

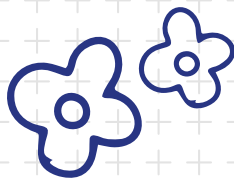
**The
Fostering
Network**



Aimee's Diary

A fostered young person's journey
through secondary school and college

With notes for foster carers, teachers,
social workers and other childcare
professionals



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Foreword

The Welsh Government is delighted to support The Fostering Network in Wales in the production of this edition of Aimee's Diary. It is aimed at those who care and have responsibility for children and young people who are looked after. This includes foster carers, elected members, social workers, school staff and other educational professionals, health and youth justice professionals.

The Welsh Government-sponsored [Fostering Wellbeing programme](#)¹ 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 Aimee's Diary.



¹ thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/fostering-wellbeing

Welcome

At The Fostering Network we know that fostered children and young people can thrive at school when they are well supported by all the professionals around them. And as a foster carer myself, I've seen how working collaboratively with teachers, social workers and others can make a huge difference to a young person's experience of education.

The original version of Amy's Diary, which we at The Fostering Network published in 2008, has become one of our most popular and accessible education resources. Looking at school life through the eyes of a fostered child is a powerful way to re-examine how we, as professionals, support fostered children and young people through the highs and lows of their years in the education system.

However, it's time for an update. There have been many changes in the provision of education for looked after children in Wales over the past decade, including the introduction of the When I am Ready scheme, a new school curriculum, changes in staff roles, and developments in theory and practice. We are therefore enormously pleased to publish this revised and refreshed edition in partnership with the Welsh Government. The new edition incorporates these substantial changes and sees Amy transformed into Aimee, a slightly different person, but retaining the force of character that made her so special in the first edition. It is also in line with the Welsh Government's recent looked after children's strategy and sits alongside the Welsh Government-funded Fostering Wellbeing programme which The Fostering Network is delivering across Wales.

This resource offers vital information about education for looked after children in Wales from the ages of 11 to 18. It will be vital reading for foster carers, teachers, social workers and other professionals in the team around the child and we aim for it to promote a collaborative culture so that everyone can support children and young people like Aimee to aim high and reach their educational dreams.

Colin Turner

Director, The Fostering Network in Wales

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 Fostering Network's Fostering Wellbeing programme (funded by Welsh Government) and the author of several publications, including *Working as One for The Fostering Network*.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Lisa Lawrence, learning leader with responsibility for children looked after and eFSM pupils at Whitchurch High School, Cardiff; Susan Soar, Kathleen Toner and Daniel Sinclair at The Fostering Network; and Alun Richards at Fosterline Wales.

Introduction

This is the fictional diary of Aimee who became looked after during her last year in primary school as a result of neglect and physical abuse in the family. Jennie became her foster carer after Aimee had spent a few weeks in an emergency placement. Aimee's Year 6 teacher supported her during her last months in primary school and asked Aimee to stay in touch by writing a diary and sharing it with her.

The content draws upon real situations which you may well recognise but none of the people in the diary is based on any living person. Each diary entry has a main theme, although there are threads running through the whole diary which appear at different points in Aimee's life. Every child who is looked after is unique and it's important to recognise that not all looked after children will experience all of these issues. Many children will have to deal with fewer issues than are recorded here, yet a few may have more.

There are currently more than 6,800 children and young people who are looked after across Wales with a total of around 96,000 being looked after across the UK, each one with their own life story. A child's wellbeing depends on how far their basic social, physical, emotional, cultural and learning needs are being met at any one time and what happens when any of those needs are not met. If one of their needs is not being met, it is almost inevitable that other needs will become more acute too since these needs are inter-dependent.

This diary focuses on Aimee's learning needs, but when she is deprived of friends, suffers physical harm, is anxious and depressed and loses her sense of belonging, then her education inevitably suffers.

This diary takes the reader through from the time Aimee starts secondary school to the point when she is 18, on the cusp of leaving care and preparing for adult life. Will she fulfil her ambitions and grow up into a happy, successful young woman? Doing well in education doesn't only mean passing exams, but also developing self-confidence, forming friendships, learning to communicate and developing life skills. Despite the challenges she faces, the support from her teachers – working alongside her foster carers and all the other professionals in the team around the child – will enable her to make the most of the opportunities that her secondary school years offer.

The corporate parents

When a local authority brings a child or young person into care, that local authority takes on some, or occasionally all, of the parenting role. It then has to make sure that it is providing parenting of a suitably high standard. This is called 'corporate parenting'.

In theory, Aimee has a whole team of adults working together to parent and support her. In practice this can often mean that Aimee has a range of adults all looking at different parts of her life, with little sense of being a team. In the words of one foster carer: 'My child does not have a team around the child, he has TEAMS around the child.' Important parts of Aimee's life can be overlooked because everyone thinks that someone else is dealing with it. This is why it's important for teachers, foster carers and others in the team around the child to work closely together.

Notes for everyone interested in the wellbeing of Aimee, and others like her

In the first edition of Amy's Diary, which The Fostering Network in Wales published in 2008, there were notes specifically for teachers and for social workers. It is now recognised that while professional integrity has to be preserved, professional boundaries need revisiting so that those caring for Aimee in their different professions all share the same values and have a common understanding of Aimee's needs and how to meet them.

The notes in this edition are for everyone and are accompanied by sections headed 'Ask yourself' and 'Action points'. There is far more to think about and take action on than suggested here, but these are the sorts of prompts which can motivate individuals and groups to reflect on and consider their values, attitudes and practices which will improve the life chances of the young people in their care.

A note about Aimee

Those readers who work closely with looked after children and young people will know that their personalities shine through anything that they write. In this publication, we have endeavoured to develop Aimee into a credible and engaging character. At the same time, however, for reasons of readability and accessibility, we acknowledge that the language that we use here doesn't necessarily reflect the language that many children and young people would really use in their personal diaries.

Year 7, Autumn term

September 21st

Keep a diary, you said, when I left juniors, cos you want to know how I'm getting on. So this is it, Miss. If you read it, don't put marks all over it. I get enuff from my new teachers.

I keep getting lost and then I'm late to lessons. The uniform's ok, but mine ain't new like the others. Most kids are alright and I sit next to my friend Kate for some things. But she is in top set for English and maths, and I am in set 3 for both. I really want to do well here but them saying I'm not good enough stinks.

Do teachers know about me being looked after? We had to write about our families and what we like doing. I wasn't gonna say my dad did drugs and hit mum – and me, was I? There are other kids with just one parent, so I wrote about Jennie – my foster mum.

Getting to school takes ages on the bus. We don't live near the other kids at my new school.



Key points

In primary school, a child will have most lessons with a single teacher, but in secondary school they will regularly encounter at least 10 different staff. Many looked after children will already have low self-confidence and difficulty in trusting adults, and attachment issues will often result in their emotional needs not being met which, in turn, affects their ability to learn effectively. The most common type of additional learning need among looked after children is behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, rather than other specific issues such as dyslexia, ADHD or autistic spectrum disorders.

The receiving secondary school should carefully assess the full range of a fostered child's needs, which means engaging closely with their primary school, foster carers, social workers and, most importantly, the child themselves. Children should be given choices as to how much personal information they share with their classmates.

Aimee's year 6 teacher from primary school encouraged her to write this diary and it's a helpful way to support her transition to secondary school. Although the teacher will be a trusted adult and DBS checked, it may depend on what Aimee writes whether or not this becomes a potential safeguarding issue – for this reason it's important the teacher doesn't promise to keep it confidential. The teacher should also ensure that Aimee's social worker knows about this.

All schools are required to have a designated person for looked after children and this member of staff will have a key role in being accessible to Aimee and her foster carer as well as co-ordinating the support in school.

It's a good idea for secondary schools to set aside a safe area for vulnerable children where they can confide in and be supported by an adult, or where they can simply relax and reflect.

Ask yourself

- How can I best engage with the looked after children for whom I have a responsibility?
- Do I understand their hopes, dreams and fears when they move school?
- What else can I be doing to make the child's experience of moving school as smooth and enjoyable as possible?

Action points

- Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil local authorities introduced a concept called the [Children Looked After Friendly School](#)². Find out what this is and use it as a benchmark.
- Endeavour to help looked after children feel part of the school community through additional activities, helpful transport arrangements and close liaison between home and school.
- Assess looked after children's needs and potential, and use the information to tailor their experience of learning.

² docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/7516f3_1c19c56aaf749d4a6fa40ac73756238.pdf

Year 7, Autumn term

October 7th

English teach Ms Kitchen sez I speak better than I write, so I go to drama club today. It was gr8 cos I could just lose the rubbish me and be another person for a bit.

October 14th

Tried recorder and sax – FAIL, big time!!! Had a go on the keyboards and I was told I wasn't bad and should have extra lessons. Need to pick the best time to ask Jennie about this though, cos they cost a lot. Only thing is, clubs are in dinner time or after school. Jennie can't always pick me up and there are no late buses. Dinners are a pain having to show my free dinner pass and the other kids seeing it. Why don't they stick a label on my back? We get new smart cards after half term – maybe they'll be better.

October 15th

Form teacher Jinksy told me they had a PEP review about me yesterday and would be writing to Jennie. Wot's all that about?



Key points

Making sure a child knows what they can do and building upon it is as, if not more, important as letting them know what they are not getting right. Being given choices can help a child like Aimee feel that they have some control in their lives. Having an activity with which they can identify and which they enjoy helps to build a sense of who they are and their self-esteem. A child who is looked after may blame themselves, unfairly, for what has gone wrong in their past and they may not like the person who they think they are. Having interests outside routine school activities develops perspective and offers opportunities for new friendships. This also helps children to experience and celebrate success with others.

Issues of identity can appear much more important to looked after children than for those who are not. To manage paying for school meals, many schools have electronic systems which mean that those receiving free school meals do not appear to be treated differently. However, such systems do not guarantee confidentiality since other students can see that a child who is receiving free school meals can only spend so much each day, usually having to have the set meal.

Some looked after children live some distance from their current school – it could be because there are not enough foster carers or the most appropriate foster carers for their particular needs are in a different area, or to keep them safe from harm or dangerous influences. Such children then require transport by school bus or contracted taxi or bus services. Sometimes this means that attending after-school activities can be difficult as no transport is available outside normal school hours. This can also make building friendships and visiting friends more complicated.

Every looked after child must have a personal education plan (PEP), which will be an integral part of their overall care and support plan, and this will be discussed in more detail later.

Ask yourself

- How can I gently encourage fostered children to try new things?
- Am I prepared to learn something new alongside the child? This is often a good way to build a stronger relationship.
- How might the practical and financial difficulties of being able to join in with fun activities at home and school be overcome?

Action points

- Where costs are involved in after-school activities, be clear on who pays and that the funding available is sufficient.
- Be honest about the commitment needed for any new extra-curricular activity and also about the rewards which can result.
- Try to promote the child's strengths as this will enhance their feelings of positive wellbeing and support their resilience during more challenging times.

Year 7, Spring term

January 15th

Jennie had a letter today. It was from school moaning I don't do homework, so I have to go to homework club after school. J goes nuts – not cos of me, but school knows about me having to get a bus. Jennie can't afford to pick me up every time. We go without stuff already – like my own laptop – so she can run the car. Kate said she'd help me and lend me stuff as well to get homework done.

