



The Personal Reflective Journal for foster carers
(Revised version 2022)

The Fostering Communities Programme

Contents

	Page
1. Introduction	03
1.1 About reflection	03
1.2 About this guide	03
1.3 About The Fostering Network	03
1.4 About the Fostering Communities programme	04
1.5 About the author	04
2. The personal reflective journal for foster carers	05
2.1 The benefits of a personal reflective resource	05
2.2 How to use this journal - some thoughts for foster carers	06
2.3 The reflective process	06
3. Reflection topics	08
3.1 Personal learning events	08
3.2 Situations in parenting or relationships	09
3.3 Other	11
4. Conclusion	13
5. Resources and further reading	13
6. Contact details	13
Appendix 1	14

1. Introduction

1.1 About reflection

We all reflect. Reflection is a natural process where our brain works to organise our experiences (and relationships) to help us make sense, tidy up and be ready for our next experience.

This process is a continuous, unconscious process, and even happens when we are asleep and dreaming! Our brains strive to be in an organised and regulated state. So, if we're doing it already, why do we need to talk about reflecting?

By reflecting on learning events, we consolidate what we learnt and we create an action plan for taking that learning into practice. When we reflect on situations, we have time to organise our thoughts, consider each other's perspectives and emotions and are able to think clearly about what we need to do next. We can also look closely about what drives our responses, to work out if there may be alternatives we can try.

Therapeutic parenting approaches recognises the fundamental role that the caregiver plays in children's recovery from relational trauma. This is boosted through the use of reflective processes. Therapeutic approaches to parenting involve caregivers reflecting on their own thoughts and emotions, but also helping children to recognise their own in the process of co-regulating.

Foster carers recognise the role their skill set plays in the care they provide for children and are active in this process. When the concept of this journal was shared with foster carers, there was an overwhelming positive response and enthusiasm for this resource.

1.2 About this guide

As part of the Fostering Communities programme, The Fostering Network in Wales is developing learning tools and resources which are co-produced with foster carers.

This Personal Reflective Journal has been written by therapist Laura Hanks, (see below) based on views and experiences shared by foster carers, fostering service managers and fostering training officers in 2021/22 as part of the Fostering Communities programme. The guide has been through a thorough design phase, with the final product celebrating foster carers' diversity, professionalism, skill, motivation, and empowering foster carers as autonomous learners.

For more information, please email the programme team:

- [Maria Boffey](#) – Head of Operations for Wales
- [Charlotte Wooders](#) - Project Manager

1.3 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.

We have been leading the fostering agenda for more than 40 years, influencing and shaping policy and practice at every level. As a membership organisation we bring together individuals and services involved in providing foster care across the UK. We have approximately 60,000 individual members and nearly 400 organisational members, both local authorities and independent fostering providers, which cover 75 per cent of foster carers in the UK. Our views are informed by our members, as well as through research; in this way we aim to be the voice of foster care.

1.4 About the Fostering Communities programme

[Fostering Communities](#) is a national programme of improvement and support led by The Fostering Network in Wales and funded by the Welsh Government from 2020-2023. The programme supports looked after children and their foster families throughout Wales, by improving wellbeing outcomes for children and increasing the competence, confidence and motivation of the fostering workforce.

As part of this programme, we will be producing a series of briefing papers for the fostering community in Wales, which will cover a range of relevant and useful topics. Click [here](#) for a list of these resources.

1.5 About the author

Laura Hanks is a Senior Lecturer at the University of South Wales, teaching on the MSc Play Therapy (BAPT). Laura has an interest in Lifelong Learning and has been an Associate of The Fostering Network in Wales for the past seven years. She has been involved in developing numerous courses for foster carers and social workers.

As a Play and Filial Therapist (Filial therapy provides caregivers with training in basic [play therapy techniques](#) so they can use these techniques with their children), Laura's background is primarily in working therapeutically with children and families, often developing caregiver's reflective skills in relation to the therapeutic care of children. Laura is currently providing consultancy and training for Barnardo's Cymru and is a board member for Association of Child and Adolescent Mental Health ([ACAMH](#)).

Laura's qualifications include MSc Play Therapy (BAPT), MSc Play and Therapeutic Play, BSc Psychology and Education (BPS).

