Getty Images Plus
Page 28: Wavebreakmedia/iStock/Getty Images Plus
Page 31: Sladic/iStock/Getty Images Plus
Page 49: monkeybusinessimages/iStock/Getty Images Plus
Page 54: monkeybusinessimages/iStock/Getty Images Plus



About The Fostering Network

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity. We are the essential network for fostering, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of fostered children. We support foster carers to transform children's lives and we work with fostering services and the wider sector to develop and share best practice.

We work to ensure all fostered children and young people experience stable family life and we are passionate about the difference foster care makes. We champion fostering and seek to create vital change so that foster care is the very best it can be.

thefosteringnetwork.org.uk



[/thefosteringnetwork](https://www.facebook.com/thefosteringnetwork)



[@fosteringnet](https://twitter.com/fosteringnet)



[@thefosteringnetwork](https://www.instagram.com/thefosteringnetwork)

To find out more about our work in Wales, please contact:

The Fostering Network in Wales

33 Cathedral Road

Cardiff

CF11 9HB

029 2044 0940

wales@fostering.net

Registered office 87 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8HA

Registered charity in England and Wales 280852 and in Scotland SC039338

Registered in England and Wales as a limited company no. 1507277 VAT Registration 231 6335 90

First published by the Fostering Network 2020 © The Fostering Network 2020 All rights reserved.

Commissioning editor: Maria Boffey

Editor and contributor: Julie Pybus

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without prior permission of the publisher.