January 19th

Jennie is a hero getting on to the school and getting things sorted. Ms Kitchen runs a homework club at dinnertime instead of me having to go after school. She even looks at what I'm writing and says to be more careful cos I write well if I try and check back on my spellings. I can now use a PC when I need to in school, but still can't get onto all the websites I want.

I still don't like maths and Ms Kitchen is the English teacher, so she can't do maths much either. But we found out how to do the sums and I got full marks in the end from Wiggy – but how old does he think I am giving me a smiley face?



Key points

Aimee's needs have to be fully recognised, not just her emotional and learning needs, but her circumstances which make her time in and out of school that much more difficult than for most children. Aimee wants to learn, but she is often careless and finds it difficult to concentrate. Expectations of looked after children should be high as it is too easy to allow the child's potential to be masked by their relatively low educational achievements to date.

If teachers were concerned about Aimee's homework completion record, it may have been better to talk through the issues with Aimee and her foster carer, Jennie, before sending the letter. Offering any extra provision, like a homework club, is resource-intensive for a school and may rely on the goodwill of staff. However, a foster carer can be supportive in lots of ways by creating the right conditions for learning in the home and working with the child to establish mutually acceptable routines for getting homework completed. Schools can also offer foster carers advice about how to help with homework.

Friends and other adults can also be helpful in supporting a child's learning, as long as the child is genuinely learning and not just reproducing another person's work. Access to the internet is important, but access should be limited to safe websites and appropriate social media.

Constructive help involves offering praise for what has been done well and, more importantly, describing what makes a good piece of work. It is not enough just to say something is 'excellent', without describing why. For example, persevering over getting spellings correct and writing in detail. Pointing out mistakes and working through solutions together needs to be seen as a positive learning experience.

Ask yourself

- How can I better understand the potential of the child and what support they need to fulfil that potential?
- How can I make the lines of communication between home and school as clear and easy as they need to be?

Action points

- School and home agree to alert each other at an early stage if homework is proving problematic.
- Create the right conditions, physical and emotional, for the child to learn at school and home.
- Find out how the child learns best by exploring, for example, their optimum periods of concentration, style of learning and the type of environment they prefer. This can be done through listening to the child's views and observing them while they are working.

Year 7, Spring term

March 10th

Thanks for emailing me, Miss, and telling me about what's going on in the old school. I do miss it.

Who's Wiggy, you ask. He's the maths teacher and his hair is like a haystack and it can't be real, so we call him Wiggy.

Good luck with the baby. I'm gutted that you'll be too busy to stay in touch tho. I'm going to carry on with writing the diary cos Ms Kitchen says it will help my English.

March 19th

I'm good at netball but games today was cross-country. Getting changed can be embarrassing, so I put my kit on as usual under my uniform, but I couldn't come home that way cos it got wet and muddy. Some of the others thought me going in the shower was a real larf. Then Miss Muscles had to lend me a towel. I used Kate's brush, but I still looked like an old witch. Kate might be my friend but the mirror isn't. I need to ask Jennie to get me a proper sports bag and better stuff for games.



Key points

A child who is looked after is often not confident in their relationships. The primary school teacher who had continued her concern for Aimee when Aimee moved to secondary school, now does not want to extend her professional interest into her own personal life as she is leaving teaching when she has a baby. It may also be that the teacher recognises that what Aimee is writing is becoming too personal and relates to other professionals. From Aimee's standpoint, however, she has lost a source of continuity and security.

Aimee's new English teacher is providing an important boost by encouraging her not just to work on her writing, but indirectly to use the diary as a vehicle for developing her life story and expressing how she feels about herself and what happens to her.

Aimee is clearly not comfortable with her appearance. But she reminds herself what she is good at and has established some of her own routines, which is important for her sense of independence. However, like many children and young people, not just those in care, she can be very self-conscious. When looked after children stand out in any way, they are more likely to be subject to unkind remarks and other forms of bullying.

It is easy to remove some of the possible sources of anguish and potential conflict by ensuring that the child has enough of the right clothing and equipment. Designer labels may not be essential, but for a young person with an eye on their classroom credibility, there is a conversation to be had with them about managing the budget available and having some choices.

Ask yourself

- Does it matter how children and young people refer to adults as long as it is not disrespectful, for example, by using first names or nicknames?

Action points

- Work with the child to enable them to integrate comfortably into routines in school and at home; this may mean compromises being made, and not always by the child.
- Make values explicit, such as having respect for others and being understanding of differences. These can help create the right climate in school, at home and within public services which support looked after children and young people.

Year 7, Summer term

May 6th

Got the letter today from Jinksy Jenkins about the geography trip. Time out at Ogmores will be gr8! Beach, rocks, maybe we'll get to go in the sea too. Kate n Emma say I can sit with them on the bus. We can wear our own clothes as well. Jennie says she'll sign the slip tomorrow. Jinksy is OK, I reckon.

May 15th

I kicked off last night and chucked my tea in the bin. Didn't care then and don't now. It's the trip to Ogmores today and I'm home cos Jennie did NOT get the form signed. She said she wasn't allowed by social services. She could have signed it, school wouldn't know she wasn't meant to.

I had a row again with J this morning, so I refused to go to school. Why should I have to sit on my own in other classes all day? J had to tell her boss I was ill and she had to stay home with me. All over a stupid piece of paper.



Key points

Aimee has every right to feel unfairly treated, since arrangements for events like school trips can be organised well in advance so that teachers, social workers and foster carers do not, inadvertently, deprive a looked after child of valuable educational and social experiences.

The legal position of a foster carer can be complicated and not all have the same degree of responsibility when it comes to things like signing letters giving parental consent. A child who is looked after is the legal responsibility of the corporate parent, the local authority. Delegated authority is the process that enables foster carers to make common-sense, everyday decisions about the children and young people they care for, such as allowing them to go to friends' houses for sleepovers, signing consent forms for school trips and even arranging haircuts.

Holders of parental responsibility can delegate authority to foster carers to undertake such tasks and decisions. Foster carers never have parental responsibility for a fostered child, so they can only take decisions about the fostered child where that authority has been delegated to them by the local authority and/or the parents.

Ask yourself

- Am I clear about what delegated authority is in place for the children and young people for whom I have some responsibility?
- How can the expectations of looked after children and young people, and disappointments when they occur, best be managed?
- Are you able to anticipate potentially difficult events, listen to the child and encourage them to discuss their feelings? Talking about feelings rather than acting on them is an important life skill.

Action points

- The process for obtaining parental consent should be included in a school policy and be well understood by all involved with plenty of time allowed to work through that process.
- If there is not the appropriate level of delegated authority in place, consider what might be done to avoid unnecessary upsets.

Year 7, Summer term

July 2nd

It's 3 weeks now since I skipped school and didn't catch the bus home. So ANGRY at what happened over the geography trip I just couldn't face going into school the next day. Jennie, Julie – my latest SW, and Jinksy all messed up, so I wanted to teach them.

I got in with a gang of older kids in town and had some fun until we were playing chicken and one smashed a shop window. When the cops turned up it's me they go for, and I get a nice ride in the police car back to Jennie's.

Ms Kitchen asked today if I wanted a part in the school musical as a year 8 had dropped out. Did she know about me bunking off? Drama club has been good, so why not? Only a few songs to learn in 2 weeks.

July 16th

The show was awesome!!! Josh Edwards, the year 10 lead boy, is so hot and he kept grinning at me on stage. Kate wasn't so chuffed at that. And SURPRISE, Mum was there! She didn't look so good, but she and Jennie gave me a hug after. Ms K was off her sox saying I was amazing. Feels good to have someone believe in me.



Key points

Looked after children are more likely to run away than those who are not. The triggers for these vulnerable children going missing are complex, and can include testing boundaries, issues with contact with their families, and attachment difficulties which potentially make them more likely to push away their carers. When not under the care of the school or the foster carers, a looked after child then becomes even more open to the dangers of being physically abused, grooming and sexual exploitation, alcohol and substance misuse or even criminal behaviour.

In Aimee's case, she felt singled out and unfairly treated over the school trip. Although her response could be a one-off incident, it could become a pattern of behaviour, especially if she falls victim to those who are willing to exploit her.

With the first indication of a child going missing, such as not turning up for school, the risk to the child must be evaluated. Each local authority is required to implement a local protocol, based on government guidance, about children who run away or are missing from their home or placement.

The safe return and future welfare of the child is the paramount consideration and they should not be blamed or punished for their behaviour. The causes of the child running away have to be explored in a way which leaves the child feeling that they have been listened to and taken seriously – some local authorities will want 'debriefs' or 'return interviews' to be carried out help to inform the best ways of addressing the child's needs. Any planned changes can then be incorporated into the care and support plan.

Ms Kitchen, the English teacher, understood that Aimee did not need to be judged but offered her a way back into being part of the school community by joining the school musical, giving her a sense of belonging and achievement.

Ask yourself

- There are different ways to reflect upon events when things have gone off track, including blaming yourself and working towards an understanding of what went wrong to avoid any repeats. Which is better and why?

Action points

- Be clear on who has what responsibilities under the [All Wales Protocol on Missing Children](https://www.childreninwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/All-Wales-Protocol-Missing-Children.pdf)³.

3 www.childreninwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/All-Wales-Protocol-Missing-Children.pdf

Year 8, Autumn term

September 28th

After seeing Mum at the show at the end of year 7, I thought she was trying harder. Then we had a day out in the summer and I stayed at her place. Now that Dad's gone she is better. I still miss him – tho he wasn't much good for me.

Today stank and whose fault was that? It was the first time I'd stayed overnight in school time with mum, but she overslept – I got nothing to eat for breakfast and missed the bus. First late mark this term, I had the wrong books and no games kit.

The teachers don't listen – they're a pain in the bum. So hungry, couldn't concentrate. Kate gave me half her fig n nut bar – how can she eat that stuff? Give me pizza and chips every day like we had at mum's last night.

I do worry about mum cos she isn't in a good place and I feel I should be there all the time for her. And then I get scared when I am there cos you never know what she's gonna do next.

September 30th

In English today I showed Ms K my diary.

Key points

Looked after children and young people will often feel guilt by wrongly thinking that they have contributed to their parents' problems and that being looked after is, in part at least, their fault. Contact visits of any sort can be emotionally difficult as they can disrupt routines and reignite feelings of loss and rejection. Foster carers and teachers often speak of children's behaviour deteriorating both before and after a contact visit and all professionals need to recognise the challenging issues involved for the child.

Contact arrangements will be stated in the child's care and support plan. Even though they can sometimes appear troublesome, they are a vital part of maintaining family links whether or not the child will eventually return to their birth family.

Being ill-equipped for school, poor concentration, lateness and incomplete homework can all be the result of circumstances beyond the control of the child. Practical measures can be put in place to alleviate some of these difficulties, but it requires foresight and co-operation between the family, foster family and other professionals involved.

Ask yourself

- Do I understand the story behind the behaviours of a looked after child who appears to me to be 'challenging'?
- What allowances, if any, should be made when dealing with unacceptable behaviour in school?
- How would viewing the child as OK but their behaviour as not affect how I behave towards them?