This project pulls together Laura's different areas of interest, bridging a gap between the training of therapeutic skills with improving outcomes for children who are care experienced. Laura's insight through extensive work with foster carers has placed their voice at the heart of this project. Laura has worked closely with The Fostering Network in Wales' team to discuss the project direction at various stages, to produce a sustainable resource which can be effective.

2. The personal reflective journal for foster carers

2.1 The benefits of a personal reflective resource

Foster carers identify that a personal reflective resource can benefit them in three different areas:



As this resource was developed based on foster carer feedback and suggestions, it has the following features:

A self-directed tool, which can be used in many ways

Foster carers wanted a resource which recognises the different ways we learn and think. The questions will help carers bring their natural reflective process to their conscious awareness, however they choose to use it. See 2.2 'How to use this journal' for more detail.

A tool which is multipurpose

Foster carers wanted a tool which can assist them to reflect on more than just training events. Reflecting on training is important for taking learning into practice, but the other sections in this guide are foster carer led.

A tool which can be used as evidence of reflecting

This guide acknowledges the effort, motivation, and autonomy of foster carers as professional learners. Sitting alongside the Post-Approval Framework, Personal Learning and Development Plan, this guide can assist foster carers in completing those questions, closing the cycle between what they learn, what they put into practice, what they want to learn more about. It may also support carers in deciding what they take to supervision.

A tool to support planning

The questions in the journal will support foster carers in organising their thoughts to help them decide what needs to be shared professionally. It will also help them plan and consider ways to approach situations in a mindful manner.

2.2 How to use this journal – some thoughts for foster carers

Essentially, this journal is a resource for each individual foster carer to use and can be used in any way that suits them. For best results, take pen to paper to make a form of record. Whether that is in your own notebook, typed into organised documents or creating a mind map. You can use the example record at the end of this guide to give suggestions for your headings.

Writing slows us down! This improves our reflective process. When writing we must think about how to communicate our issue, our feelings and our plan, so we think more clearly about it.

This also means you will be able to look back at your past reflections and use them in supervision or the annual review process if you choose to.

Reflecting tips

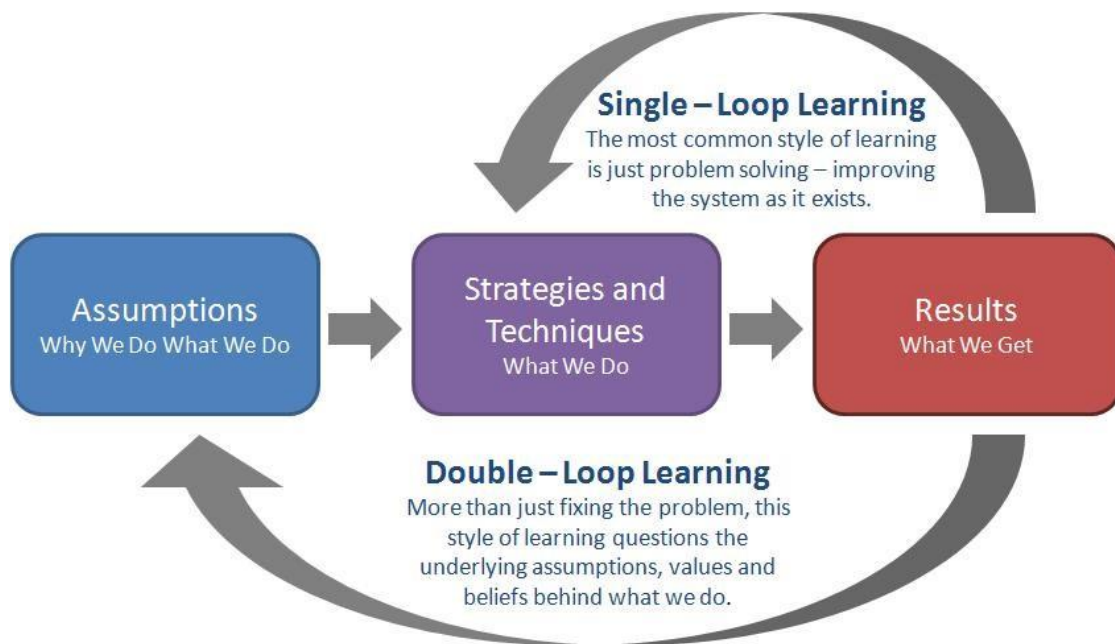
- Write like you're telling a friend
- Recording honest feelings can offload your stress
- The more you practice, the more natural it feels
- Give yourself the time, you deserve it!