Action points

- A key member of staff could give time first thing in the morning to looked after children and young people by, for example, greeting them or making a safe area of the school available – although this is labour intensive it can pay dividends for the rest of the day.
- Foster carers and social workers can plan ahead for contact visits and ensure schools are aware so that practicalities are taken care of and do not lead to emotional conflicts.
- Allow children time and space to talk about any anxieties they may have about forthcoming or past contact visits. Help them to find ways to cope with this.

Year 8, Autumn term

October 7th

Ms K talked to me about my diary and said I showed real promise with my writing and should carry on with it. She promised not to tell anyone else what was in it as long as I wasn't saying anything which meant I was – like she says – putting myself or others in harm's way. That's ok, I suppose.

October 14th

Jennie went on one of her fostering courses and found out that she and me should be at the PEP meetings, so she kicked up a stink and got us both in. All sorts of people were there and they talked about me all the time. I should have felt good about that, but it just made me feel small. Ms K had lots of good things to say, but not many others did. They were like –

- Only sometimes does homework.
- Never brings right books and stuff.
- Only sometimes shows interest.

So I live my life somewhere between 'sometimes' and 'never'. FAIL – that's me.

And for maths they think I'm what they call 'additional needs'. I told them that if the teachers made stuff a bit more interesting, like Ms K does, it would help. 'What do you want to be?' they asked. I said NORMAL, and some of them laughed.

Key points

A personal education plan (PEP) is an integral part of the overall care and support plan for the child. The PEP should not be seen in isolation from other parts of the care and support plan but should relate particularly to those elements which concern health, emotional and behavioural development, identity and family and social relationships.

A good PEP will contain:

- The child's voice and notes of their strengths and aspirations.
- Details of other learning activities outside the normal school day.
- Details of the arrangements for how their education will be provided in the short and longer term.
- Any other particular issues which need addressing, such as attendance.
- How the child will be supported, academically, socially and emotionally.
- Details of the members of the team around the child and their responsibilities.

Any school age child with additional learning needs (ALN) will have an individual development plan (IDP). Aimee should have one for maths and this will become part of her PEP.

Aimee's teacher Ms K explains to Aimee why she can't keep things confidential if there is a risk to a child being harmed. Any childcare professional who learns something from a child which could be a safeguarding issue should inform the relevant person, according to the [Wales Safeguarding Procedures](#)⁴.

Ask yourself

- Are the voices of all the team around the child – including the foster carers, birth family and the child themselves – being heard and paid attention to in education-focused meetings?
- Is there emotional support in place at school and in the foster home which enables the child to engage fully in their education?
- How can I ensure that the child's hopes and dreams are taken seriously by all the adults around them?

Action points

- Foster carers and the child are entitled to be at a PEP review. Support the child in being able to contribute to their PEP.
- The care and support plan, PEP and IDP (individual development plan) need to be co-ordinated so that they tell the same story and share the same planned outcomes.
- A one-page profile of the child or young person can serve many purposes and be part of any plan. (See The Fostering Network's [Working as One](#)⁵ publication for more information about these.)

⁴ <https://gov.wales/safeguarding-guidance>
⁵ thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/workingasoneenglish.pdf

Year 8, Spring term

January 4th

Wanted to see mum over Christmas but Julie – still my social worker – said she was ill and couldn't see me. Is that fair? I'm gutted, yeah, but then mum in a bad way is bad for me too. The Christmas card from her had glitter in it which fell on to my hands and things, and now every time a bit of it twinkles, I think of her.

January 11th

Kate's got a new iPhone so she asked me if I wanted to buy her old iPod. She let me try it for a few days. Then it all kicked off. Kate's mum is a right cow. She wanted the iPod for something and I had it. So to cover her own back Kate said I'd taken it and kept it. The head of year calls Jennie saying I had nicked the iPod and gets me and Kate into his office and then shouts at me, dropping in that, of course, he knows how difficult things are for me.

How could Kate do that to me? And why should they believe her and not me? She did say sorry after, but she could have had the row from her mum instead of me getting a kicking. Maybe she thinks I'm too beneath her to be a true friend. Jennie is peed off that I didn't talk to her about the iPod in the first place – but at least she believed me.



Key points

Life for looked after children and young people can often seem unfair; they often don't have the same choices as others and can feel that they have little control over what happens to them. Emotional triggers can mean that it is more difficult to take setbacks calmly, and they are no different from anyone else when it comes to feeling a sense of injustice.

In education, social services and foster care, judgements have to be made about what people say and whether they are telling the truth. It is easy to make assumptions, as Aimee's head of year did. The psychological effect of not being believed when you are telling the truth can be severe and, in the case of a child like Aimee, it can lead to even greater mistrust of others, adults in particular. It may be, due to experiences in the past, that the child expects to be treated unfairly so they do not challenge false accusations.

A child may appear to manage injustices and appear calm on the outside, but they have internalised their negative feelings. Physical or verbal violence may offer an outlet for some children, but this will not bring a resolution to an issue and allow them to move on without hurt or resentment.

Ask yourself

- How does my sense of what is fair differ from that of children and young people's sense of what is fair?
- Do I pre-judge or remain objective when faced with conflict?

Action points

- When a view has to be taken on who is right in a certain situation, consider evidence objectively, explain the reasons for decisions and invite comment.
- When things go wrong, consider employing a restorative approach which focuses on repairing the damage done and rebuilding relationships.
- If a public organisation that you're involved in, such as social services, education or health, works to a set of values or principles, ensure that you know what they are.

Year 8, Spring term

March 14th

We had a talk from the school nurse on a jab we're supposed to have. If you don't, you can get loads of disgusting stuff when you have sex, even just touching. Rhian nearly wet herself laughing, but no-one else saw the funny side. Nurse gave us a form – here we go again, I said, just like the geography trip. Jennie said she'd sort it.

March 24th

Fair play, J got the form signed and today we had the jab. But I can't remember when I last saw a doc or dentist. I saw someone called a LAC nurse when Jennie first fostered me. Jennie was amazing when my period arrived and it felt like my guts were being thumped by a gorilla. Girl flu is what Jennie calls it. Apart from that, no-one really bothers about how I REALLY am – inside. Painkillers and sticking plasters don't reach the other hurts that I feel.

Key points

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the name given to a common group of viruses, some of which are linked to the development of cancers. In Wales, girls and boys aged 12 to 13 years will be offered the first HPV vaccination when they're in year 8. The second vaccination is usually offered six to 12 months after the first. It needs to be made clear via the delegated authority procedures whether a child's foster carer has the right permissions to sign the consent form.

Looked after children and young people may have a higher incidence of physical health problems such as sight difficulties, speech and language difficulties, asthma and eczema than those who aren't looked after. Additionally, they often have more prevalent and serious emotional and mental health needs. These physical and mental issues are often linked and may be due to neglect experienced before coming into care. A child who has recently come into care may not be up to date with vaccinations, have had a poor diet, lived in unclean conditions and not enjoyed an environment rich in language and play.

It's useful to note that research suggests that looked after children and young people tend to identify internal emotional problems when asked about their health, whereas adults predominantly focus on the visible behaviours such as poor appetite.

Looked after children and young people in Wales should have a regular visit from their local health board's named nurse with responsibility for looked after children every six months. Regular check-ups with a dentist are vital, as is being registered with a GP and, if possible, retaining continuity with any medical treatment. These health matters should also be discussed at looked after children's review meetings.

Ask yourself

- When I ask a young person how they are, how can I ensure that they know that I mean both their physical and emotional health?

Action points

- Ensure that looked after children and young people are receiving all of their medical entitlements, monitoring and treatments.
- Ask children and young people about their personal health with sensitivity and make the facts clear without being judgemental.

Year 8, Summer term

May 10th

Are you on target, they keep asking me. Targets are what you shoot at, but I'm feeling like they're out to get me instead. A bullet in the head... ha ha.

In form lesson today we had to write on our records how we thought we were doing. Effort – mostly tries hard, I reckon, and always in English. Next year I'm going up to set 2, Ms K says. But maths is still not so good.

In athletics my long spindly legs make me the best high jumper in the group. If they set the bar too high, all that would happen though is that I'd bang my head.

May 24th

I'm now a guinea pig. Our school is testing out a new way of assessing, so no more levels. Deputy Dog (how'd he get that name?) tried to explain. Everything changing so more tick boxes to say what we can and can't do. Perhaps I'll feel like I'm less of a number then.



Key points

Targets are a double-edged sword; they can motivate some and discourage others. They can be a cause for celebration if they are reached or instil a sense of failure if not. However, setting targets and goals, and identifying next steps in learning, are part of school life for students and staff.

Students, teachers and carers should have a shared understanding of what targets are and what they are meant to do. They are not intended to be carrots or sticks, i.e. cause for reward if they are met or punishment if not. They are there to support students to identify where they are in their learning, what they need to do next and how to get there.

Curriculum for Wales⁶ will be introduced in schools from September 2022. We will be moving away from our current system, where judgements are made on the overall attainment of a student in a subject at a specific point in time, through the allocation of a level on a 'best-fit' basis. Schools will be designing their own curriculum, appropriate for their students and context. As part of this process, they will also develop appropriate assessment arrangements, focusing on the purpose of assessment which is to support the progression of each individual student in relation to the 3-16 continuum.

Children and young people are also assessed through the online personalised assessments in reading and numeracy. Feedback is available after the assessments are taken, and teachers can discuss this with their students and plan next steps. Carers should have access to reports on the skills and progress of the child they look after.

Ask yourself

- How can I involve students in the learning process, encouraging them to take ownership of their own progression?
- How can I create the right climate in which children can have the confidence to trial new things, make mistakes and learn from them in a safe environment?

Action points

- As we prepare for Curriculum for Wales 2022, all interested parties, not just teachers, should be informed of what the changes are and how they can support students.
- Any targets in any of the looked after child's plans (such as the PEP, and care and support plan) should complement each other and not present an overwhelming agenda for the child or professionals involved.
- Involve children and young people in developing their own targets and identifying the next steps in their learning, to ensure engagement and that they take control over actions and their consequences.

Year 8, Summer term

June 16th

Writing this at home today, with Jennie downstairs biting her tongue and trying not to make things worse. I went for break as usual with Kate and Emma (I don't exactly have a wide choice of friends). Josh comes over for a chat. Fair play, he doesn't get heavy with me and we're just mates – BFFs I hope. But then in science Emma asks if we've done anything yet. I say NO, it's not like that, then she says he wouldn't want to be with an ugly cow like me. So I told her she was jealous. She kicked me under the table – and then I lost it.

So what if Emma lost a handful of hair and Kate got a fat lip trying to pull us apart? Getting kicked like that was like lighting a fuse – I saw mum getting kicked around, and I am not going to be that sort of saddy.

So Deputy Dog took us off to his office and of course I got the blame, cos the teacher saw me having a go at Emma, but not how it started. Kate went to the nurse, Emma got sent to isolation and Deputy Dog phoned Jennie and said it was best if she kept me at home for the week.



Key points

An exclusion of a student from school should be a last resort. An exclusion, for a fixed term or permanently, 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.

An exclusion requires a formal process to be carried out by the school. Only the head teacher (or an agreed representative) can sanction an exclusion. The child's parent or carer must be informed immediately. Where a looked after child is excluded, the person who is acting as their parent or carer has the right to appeal. A discipline committee of school governors can overturn a decision to exclude.