2.3 The reflective process

Using this journal, you will look at situations in a 'double loop'. This means asking yourself 'why?', not just 'what?'.

It might be helpful to use the metaphor of a thermostat: a thermostat learns about the temperature of a room and switches on and off when the temperature changes. That's single loop learning.

When we think in the second loop, we want to know why the thermostat is set at that temperature, causing it to respond when it does. If we can work out why, we can also assess whether or not our strategies are right for our own individual situation.



Argyris & Schon, 1978

Image widely available: original source unknown

So, what does all that mean for our reflective journal? We're going to be using three steps, adding in that second loop into our reflections.

The three steps

Step 1: What?	Describe	Describe the situation/learning/event.
Step 2: So what?	Reflect	Looking at perspectives, assumptions, asking why.
Step 3: Now what?	Action	Thinking forward with what we will do with this information.

Driscoll, 2007 (in Bassot, 2020)

The questions in each section will follow this structure. With practice, you'll generate your own questions that relate to each specific situation.

Follow the headings to narrow down the questions that focus on the type of reflecting you are doing. It is ok to skip a question, but ask yourself why you have skipped it, and why it was asked?

The reflection topics

Personal learning events:

- Training events
- Self-directed learning

Situations in parenting or relationships:

- Discussions and meetings
- A one-off interaction
- A recurring challenge

Other:

- General reflecting
- A call caring for a new child

3. Reflection topics

3.1 Personal learning events

A training event

<p>Step 1:</p> <p>What? Describe</p>	<p>Describe the situation/learning/event</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the key learning points for me? • What was good about this event? • What was challenging? • What did I feel? • What did I think about?
<p>Step 2:</p> <p>So what? Reflect</p>	<p>Looking at perspectives, assumptions, asking why</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did this link in with prior learning, or what I already do? • Why did I feel the way I did? • What did I learn about myself? • What did I learn about others?
<p>Step 3:</p> <p>Now what? Action</p>	<p>Thinking forward, with what we will do with this information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will I do differently, after this learning? • What will I look back on, to revise or revisit? • Do I need to know more? • How will I learn more? • What will I take to supervision?

Self-directed learning

<p>Step 1:</p> <p>What? Describe</p>	<p>Describe the situation/learning/event</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What led me to this learning? • What did I do/read/watch?
--	--

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the key learning points for me?
Step 2: So what? Reflect	Looking at perspectives, assumptions, asking why. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did this link in with prior learning, or what I already do? • Why did I feel the way I did? • What did I learn about myself and others? • Did I think about something specific, in my current practice?
Step 3: Now what? Action	Thinking forward, with what we will do with this information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will I do differently, after this learning? • What will I look back on, to revise or revisit? • Do I need to know more? • How will I learn more? • What will I take to supervision?

3.2 Situations in parenting or relationships

Discussions/meetings

Step 1: What? Describe	Describe the situation/learning/event <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was discussed? • What was the new information? • What are the views shared by others? • What are my thoughts and feelings about this? • What did I contribute, or did I receive information?
Step 2: So what? Reflect	Looking at perspectives, assumptions, asking why <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did this relate to my role and what I do? • What makes the other person hold their view about what was discussed? • Do I agree? Why? • Why do I feel the way I did? • How did that affect how I responded? • Do I feel heard? Do others feel heard? • What did I learn about myself?
Step 3: Now what? Action	Thinking forward, with what we will do with this information

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there something I can do to prepare myself for planned changes? Or skill-up on an issue we discussed? • How will this discussion/meeting affect my role and what I do? • What will I discuss in supervision? • What will I take to supervision?
--	---

One-off interaction

Step 1: What? Describe	Describe the situation/learning/event <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What happened? • What happened before? And after? • If it was an action, what did it achieve? • What are the views shared by others? • What are my thoughts and feelings about this situation?
Step 2: So what? Reflect	Looking at perspectives, assumptions, asking why <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why did I feel the way I did? How do I know? • What does their behaviour/body language communicate? • Do I feel heard? Do they feel heard? • What did I learn about myself? • What did I learn about them?
Step 3: Now what? Action	Thinking forward, with what we will do with this information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will I do anything differently in future? • Do I need to revisit this situation? If yes, what do I need to do? • What are the key messages? Safety, feelings, listening to each other? • What will I discuss in supervision?