A school should not ask a carer or parent to remove their child from the school for a few days; this sort of 'informal' exclusion is not legal. An excessive number of recorded exclusions can raise questions about how effectively a school deals with behaviour issues, which is why some schools might try to bypass the proper procedures.

After a fixed term exclusion, a return-to-school meeting is good practice to discuss measures that can be put in place to prevent a repeat of the behaviour.

For Aimee, losing any of her education is a setback she can ill afford. It also adds to strong feelings of rejection which may have been an integral part of her past. Schools have a difficult decision to make with any child's unacceptable behaviour, but for one who is looked after there will always be a back story to their behaviour which needs to be understood and anticipated by offering an emotional support programme such as [Emotional Literacy Support Assistants](#)⁷, [the PERMA Model](#)⁸ or [the Thrive Approach](#)⁹.

The provision of a safe, time-out space in a school, which is not seen as a place of detention, is often effective in helping a child reflect and feel supported rather than humiliated and banished.

Ask yourself

- Is an exclusion an admission of failure? In this situation who has most to lose, the school or the child?

Action points

- If you are a foster carer or a social worker, find out how you can challenge any 'informal' exclusions in your local authority.
- Research what has been successful to reduce or eliminate exclusions.
- Schools should put in place preventative measures to avoid the necessity for exclusions. Given that an exclusion means a working child-school relationship has broken down, consider how this might be repaired.
- Consider how relationships between the school and the child can be repaired following an exclusion.

⁷ elsa-support.co.uk
⁸ positivepsychology.com/perma-model
⁹ thriveapproach.com

Year 9, Autumn term

September 1st

At last!! Jennie and me went to town and now I have a real SMART phone and can join the 21st century. FOMO no more!

I spent ages trying to get a decent selfie – there must be a way of looking gorgeous even if you're not gorgeous. But I've found out that Jennie put on some settings which mean I can't do all I want. I still managed download an app to do my own thing anyway.

September 4th

I've been put up to set 2 for English – and I still have Ms K. Happy days!!!

September 16th

Mum is now messaging straight to my phone – gr8 that we don't have to wait for contact to share the latest. It's strange that dad has found me online and is asking to meet up. Do I want to see him after what he did to mum and what I had to put up with from him? I haven't told Jennie or the social worker about that.

Some guys I don't know want to be my friends online. And Josh keeps sending me dodgy photos. My world is getting bigger – I am luvvin this!

Key points

Using social media is an everyday part of a teenager's life. While developing young people's 'digital autonomy' is an important part of the transition to adulthood, a delicate balance has to be struck between independence and being open to risk. Developing 'digital resilience' and empowering young people to navigate online risks, instead of simply trying to curtail online access, is more likely to have the desired outcome and cause less resentment.

Research has found that young people in care can benefit from the psychological, emotional and social support provided by social media networks (University of East Anglia, 2018).

However, as well as benefits, the online world does carry risks for looked after children and young people, particularly those who are vulnerable due to early experiences or the instability of being in care. Specific risks children in care may face online include:

- inappropriate contact from parents or relatives
- bullying
- encouragement to engage in risk-taking behaviour
- easy access to potentially harmful content.

Not everyone they are in contact with will have their best interests at heart and a child may need to be gently reminded of this. If contact with parents and relatives is not allowed in the offline world, it should not take place online unless this has been formally agreed at a review meeting.

In Aimee's case, Jennie needs to reach an agreement with her about what is appropriate access, amount of screen time and how Aimee's use of her smart phone is monitored.

(Note: There are many resources available focussing on online safety. See the Further Resources section at the end of this publication.)

Ask yourself

- Do I know enough myself to support the children and young people I work with through the technological, moral and information maze that exists online, including the risks and benefits of the internet and social media?

Action points

- Ensure looked after children and young people's privacy settings on social media are set to private.
- Schools could consider how what is taught in the school about online safety can be shared with social services and foster carers.
- Make yourself aware of the most high-risk activities that young people might engage in, such as online gaming, live streaming and sexting.

Year 9, Autumn term

November 24th

Jennie and mum came to a meeting after school today. I sort of knew what to expect after the review meeting a few weeks ago –

'Aimee is trying harder in some subjects but not others.'

'Showing promise in English but behind on her maths.'

Jennie knew all this too, but I suppose mum didn't, so we played along to make sure she didn't fly off on one about being left out. J had asked for the updated copy of the PEP from the last review and hardly any of the teachers had seen it, or remembered what was in it.

It's still too early in the year for the Design Tech and Music teachers to even know my name yet, but Ms K and Jinksy impressed mum and J with how well they knew what I could and couldn't do and what sort of person I was. I don't want to be just a name on a list.

November 30th

Jennie's social worker came to see her today. I don't know what went on, but Jennie was really quiet afterwards and wouldn't say much. I'm having a new social worker, the first change in two years. Julie was a good listener – I'll miss her.



Key points

Schools are required to report at least once a year to carers and parents. The report must include brief details of progress in each subject, examination results or end of key stage teacher assessments, the attendance record and details of how carers or parents can discuss the report with teachers.

The question of the foster carer's role in home-school contact may be determined by delegated authority. Who attends any meetings at school needs to be discussed and agreed between a child's foster carers, social worker and birth parents as the school needs to know who to invite. Whether the child is present at the meeting or not, there should be a discussion with them beforehand about what they are comfortable sharing with teachers.

In addition to these formal occasions, foster carers, school staff and social workers need to ensure that there are always open channels of communication. In every school, there is a delegated member of staff to oversee the welfare and progress of looked after children and young people, and foster carers and social workers should know who that is and how to contact them. Ideally, a meeting between foster carers, social workers and this member of staff takes place soon after, or even before, the child starts at the school. Schools following Welsh Government advice on good practice will also have a named governor for looked after children and young people.

Ask yourself

- What are the key points which the child and their foster carer need to know if progress in learning is to be made?
- How can I ensure that I am sharing at least as many positive things as negative things about a looked after child?

Action points

- Set up clear and agreed lines of communication between all parties involved, not forgetting to involve the child themselves.
- Schools could consider arranging social events and information-giving events for foster carers and the children in their care. These are valuable for developing home-school relationships.

Year 9, Spring term

January 2nd

So I'm on holiday from school – which is rubbish – no friends, no gossip, no nothing. It's soooo boring. Then Christmas turns into a complete nightmare. Mum said we could meet, eat out and go to a film on Christmas Eve. There was me imagining a nice, cosy day out and getting a PRESENT – which she doesn't often manage. But then Jennie gets a call and mum's in A&E with an overdose. Why have I got such a stupid woman for a mother?

Jennie comes into my room without knocking to see what the crying n wailing was all about. I was just on my second cut, so she sees it and goes nuts. So my Christmas present turns out to be tissues, a bandage and, in the end, a hug from J. I just wanted to see how far I could go and if it would help...not really... who's punishing who here? – So mixed up...

January 3rd

First day back at school. Jennie and I did the 4 Fs last night, then sorted out what to write in the letter to Deputy Dog about the cuts so they didn't ask too many questions. Jennie had to tell the social workers as well. Deputy Dog wasn't sure what to say, but at least he didn't blow up, and he said he'd set up a meeting with the school counsellor if I want.

Key points

The environment and routine of a school can be a stabilising and safe place for looked after children, so school holidays are not necessarily the time of release and relaxation which some might think. Christmas can also bring back painful memories for children who are separated from their parents and siblings. Aimee suffered a number of emotional triggers during the holidays which led her to experiment with a form of physical self-harm.

Self-harm is often a way of coping with emotional pain or communicating distress. It can take many forms including drug and alcohol abuse, eating disorders and self-injury such as deliberate cutting.

Such behaviours are often difficult to understand and deal with. A sensitive and non-judgemental response is required. Jennie's first reaction may have been shock and disapproval, but showing that she still wanted Aimee to feel loved was important. It's also very important that Jennie informs the fostering team and Aimee's social worker to agree an approach to Aimee's self-harming. Professional support is often needed and this should be accessed through the GP, or school or social services. The deputy head teacher's initial intervention of offering counselling was an appropriate first response.

Getting a highly emotional young person to achieve some perspective on events and their responses is difficult but not unrealistic. The 4 Fs strategy of talking and writing about a traumatising situation can help by working through: Facts (what happened?), Feelings (at each stage), Findings (what can be learned?) and Future (how might the response be different and better another time?).

Ask yourself

- Am I prepared to respond in a supportive and positive way if I discover that a child or young person in my care is wishing to harm themselves?
- If a child or young person has self-harmed, reflect on whether more could have been done to prevent this without putting blame on yourself or anybody else.

Action points

- Have strategies in place which can de-escalate tension in potentially explosive situations at school and at home.
- Know the routes to support which are available for those self-harming or thinking about taking their own lives.
- Try to pre-empt such critical events through talking, listening and building coping techniques among children and young people.

Year 9, Spring term

March 11th

Think about your future, they said in PSE. Thinking and doing are not the same thing. I'd like to think that I could be anything I wanted to be – a singer, an actor, dress designer, be my own boss for once. But what chance have I got? Mum never had a job. Jennie does something in a boring office and goes on about how you can't always do what you like. Even if I wanted to do some sort of posh job, how am I going to get the exam passes I'd need? Hair and beauty comes up as the answer from the questions the app asks – but I need to sort my own looks first.

March 20th

Ms K says to keep up the writing cos my stories are about real people living real lives and that I should send one to a teen mag I get. Does anyone still read them – apart from me? Jennie is keen for me to do some vocational stuff. Carrie, my new social worker, agrees – but she doesn't know me, only what she read in the file.

Anyway, where might I be in 3 or 4 years time? Will anyone still be looking out for me then? Proper families stick together.

Key points

The wider curriculum in schools, especially after 2022, is about preparing young people for a world that requires a variety of skills, adaptability and independence of thought. At the age of 14, few young people will have a clear idea of what they wish to do later in life. They are, however, entitled to have aspirations which, to some, may already appear out of reach.

Those in care frequently underachieve, and the road to making full use of their talents and potential may be much harder than for others. Research indicates that while looked after children and young people are as ambitious as anyone else, they cannot see ways to fulfil those ambitions. Low expectations can, therefore, sit alongside high hopes.

The majority of young people will continue with education or training after the age of 16. A young person's social worker needs to discuss with the foster carer about their willingness to care for the young person up to and beyond their 18th birthday under an arrangement known as 'When I am Ready'. Such longer-term support will increase the chances of a young person making a success of their chosen career path and help them adjust as and when they meet obstacles along the way.

Ask yourself

- How will I encourage children and young people to be aspirational and challenge the negative image they may have of themselves?
- How might a child or young person be reassured and not alarmed when considering the significant changes for them at 16 or 18?
- How far will decisions made at the age of 14, 16 and 18 be entirely their own? It is important that young people feel they are able to own decisions about their future.

Action points

- All professionals should ensure they are aware of the provision available for care leavers at 16 and 18.
- Early discussion and planning for a young person's future allow for more options to be explored.
- Ensure that a young person is offered additional sessions with a careers adviser if necessary.

Year 9, Summer term

April 26th

I've got this uneasy feeling. Jennie's been a bit off these last few days and my latest social worker Carrie has been to see me more than Julie ever did. They keep saying I've got big decisions coming up, but there's not that much choice over which subjects to take.

Geography and drama are in the same option group – should I stick with Jinksy for geography or be the DRAMA QUEEN? Which is what some think I am anyway.

Kate is doing RS and ICT, so I could do them too – why not? I called mum and she just asked if I was going to be a geek AND a god-botherer. She doesn't get that GCSEs aren't one-way tickets to a job.

May 5th

Josh says the Bacc was cool, but GCSE was a breeze compared to A levels – what hope is there for me at sixth form then? He told me today that he dumped his girlfriend. Why did he say that to me? He's three years older and going into year 13 next year. Wot is he thinkin?? Wot am I thinkin???

The mag emailed. ☹️ – they won't print my article. 😊 – they told me to send more as they liked my 'quirky style and out of the ordinary experience of life'. They should try living it.



Key points

At GCSE level, choices are limited as the core subjects of English, Welsh, mathematics and science must be followed by all students. Different schools will have different ways of organising the option choices, usually in three or four groupings. The Skills Challenge Certificate is a qualification that students will study during years 9, 10 and 11 and, in combination with GCSE passes, can lead to the award of the Welsh Baccalaureate.

No subject at this stage leads on to a career but the development of a range of skills is important to allow flexibility later. Young people's choices may be influenced by career ambitions, subjects which they enjoy, subjects they are good at and what they think about a particular teacher. What their friends are planning to do may be a factor too, but it should not be a deciding one.

The range and detail of option choices may be daunting and challenging to the confidence and resolve of looked after young people, especially if their families have no history of succeeding in the education system. After discussion of the options, and their pros and cons, it should ultimately be the young person's choice.

Ask yourself

- Will this young person have genuine choices at this stage of their life?
- What extra might be done to help overcome the barriers raised by their past experiences?

Action points

- Avoid imposing your own preferences on a young person as they need to be motivated and able to study a subject that they find interesting.
- Approach the school's designated person for looked after children, the careers adviser and/or the local authority's Looked After Children's Education (LACE) co-ordinator for extra advice and support.

Year 9, Summer term

July 12th

My PEP review and end of year report are AMAZING! – for me that is. With my options sorted and year 10 coming up, having to think ahead is good... even though it's something I've always been scared to do – I've usually got enough to worry about here and now.

Carrie told me that social services had to speak to dad about him messaging me. I definitely do NOT want to see him again. It feels like I'm being pulled in all directions by mum, by dad, by Jennie and Carrie – maybe I'll come apart in the end.

July 14th

Jennie is getting worried about her dad as he's not well and lives somewhere in north Wales. We had one of her 'serious chats' last night and she reckons I have to think about college or even uni, especially because I might go up to set 1 in English in September.

In two years I could be a care leaver. But if I keep studying after 16 who will pay, where will that lead? And then I can stay with Jennie, I guess, if I go to college afterwards, but if I go to uni then that is scary.



Key points

The roller-coaster ride for looked after children and young people has occasional highs but also many downs. Good news such as achieving well at school needs to be celebrated. Bad news can quickly deflate a young person, and it can sometimes unintentionally be seen as a reprimand, so timing is important.

Many looked after young people will underachieve at school and have, on average, much lower outcomes compared with their peers at the end of key stages 3 and 4 (ages 14 and 16). A minority of care leavers go on to further education and fewer still on to higher education. When a young person shows promise, as in Aimee's case, it is important to raise expectations for them if they are not seeing their own potential. Those expectations should be realistic and work should be done to build the resilience of the young person should they fall short.

The professionals in the team around the child can offer the young person plenty of emotional support but there also needs to be consistency in providing solid information and not making promises which may not be kept.

Communication and collaboration between services is vital at this stage. The looked after young person needs to know what support will be available to them and should be able to rely on that support appearing when it is needed.

Ask yourself

- Can the young person trust me? If not, why not? If so, why?
- How can I best help young people to have high, but realistic, expectations and ambitions?

Action points

- Start discussions with future care leavers at an early stage to show that, while there will be issues for them, there are also a range of options for resolving them.
- Prioritise future care leavers for taster sessions at colleges and universities.

Year 10, Autumn term

September 4th

They call themselves adults, but they let you down all the time. So what if Jennie's dad got ill and she's giving up fostering to look after him? I must have done something wrong, but what? They say blood's thicker than water, so I'm the dirty water just left to go down the plughole. Christie – my third social worker this year! – says no-one else in the area can foster me, so it's pack-your-bag time, as if my life is just a bit of luggage to be carted around. Perhaps what happened with Josh in the summer is the real reason they're moving me on.

Elaine and Andy, my new foster carers, might be OK – it's early days. I wonder what they're really like. At least she asked what I like to eat and if I want to move stuff around in my room and put up some pictures. Only one rule they have and that's RESPECT. He doesn't say much.

I should be starting my GCSEs now, but I haven't even been told which school I can go to yet.



Key points

A change of placement is far more than a change of address for looked after children and young people. They lose the security of the family routines, environment and relationships, however good or bad they may have been. If they have to move area, there is also the loss of the safety of the school, friends, the places they know and the local community. They may feel a sense of rejection and blame themselves.

Change on this scale is traumatic and young people will react in different ways such as violent outbursts, retreating into their shell, irrational behaviour, rebellious behaviour, running away or even appearing superficially calm.

If at all possible, continuity in the same school at this point should be the priority. There is evidence to suggest that academic performance will suffer after a secondary school move and that GCSE grades will be lower. However, if the young person is going to be out of school for some time, as might happen in an emergency placement, the school can help by providing work. If a child has to move school, a celebration of their achievements before they leave can give a boost to their sense of self-worth. Saying goodbye to those who have been important in their lives is crucial to being able to move forward.

A wide range of new arrangements will need to be made, including travel, with the young person being fully involved in the decision-making.

In Aimee's case, Jennie had given notice of intention to stop fostering so there should have been time to make all the necessary arrangements for her continued education.

Ask yourself

- What aspects of my life do I like to feel in control of? What effect does it have on me when I'm not in control?
- What else can I offer apart from sympathy when young people have to move homes?
- A sense of agency, having some control, is important for all young people, especially as they approach adulthood. How they can be helped to feel as if they have got some control over their lives?

Action points

- Build the coping skills of young people by helping them learn from adverse events, reassuring them of their positive attributes and being optimistic about the potential for change.
- Make sure that links to a trusted adult, such as a social worker, teacher or independent visitor, are maintained as far as possible during a placement move.
- Help the young person to say goodbye and appropriately keep in touch with friends and key adults.

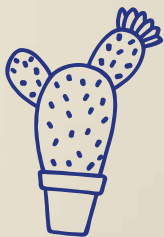
Year 10, Autumn term

October 15th

I've been out of school for six weeks while they found one which would have me. Already gutted that I had to move home and then this.

Don't they know that I want to be educated and pass some exams? I can't do all the subjects I chose before, but at least I'm doing RS and ICT for GCSE. Mrs Rees, the new English teacher, is really cool and says she will do some catch-up lessons with me, at least someone understands. The kids on the school bus are such idiots, it's embarrassing.

Still waiting for Kate to message me. I could do with a real friend right now.



Key points

Moving school at any time is very difficult for most children and young people. Combined with a change of placement, Aimee needs understanding and reassurance to mitigate potentially very negative effects.

The local authority is responsible for finding a school place for looked after children and young people, but, in practice, this task often falls to the foster carer. A school cannot refuse a place to a child who is looked after even if their classes are full, but it is not unknown for some schools to resist accepting the placement.

Before the child or young person starts, the new school needs their full record from the previous school and a briefing on their circumstances.

In Wales, the chances are that a student will be following the same syllabus in the majority of subjects. However, beyond the core subjects, the option choices available may not be the same. Non-examination assessments, which include coursework, oral assessment, fieldwork, portfolio work and practical assessment, could be carried across to the new school but this will need discussing with the individual subject teachers.

The designated members of staff for looked after children in both the old and new schools have a critical role to play during a transition by sharing information about the young person. The new school's designated member of staff should also initiate catch-up arrangements if there are any gaps in the young person's knowledge or education.

Ask yourself

- How would I feel if nearly everything in my life which made me feel secure and wanted were taken away?
- How can I gain a full picture of the needs of children and young people who have just moved schools?
- Do I help or hinder in trying to meet those needs?

Action points

- If a looked after child or young person is moving placement, be clear on where responsibility for their education lies and ensure that they do not miss any schooling.
- Set up a link between the previous and new school, for example, via the designated members of staff, to offer some continuity and support.
- Set up additional support in school and at home – socially, emotionally and academically – following a school move.



Year 10, Spring term

January 6th

So another Christmas does my head in... why can't things be like I want them to be, so I can just be left alone?

New school: 'We just want you to be happy, Aimee.'

New carers: 'Call us whatever you would like to Aimee.'

Christie, the OH SO COOL social worker: 'If you won't talk to us, Aimee, we can't help you.'

And then there's Josh, the BIG CON, stringing me along in the summer, making me feel he cared, and then the message trail starts to go cold after I move. And on Christmas Eve, he finally admits I was just a bit of fun for him. Thanks very much.

Andy and Elaine try, I suppose, but they don't know me, no-one really does, except Ms K and she's in the old school.

Don't feel like eating. No point talking to anyone. Not doing my homework. Can't sleep. I don't belong anywhere.

I don't let them see the tears...I may be lost in the black cloud but at least it's MY black cloud.

January 9th

I wrote 'My Christmas story' and sent it to Ms K. I felt a bit better afterwards, seeing it all written down.

Key points

Mental health issues are increasingly affecting children and young people, with looked after children and young people being more likely to experience them.

A child who has experienced abuse or neglect should have the opportunity to begin a process of healing once they are taken into care and given love and care by adults they can trust. All of the child's basic needs need to be met if their mental health and wellbeing are to be nurtured successfully. The interplay between their social, physical, emotional, cultural and learning needs means that any one unfulfilled need can lead to mental health issues. The powerful sense of loss, abandonment and losing her sense of identity which Aimee has experienced in moving home and school have created a potentially dangerous, depressive spiral.

Looked after children and young people should have a health care plan as part of their care and support plan. This will include details of the named doctor and nurse for looked after children in their area. Foster carers and social workers should know how to access the services available. Support is available in schools as well as via the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services; all secondary schools have a counsellor and some run emotional support programmes. The Educational Psychology Service (EPS) can assess a child or young person and offer strategies or therapies to help meet their needs.

Ask yourself

- Am I a good listener with enough knowledge and empathy to pick up the signs of a child or young person developing a mental health problem?
- Do I look after myself well enough so that I am able to support a child or young person with their own issues?

Action points

- Ensure children and young people receive consistently positive messages from all adults involved in their lives. This helps to remind them of their positive attributes and supports them to focus on their future.
- Find out about and learn to employ the PACE model, which is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that aims to make children feel safe. (See the [Dyadic Developmental Practice Network¹⁰](https://www.ddpnetwork.org/about-ddp/meant-pace), founded by Dan Hughes)

¹⁰ [ddpnetwork.org/about-ddp/meant-pace](https://www.ddpnetwork.org/about-ddp/meant-pace)



Year 10, Spring term

April 2nd

Some people aren't all bad. Thought Mrs W, head of year 10, was an old cow but she rescued me from detention. Smiler, my maths teacher, had a go at me cos I am a girl. We were doing work on household bills and I couldn't say what our weekly shopping came to. 'You won't make a very good housewife will you?' he says. Playing cool, I say, 'What does that mean?' Then he goes on about learning from my mother and the best I can expect is to stay at home and have kids.