A recurring challenge

Step 1: What? Describe	Describe the situation/learning/event <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What happens each time this occurs? • What happens before? And after? • If it was an action, what did it achieve?
---	--

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What aspects are the same, each time? What are the differences? • What are the views shared by others? • What are my thoughts and feelings about this situation?
Step 2: So what? Reflect	Looking at perspectives, assumptions, asking why. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the behaviour/body language/this situation communicate? • Can I identify a need/want, aside from the behaviour? • Why does it make me feel this way? How do I know? • Do I feel heard? Do they feel heard? • What did I learn about myself? • What did I learn about them? • What strategies have I already tried? • How would I know we are making progress?
Step 3: Now what? Action	Thinking forward, with what we will do with this information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can I re-address the need/want when the behaviour/situation isn't happening? • What are the key messages? Safety, feelings, listening to each other? • Is there something I can do differently, to address the issue behind the situation? • What will I discuss in supervision?

3.3 Other

General Reflecting

Step 1: What? Describe	Describe the situation/learning/event <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is going well? • What are my current challenges? • How am I feeling right now? • How do I feel when I look back at this last week? • What makes me feel a sense of achievement?
Step 2: So what? Reflect	Looking at perspectives, assumptions, asking why. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why am I drawn to thinking about each of the things listed above? • How do I know when I have done something well?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do I know there is something to improve? • How do I know when challenges are improving? • What makes learning new things a challenge?
Step 3: Now what? Action	Thinking forward, with what we will do with this information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will I focus on tomorrow? • What will I focus on this week? • Is there something I can do differently, to address one of my challenges? • What am I looking forward to? • What will I discuss in supervision?

A call about caring for a new child

Step 1: What? Describe	Describe the situation/learning/event <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What information is shared? • What are my first thoughts and feelings?
Step 2: So what? Reflect	Looking at perspectives, assumptions, asking why <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do I feel the way I do about this? • Why is my home suitable for this child? • Do I have the necessary skills? • Thinking about skills, do I need to learn more? • Who will this impact? • Thinking about the needs of those already in my household, how will this impact each person? (anonymise) • Thinking about impact logistics, what will need consideration? Short and long term, weekly routines etc.
Step 3: Now what? Action	Thinking forward, with what we will do with this information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will I proceed? • Logistically, is there anything that needs to be arranged? • Do I need any training? Resources? Support? • What support will I need for each person considered above? • What will I discuss in supervision?

4. Conclusion

The role of a foster carer is a challenging one. Almost every day, if not several times a day, situations arise which require careful reflection and action. Of course, one of the challenges is finding the opportunities to take time for reflection. We hope that this resource equips foster carers with one possible way to reflect and that the questions set out above are useful in helping carers describe the situation, think about the 'so what' and decide upon relevant actions. We believe that following these steps will help foster carers, but will also result in better experiences and outcomes for the children in their care.

At the end of this document (Appendix 1) is an example of a **reflective journal record template**. An editable version can be accessed [here](#) which can be printed off or saved on a computer for foster carers to use on a regular basis.

If you have any suggestions about the reflective journal or would be willing to share anonymised examples of how you have used it, please do get in touch at wales@fostering.net.

5. Resources and further reading

For further information on reflecting, you might like to read:

- Bassot, B. (2020). *The Reflective Journal*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
- North, J. (2014). *Mindful therapeutic care for children: A guide to reflective practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers ISBN: 978-1-84905-446-1

6. Contact details

If you would like more information about anything in this paper please contact: maria.boffey@fostering.net

The Fostering Network in Wales
33 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF11 9HB.
Telephone: 029 2044 0940
Email: wales@fostering.net
Website: thefosteringnetwork.org.uk



Appendix 1

Reflective Journal Record	
Date:	
Reflecting on:	
Step 1: What? (Describe)	
Step 2: So what? (Reflect)	
Step 3: Now what? (Action)	
For supervision	