He treats all the girls in the class like dirt, so I told him what I thought of him and just cos I said there was more than one way of abusing women and that's what he was doing now, he puts me in detention.

April 4th

Found out today that Rhian and a couple of others had gone to Mrs W to say Smiler hadn't been fair. Then Mrs W told me he shouldn't say those sorts of things again, but if he did, I should let her know.

She also told me how pleased she was with the effort I'd been making in the last few weeks. Elaine this evening reckoned I had been right to stick up for women's rights.

April 5th

Ms K got back to me to say 'My Christmas Story' was amazing and I should send it off to that magazine – but change the names. DONE!

Key points

We all have our biases and prejudices, but we do not always realise that we have made a judgement about something or someone without having proper evidence – as Aimee did with Mrs W and does about herself when she fails to see her own good side.

For young people, particularly those who have some reason to feel the world is against them, it is easy to jump to conclusions. However, there are times when a strongly held view or principle has to be defended and to do so diplomatically and effectively is a difficult skill to acquire. Aimee may not have seen her response to the gender bias of the teacher as being aggressive, but the teacher saw her response as a threat. If a looked after young person repeatedly feels that they are being treated unfairly, the added sense of injustice when they experience prejudice and discrimination can lead to more extreme reactions and disengagement.

Professionals have to take care to avoid undermining the standing of a fellow professional. The incident will have been recorded and consideration given as to whether or not disciplinary action against the teacher is justified. Education professionals are expected to treat all learners with respect and demonstrate a commitment to equality and diversity. When fundamental values are challenged, such as gender equality, an open and honest approach, emphasising that upholding values is the prime concern, is more likely to lead to improved attitudes and behaviours on all sides.

Ask yourself

- 'Fair' and 'unfair' are overused and often misused terms. What do I mean by 'fair'?
- How can I stand up to prejudice and discrimination, even when to do so makes life difficult?

Action points

- A set of core values shared between organisations and with the public should inform all professional activities. Check against the [Education Workforce Council's Code of Professional Conduct and Practice](#)¹¹.
- Find out whether complaints processes for all relevant professions in the team around the child are readily available and easy to follow.

¹¹ ewc.wales/site/index.php/en/fitness-to-practise/code-of-professional-conduct-and-practice-pdf.html

Year 10, Summer term

May 26th

Still trying to wipe the grin off my face. I got an email from the magazine and they want to print my story (without my name on so that no-one knows who I am) and pay me £50!!! Ms K will be so proud of me – and she was the one who believed in me and made it possible. Elaine and even Andy are chuffed for me – they still haven't read it, mind. Apparently, Christie needs to know so I'm waiting for him to get back to me about it.

If I'm a writer and write books, I can earn millions and then they'll make films and tv shows... not the sort of star I dreamed of but still famous – ME!

Can't get enough of English and Mrs Rees has asked if I'd read my story out in her English lesson and have it announced in assembly. BUT then everyone will know all about me and do I want that? How would mum feel, if she ever read it and she knew I wrote it?



Key points

Achievements are worth celebrating. However, the nature and extent of the celebrations have to be appropriate and proportionate to the individual and their circumstances, as achievements don't always lead to better things.

For Aimee it would be a good idea to reinforce the factors which led to the achievement. For example, she took Ms K's advice, persevered with her English and wrote honestly about her real experiences. Aimee is justified in her feelings of self-worth and motivation to go further.

However, the risks of her success include unrealistically high expectations she has of herself which could result in huge disappointment later, not being able to handle possible jealousy from her peers and losing sight of the many needs she still has. Excessive praise can often lead to young people who are not used to success becoming unrealistic about their true abilities.

For looked after young people it is usually not appropriate to have their personal circumstances exposed, so Aimee reading her story out in class is unlikely to be a good idea. As a young person gets older, they can make decisions about what to reveal about themselves but, while the role of corporate parent rests with the local authority, care has to be taken over how much personal information goes beyond those who need to know. At the same time, confidentiality procedures must be clear so that all professionals involved in the team around the child, including foster carers, have all the information they need to provide appropriate care.

Ask yourself

- Do I always give praise when it is due?
- Do I give the right sort of praise so that the person knows not just that what they did was brilliant but also why it was so good?

Action points

- Be clear on corporate and individual responsibilities in situations where a looked after child or young person might have their private lives exposed publicly.

Year 10, Summer term

July 9th

It's my fourth day of work experience at the Echo. Mrs W 'pulled strings', as they say, to get me in there to see what a writing career might look like. It's not exactly glam rock! The best thing was going out with reporter called Faye to cover a climate emergency protest at a local school. Report the facts is what they say, but whose facts are right and which ones do you leave out? Tricky.

Anyway, it's better than just making coffee and tea – I couldn't believe they asked me to do that on the first day – maybe it was a joke.

July 10th

My last day at the Echo and they asked me to write a short article myself – 100 words on exam pressures. But when the sub-editor sent it back it didn't look anything like what I had written. Elaine said she'll buy the paper tomorrow to see if they print it.



Key points

Finding suitable work experience placements is not easy for young people. For a looked after young person, extra effort may be needed by the social worker, foster carers and school to find meaningful work experience. No young people attending work experience should be put at risk in any way and for looked after young people there may be added risks which have to be managed.

The value of the work experience will vary with the relevance of the placement to the young person's interests and aspirations. Ideally, they will be given some responsibility and learn some new skills rather than just be an extra pair of hands to do menial jobs or a passive observer of the workplace.

A good experience can encourage greater ambition and increase a young person's motivation to achieve good exam results. Negative experiences do happen though, and they need to be counteracted to avoid disenchantment with the world of work.

Ask yourself

- Am I realistic and honest in how I portray the world of work to young people?

Action points

- Local authorities should consider how they might make work experience placements within their own workforce available to looked after young people.
- Teachers, careers advisers and the local authority's LACE co-ordinators should help to find and support suitable work placements for looked after young people.
- Ensure that young people have the opportunity to discuss their work experience afterwards, so that it has value as a learning experience, even if they did not enjoy it.

Year 11, Autumn term

September 18th

So life and stuff just got more confusing. I already have a PEP, an IDP, a care and support plan and probably a health plan somewhere, and now Christie is talking about having a pathway plan. I'll need a plan to find my way through all the plans!

DON'T WORRY, he says – I'm your social worker! Yeah, and then he talks about his team leader having a say, and the IRO and then I'll have a PERSONAL ADVISER and an advocate as well if I want – whatever they do.

If we write down all this stuff about the sort of future I want and how it's going to happen, then who is going to wave the magic wand so my life will all fall into place? As if all those bad times will melt away and leave me with a rosy glow Who really is the boss here? Who is pushing the buttons if it's not me?

September 27th

The college visit went OK. There are so many courses and the facilities are far better than in school where there's no sixth form anyway. I can still do English and it includes creative writing. The social care course might be OK, but there aren't any journalism courses.



Key points

When a looked after young person is 15, the local authority must start preparing a pathway plan to assist them 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 young person's existing care and support plan, which will then become part of the pathway plan along with other plans such as the personal education plan.

Included in the pathway plan should be actions which need to be taken by various members of the team around the child, as well as the young person's family and the young person themselves.

An important aspect of the pathway plan is its focus on education, training and employment. Advice should be made available and a personal adviser appointed to guide the young person through the maze of options open to them. The plan will include things like where the young person will live, the education or training they will pursue, information about jobs, money, any cultural needs, health and lifestyle. It should be reviewed at least every six months. The young person needs to take an active part in the creation of the plan and it should evolve as needs, circumstances and aspirations change.

The roles of different adults in Aimee's life may not be clear to her and she is right to question how far she is able to influence decisions and who is ultimately responsible for what happens to her. So much will appear to be outside of her experience and control.

Any time of transition is one of heightened risk and young people must be reassured that their voice and wishes are being listened to.

Ask yourself

- Who and what did I find valuable when I was preparing to enter the adult world?
- What are the risks of encouraging a young person to consider how they might plan ahead when they don't know where they will be living when they turn 18?
- How might the apprehension, anticipation and excitement of planning for an uncertain future best be managed?

Action points

- Ensure that the young person is not only fully involved in decisions about their life, but that they understand the reasons for certain decisions which may not be in line with their hopes or expectations.
- A young person's entitlements to support at different stages must be clearly explained to everyone.
- Make sure that the young person receives consistent messages from all the professionals around them.

Year 11, Autumn term

December 18th

I know what they mean now by the day after the night before. My head is doing itself in without me having to even try. Rhian had promised I could go to her party after I'd spun her my story of Christmas crapfests. So I lost track of how much I'd had to drink but the girls kept pushing more at me, and I was having FUN, and Carl was more fun again. I should remember what we did later, but I really was out of it by then so HOPING we didn't go too far!!

Throwing up back at the house wasn't the best idea. But Elaine was so cool this morning – she smelt the fags, knew about the drink, asked about drugs, but didn't give me any grief. I told her I was sorry – maybe that's the first time that's happened, and I may need her on my side later. Andy has steered clear of me all day, which is good of him as he does know when to stand back.



Key points

Many under-16s will experiment with cigarettes and alcohol; they may also be tempted to try other substances and experiment sexually.

Schools cover these issues as part of the curriculum by providing the facts, explaining the legalities and exploring the moral aspects. But this does not mean all young people will be adequately prepared for real-life situations with the excitement and adrenalin rush of a party, combined with peer pressure and behaviour-altering substances.

Schools, social workers and foster carers can help a young person to appreciate the risks they may be open to in such situations and do so without either forbidding them ever to socialise or coming across as out-of-date killjoys. If a young person appears to be under the influence of any harmful substances, the priority is to ensure they are in no immediate danger. If they have to be sent home from school, this should be done by following the formal process.

Specific issues relating to alcohol should be fully and honestly discussed between the foster carer, their supervising social worker, the young person's social worker and the young person, as appropriate to their age and understanding. The outcomes of the discussions should be recorded in the care and support plan and the foster care agreement.

Worrying changes at home or school, such as failure to complete homework, increased rudeness or less concern for personal hygiene, may be symptoms of a developing pattern of risky behaviours. These need to be noted and shared with the team around the child.

Ask yourself

- Does the young person understand the boundaries set by their foster carers and school?
- What is a good balance between support and challenge when a young person's behaviour puts them at risk?
- How can a young person respond restoratively for any upset that they have caused, with the aim of repairing any damage done and rebuilding relationships?

Action points

- The foster carer, the child's social worker and the young person themselves, should discuss together what constitutes an appropriate social life.
- Ensure good communication between home and school continues as the young person benefits when concerns are shared promptly.

Year 11, Spring term

January 9th

Boys!! Men!! All men are boys really. I've been thinking about the way Dad treated Mum and there wasn't any love there, perhaps there never had been. In the dark corners of my past I can still hear them fighting and screaming like animals. Then Josh was just stringing me along – he was only after one thing, and when he didn't get exactly what he wanted it was bye bye, Aimee.

I didn't know Carl that well, and at the party I got carried away with everything. Now he won't tell me what did or did not happen – he's probably been bragging to his mates and doesn't want to lose face. So do I have the rep of being an easy touch now? I'm a total dork.

January 12th

I finally told Elaine about me and Carl. She sorted some tests for me and at least I'm not pregnant and I haven't got anything nasty. God help the kid if I had one at my age. Though first I'd need to find someone I could trust. That rules out nearly every boy – and man – I've ever known. Good job Andy's a nice guy. Him and Elaine seem to get on well.

Key points

For a child to witness her mother being abused, besides being traumatising in itself, carries a risk that the child will then see this sort of treatment by a partner as the norm. If the father is the perpetrator, the idea of the man as abuser and woman as victim can become a pattern too easily accepted and repeated in later life.

Growing sexual awareness for any teenager raises questions and anxieties. Someone with Aimee's history may not understand the dynamics of adults being in a loving relationship and how this builds trust and security within which both can enjoy an enduring sexual relationship. Aimee is already thinking the worst of all men.

Aimee realises how she has made herself vulnerable in various ways: to the possibility of becoming pregnant, to catching a sexually transmitted infection and to gaining a reputation of which she is ashamed.

It is important for foster carers to know enough of the history of children and young people coming into their care so that they are prepared for behaviours which are already sexualised or may become so in the future. In this instance, Aimee's foster carers should take the opportunity to talk to her about safe sex and the age of consent.

Ask yourself

- Consider what influenced Aimee's risk-taking behaviour at the party. How far do her traumatic early years affect her beliefs now? How can the people around her today help her overcome this difficult experience?
- Can I share some of my personal experiences and feelings to help someone like Aimee understand that there are many ideas of what is normal and acceptable?

Action points

- Ensure that looked after young people have a trusting relationship with an adult who can offer sound advice about making good choices in their sexual behaviour.
- Help young people to understand and articulate their own feelings to give them greater control over their behaviour. Emotion coaching is one strategy you could explore.

Year 11, Spring term

February 13th

Mocks start tomorrow – Valentine's Day – don't you just love the irony? I got that cos we did irony with Mrs R last week when we were revising Mockingbird. Andy is going on at me now to revise, revISE, REVISE.

Some stuff is OK but maths and science are rank and I just don't understand a lot of it, never mind remembering it. They wanted me to do eight hours a day this weekend – my head's loaded after just one hour!

Elaine and Andy showed me the geography project their Tom did for coursework which he spent ages on for loads of evenings and weekends and how that got him his grade B. I had to explain that we don't do coursework like that any more. Apparently, they can't trust us kids not to cheat... as if!



Key points

Different people respond differently to the pressure of examinations. Preparing for a series of exams is a long-term project and few succeed by making a last-minute effort. This is often a particularly difficult time for looked after young people who may be worrying about where they are going to live and how they will support themselves as they become care leavers over the next few years.

It is the teachers' role to prepare their students for the examinations and this will include coaching in exam technique and also being given past papers, revision materials and website addresses where the students can get further help. Carers and parents should receive information from school on how they might assist their child.

Revising with a foster carer can be more constructive than with a friend. Revision lessons on offer in schools should be taken up to fill in gaps in understanding and build skills for exams for particular subjects further.

If a young person has missed lessons, it is essential that school staff and foster carers check that the work has been done subsequently.

Social workers and foster carers need to be aware of the extra pressures on young people at this time and support their needs. At home, foster carers can help young people to pace themselves with revision, take regular breaks and get a good night's sleep during both the revision period and exams.

There is, generally, less coursework than a few years ago. Students often have to undertake 'controlled assessments' which are done in the student's time outside of lessons. Subjects such as art and design have practical coursework to complete but even this will be carried out under supervision or be monitored, nearly always in school time.

Ask yourself

- What is the right balance between encouraging and cajoling to prepare someone well for examinations?
- Do I know enough about the educational and personal circumstances of a looked after young person to help them succeed when they are under pressure?

Action points

- Ensure that young people have revision timetables in place.
- Ensure that young people know the correct times for each exam, are properly equipped and have eaten properly and drunk enough water before they go into an exam.
- Encourage young people to chat about how they feel about their exams, what they need help with and how they think you can best provide that help.
- However well or badly a young person does in trial exams, help them to learn from their experiences so that they are better prepared for the real exams.

Year 11, Summer term

May 6th

Exams started yesterday with maths first up – OMG he or she up there does not like me! I'm amazed that I could do any of it... I've got FAIL written all over me.

Welsh today wasn't so bad... I learnt lots of words over the last week – da iawn Aimee,

...celf bendigedig!



I've got three good luck cards, even one from Mum. I don't hear from her for ages, she misses contacts and then sends me this sweet sickly card saying how much she misses me and wants me to do my very best. I HATE that I LOVE you.

May 19th

Two weeks in and I really don't know how the exams have gone. Rhys is always so cocky after each exam but I know he hasn't done much revision. 'It's as easy as pickin my nose,' he reckons – yuck, but he's a good laugh, I need that right now.

Rhian doesn't say much. I wish I was like what the teachers say about her – 'quietly confident'.

Elaine is being her cool self which is great; we chat about the day and what's coming up. The Prom should be amazing and she's said that I can have a special outfit as long as I concentrate on the exams for now.

Key points

Much is made of building the confidence and self-esteem of looked after children and young people, and rightly so. However, this is easier said than done. A starting point is considering their self-concept – how they see themselves.

Often someone who has been through the trauma and loss associated with having to be taken into care will perceive themselves in a negative light, perhaps feeling guilt that they are responsible in some way. They may have little sense of self-worth, feeling that they are somehow deserving of their fate.

At a critical time of life, such as taking examinations, feelings of inadequacy can come to the fore. Preparing the young person for such critical times has to include addressing their emotional needs and helping them keep their lives in perspective. There will be positives which they will need reminding about – successes at school, talents they have shown, good times when they made others feel happy, or obstacles they overcame through their own efforts.

Students can be unrealistic about how well they have done in exams, either overinflating or underestimating their success. Not knowing how well they have done will add to the anxiety of the examination experience. For a looked after young person, the added uncertainty over what happens to them after they turn 16 or 18 can make this anxiety worse.

Aimee has realised that there are certain things she can do well and that some people in her life are a force for good. But she still feels the knocks, her judgements about some people and events are dubious and her confidence can be fragile. The volatile relationship with her mother does not help but Elaine, her foster carer, endeavours to be non-judgemental and supportive of Aimee by being both reflective and forward-looking.

Ask yourself

- What do I value from others at critical times in my life?
- Does giving excessive praise lead to unrealistic expectations on the recipient's part? Is giving excessive praise better than not recognising achievements?

Action points

- Before GCSE exams begin, ensure that young people are offered as much certainty as possible over what they will be doing, where they will be living and who will be supporting them after 16 years old.
- Consider offering rewards that acknowledge the effort that young people put into their exams as well as any success that they have.

Year 11, Summer holiday

August 17th

So it has all kicked off now – it's DECISION time. Elaine had made a delicious chocolate cake ready for when I got home with the results. Andy wasn't too chuffed about the D in maths but I was well made up with five passes of at least C and an A in English!!! So much for them calling me thick!

Christie came round today, fair play to the man. We went through the pathway plan and at the last review Elaine and Andy said I should be able to stay on with them after I'm 18 if I want. Now they have confirmed that's all good. I used to think of them as being like A&E, picking up the pieces and sticking me back together every time something went wrong, but now there's a chance I can keep clear of all those car crashes.

August 26th

I went along to the college and they will take me on the English A level and Health and Social Care BTEC. I have to take the sodding maths exam again though. Roll on September...



Key points

Since April 2016, young people in Wales have had the right to stay with their foster families beyond the age of 18, under the [When I am Ready scheme](#)¹². This is intended to ensure that a looked after young person does not experience any sudden disruption to their lives, including living arrangements, education, training, employment and the development of skills for living independently.

Planning for the young person's life during the ages of 16 to 18 should already have taken place well before their 16th birthday as part of the pathway planning process, and should take account of where the young person might be living at 18 and what they hope to be doing. Pathway planning is not a one-off exercise and the plan must be regularly reviewed, as young people may frequently change their minds during this time.

GCSE results day can help crystallise a young person's thinking about the future. There are always options for continuing education, however disappointing the young person's grades are. Discussing those options with a Careers Wales adviser or someone at the school are good starting points.

Aimee will be going on to the local college which offers the full range of academic and vocational qualifications. Her level three BTEC in Health and Social Care is the equivalent of two A-levels, so her options will remain quite open at 18.

Although she is moving to a different institution, this time it will be planned. She will stay with her friends, be following courses of her choice and there is no need for her to change placement. Reducing the number of changes which have to be made at any one time gives greater continuity and security to young people.

Ask yourself

- What would I want in place for my child, or any child, when they take the next step in life aged 16?

Action points

- Ensure that looked after young people know both before and after receiving GCSE results what options are available to them for continuing their education.
- Ensure the pathway plan is a dynamic document which is owned by all parties involved, especially by the young person.

¹² thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/policy-practice/practice-information/when-i-am-ready



Year 12, Autumn term

September 24th

No more teachers, they're now 'lecturers'. No school uniform – YAY! But then I don't exactly have that many clothes and will have to wear the same ones to college each day. The café and coffee shop mean we get treated like adults and the food is more than tidy. BUT Elaine had got me free meals at school and now in college you can't have them. I don't like crawling to the student support services begging for help just because I'm in care.

I've decided to write PROPER English in my diary now that I'm doing it for A level. Learning about voice and register and all that stuff which I didn't even know I was using! The magazine still wants me to send in articles although they haven't printed any others yet.

September 30th

Christie has asked me to write something about going to college for the council's magazine. His face dropped when I asked him what was in it for me. Then he garbled something about the council being my corporate parents and they want to give me the sorts of chances any parent would want for their kids. I could do with a few quid too though, isn't that what parents also do?



Key points

When a child is in care, all elected members and officers of the local authority, as their corporate parents, need to be concerned about that child and continue to be concerned until they are well into adulthood – in many cases, until the age of 25. This includes caring about the young person's education and health as well as what they do in their leisure time and holidays, their cultural interests and how they are taking forward plans for their future.

The relationship between the child or young person and the local authority as their corporate parent cannot be the close and personal one as exists in other family set-ups. But neither is it a business or transactional relationship. Officers, elected members and frontline staff of the local authority all have a duty of care to the child or young person. Those in direct contact with the child or young person, be it a social worker, teacher, classroom assistant, and so on all have the responsibility of meeting their basic needs and creating a caring environment for them.

While where Aimee is living and her social worker have not changed, her place of education has and with it come new issues for her. Aimee's foster carers will continue to receive their fostering allowance as she is still a looked after child. The money, however, is not likely to go as far. A looked after young person who is staying at a school sixth form may still be entitled to free school meals, depending upon the foster carer's circumstances, but once in further education – like Aimee – there is no entitlement. Costs at college may be higher for such items as travel, clothing and equipment.

Some colleges and local authorities may have financial support they can offer in this situation. The young person should not be made to feel that they are a 'charity case', but that they have entitlements the same as any other person.

Ask yourself

- Am I clear on my role in meeting the responsibilities of the local authority as a corporate parent?

Action points

- Work out what additional costs may be involved in a looked after young person going to a further education college or sixth form. Finance ought not to be a prohibitive factor for a young person to continue their education.
- Ensure that all those who hold responsibility as corporate parents are fully aware of the implications for the everyday life of a young person who is a dependant of the local authority.

Year 12, Spring term

January 18th

These study lessons are great, you have time off from being in the classroom and can follow up on what you're learning. At least, that's what they are meant to be for. I met Jamie two weeks ago – he's also in care and we haven't stopped talking since.

January 29th

I had a session with Christie today on my pathway plan. He keeps saying, 'When I am Ready' when he really means it is me that has to be ready, not him.

I'm not a lot wiser now than when we first started on this last year. Yes, I'm fostered right now and then this When I am Ready scheme can take over when I'm 18 or I can be supported if I have my own place.

Whatever – I'll be on my own, but not on my own. I'll be an adult at 18 (that doesn't bear thinking about too closely!) but still sort-of cared for. Other kids can always fall back on mum and dad and at least have somewhere to bed down. But, even though Elaine and Andy have said I can stay, I'll have to sign an agreement with them.

I'm going out with Jamie tonight!



Key points

When I am Ready arrangements will be discussed at a planning meeting convened by the local authority to ensure that a young person and their foster carers understand what is expected of them once the young person is 18. While advice and support about practical and financial arrangements will be given, it can be a particularly anxious time for any looked after young person. The foster carers have to agree for the young person to carry on living with them, but the status of both changes.

Under the When I am Ready scheme, the young person is over 18 and is classed as an adult and care leaver. They will have a 'living together agreement' with their former foster carers and they are expected to contribute to their keep. They may be able to claim certain benefits, such as housing allowance.

This change in status accelerates the move to a more independent life than most young people of that age experience and they will need emotional and practical support.

If the young person doesn't want to follow the When I am Ready scheme, then there are other options, such as Supported Lodgings. Under this arrangement, the young person who is 16 or over rents a bedroom in a private home managed by a Supported Lodgings provider, and is expected to contribute towards their keep. Again, benefits may be available and support will be given by the Supported Lodgings provider and social services.

Part of learning to live independently is balancing your working life with your social life and home life. School or college post-16 offer more opportunities for socialising and testing out new interests. Romantic interests in particular can be a strong and time-consuming magnet which can draw young people away from their studies.

Ask yourself

- Is there sufficient trust in the various relationships around the looked after young person to make a When I am Ready arrangement work?
- Is everyone aware of the benefits and risks of the different options available to the looked after young person when they turn 18?

Action points

- Ensure early and close liaison between the child's social worker and the supervising social worker; this is critical to the success of the When I am Ready scheme.
- Discuss with young people what are appropriate behaviours as they approach adulthood.

Year 13, Autumn term

October 18th

Making your own decisions is NOT easy! Isn't there an app which does it all for you?

Rhian, Stace and TC are already working on their UCAS forms. Jamie just wants to get a job – he hasn't said he'll look after me though, but then it's too early for that, isn't it?

The uni runs a journalism course, all about 'finding and telling stories' which is great, as the stories keep finding me. But then they say it is 'a rigorous academic education' and that doesn't sound much like me. I must find out what jobs I can do with my Health and Social Care BTEC.

Rhian passed her driving test yesterday... ENVY. I wish I could have lessons, but I know Elaine and Andy don't have the money.

I've got a chance of getting a weekend shop job at Christmas. It'll be good for my CV, Christie says, but I say better for the pocket.

October 27th

Open day at the uni was a bit special. Is this place me? Jamie wasn't there with us, so when I saw there was a stand for 'independent students', which included care leavers, I had to go there on my own. They had loads of advice and even said I might be able to get some funding.

Key points

The range of options at 18 is vast – including higher education, further education, apprenticeships, traineeships, employment, sandwich courses and volunteering.

For those aspiring to continue into higher education, they need to complete a [UCAS¹³](#) application which needs to be submitted by the January of the same year that they want to start the course. It's very important that the young person ticks the care experienced box on their UCAS form as this will allow them to access a range of extra support and even, from some universities, a lower offer for the grades they need.

The young person must also decide if they are prepared to move away from their foster carers' home and live in student accommodation or independently to pursue their ambitions.

As they move towards adult life, young people increasingly have to make their own decisions, but they will usually appreciate guidance which is offered in the spirit of helping them reach their own decisions rather than directing them towards a particular outcome. Their social worker, personal adviser, school/college staff and foster carers all may contribute, but they must endeavour to support the young person rather than confuse them.

Taking on part-time work could be good to boost Aimee's independence and sense of personal responsibility. If paid work is not available, there are schemes which give opportunities for young people to volunteer their services which can help to broaden their experience.

Ask yourself

- How seriously can I take a young person's push for independence while making sure that they stay safe and their basic needs are met?
- If a looked after young person is about to leave care and is making what I think is the wrong decision, do I say so?

Action points

- Make the resources and time available for a young person who is about to leave care to explore their options fully. See [skillsupport.org.uk](https://www.skillsupport.org.uk) or information tailored to care leavers.
- Taster sessions, for whatever next step is contemplated, can be more instructive than lots of information.



Year 13, Summer holiday

August 8th

It's results day tomorrow and all that I can think about is bloody money. The root of all evil which makes the world go round – ha!

The holiday job is really good. The boss has offered me a full-time job in his store with the chance to train as an assistant manager if I want it.

Uni, if I get the grades, means massive fees, but there's a bursary. Is this a passport to a cool job with cash to spare, or a one-way ticket to years of debt?

Christie reckons being a social work support worker might be a good step, and after tomorrow I could have the necessary qualification with my BTEC.

Jamie's sorted with his electrician apprenticeship. But as for When I am Ready... am I ready? It doesn't feel like it. All that pathway planning and it all comes down to the number of ticks I get and the grades on a couple of bits of paper.

Elaine is doing lots of hand-holding saying they'll stick by me but I know they cannot afford to be bank of mum and dad. I have yet to hear anyone say 'bank of FOSTER CARER'!

So what will tomorrow bring? A new page for sure but what will be written on it?



Key points

Having the courage to step into the unknown is far from easy when you feel that you have been let down so many times and are still mistrustful, perhaps of both yourself and others to do the right thing. Turning 18 for anyone is a rite of passage into the adult world, and for a care leaver it will likely be more daunting with even greater uncertainties.

Emotional support is crucial and ideally there will be at least one trusted adult the young person can confide in. Weighing heavily will be the challenges of dealing with the practicalities, whether opting for the route of When I am Ready and staying with the same family or striking out on a more independent path requiring still more skills for adult living – cooking, budgeting, the discipline of a work routine, maintaining relationships, and so on.

Care leavers and the professionals who support them should explore the practical and financial assistance available to them. For example, some further and higher education institutions offer additional support for care leavers. The Welsh Government's St David's Day Fund also offers small grants to support care leavers in their transition to adulthood.

A young person on the threshold of leaving care needs the reassurance that making mistakes and taking the wrong path is all right as long as they learn from the experience and reset their life compass. The future for them, as for any young person, has to be as promising and exciting as it is challenging.

Ask yourself

- Indecision and fear of failure can be major obstacles for a care leaver to overcome. What help can I give to make their transition into adulthood a step full of hope and opportunity?

Action points

- Find out about the [St David's Day Fund](#)¹⁴ in your area. If you are part of a corporate parenting board or leaving care team, ensure that it is promoted to relevant 16- to 25-year-olds and that applications are encouraged.

¹⁴ thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/stdavidsdayfundfactsheet.pdf

Resources – how The Fostering Network can help

The Fostering Network website

The Fostering Network website at thefosteringnetwork.org.uk is an essential source of information, while our online community 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

Working as One: How foster carers and schools can work together to achieve the best outcomes for looked after children¹⁵

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. This free guide explores how education professionals and foster carers can work together to help more fostered children to build the educational foundations they need to develop into happy and healthy adults.

Safer Caring: A new approach¹⁶

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 guide¹⁷

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 care¹⁸

This free magazine, published by The Fostering Network in Wales, 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 Wales¹⁹

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 Happen²⁰

This free 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 Expectations²¹

This free 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 Hand²²

The Fostering Network in Wales teamed up with the Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE) to produce a free 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.

The four resources above can be downloaded from The Fostering Network's Education page²³.

When I am Ready FAQs²⁴

The Fostering Network in Wales has developed a free 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. This free 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.

¹⁵ thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/tfworkingasoneenglish.pdf

¹⁶ fosteringresources.co.uk/?cid=1&sid=8&pid=497

¹⁷ fosteringresources.co.uk/?cid=1&sid=8&pid=499

¹⁸ thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/all-about-fostering/resources/newsletters/thrive-newsletter-young-people

¹⁹ thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/tfeducationguideeng-min1.pdf

²⁰ thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/tfmakingithappenmagazine.pdf

²¹ thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/tfgreaterexpectationswebeng.pdf

²² thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/workinghandinhand-english-singles.pdf

²³ thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/looking-after-fostered-child/education

²⁴ thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/system/files/content/wir-faq-final-version.pdf

The Fostering Wellbeing programme

[Fostering Wellbeing](#)²⁵ is an innovative programme, funded by 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's 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 see our [training pages](#)²⁶ or email wales@fostering.net, or call 029 2044 0940.

²⁵ thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/fostering-wellbeing
²⁶ thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/get-involved/training-consultancy

Additional resources

[All Wales Protocol on Missing Children](#)²⁷

[Children Looked After Friendly Schools](#)²⁸
Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil local authorities

[The Curriculum for Wales](#)²⁹
Welsh Government, 2020

[The Education Workforce Council Code of Professional Conduct and Practice](#)³⁰
2018

[Making a Difference: A guide for the designated person for looked after children in schools](#)³¹
Welsh Government, 2017

[Skills Support for Care Leavers](#)³²
Learning and Work Institute

[Wales Safeguarding Procedures](#)³³
Cardiff and the Value of Glamorgan Regional Safeguarding Board with Emeritus Professor Jan Horwath

[When I Am Ready practice information](#)³⁴
The Fostering Network

Emotional support in education

[Resources for Emotional Literacy Support Assistants](#)³⁵

[The PERMA Model](#)³⁶

[The Thrive Approach](#)³⁷

[The PACE Model](#)³⁸

²⁷ myguideapps.com/projects/wales_safeguarding_procedures/default/chi?nocache=0.6480025297479324
²⁸ afaeducation.org/content/cia-resources/resources-in-english-adnoddau-saesneg/about-this-resource/download
²⁹ gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales
³⁰ ewc.wales/site/index.php/en/fitness-to-practise/code-of-professional-conduct-and-practice-pdf.html
³¹ gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-11/making-a-difference-a-guide-for-the-designated-person-for-looked-after-children-in-schools.pdf
³² skillssupport.org.uk
³³ www.childreninwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/All-Wales-Protocol-Missing-Children.pdf
³⁴ thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/policy-practice/practice-information/when-i-am-ready
³⁵ elsa-support.co.uk
³⁶ positivepsychology.com/perma-model
³⁷ thriveapproach.com
³⁸ ddpnetwork.org/about-ddp/meant-pace

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



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