

Thrive

Keeping in touch with family and friends

GET CONNECTED

All the different ways you can keep in touch

When will I see my big sis again?

Ask Matt

The
Fostering
Network

Good times!

Where to go and what to do

TAKE CONTROL

Dealing with your emotions

KIERAN'S ON A HIGH!

The Rickshaw Challenge star on his family's ups and downs

Get the lowdown...

IN THIS ISSUE OF *Thrive* ...

3	Good times! You tell us about your best family contact .	4	Contact: the lowdown – your rights and how to make sure you're listened to.
5	Real life! How an Xbox helped Teg re-connect with her little brother.	6	Rows, doubts and smelly offices. Don't stress! Matt's here to sort you out.
8	Worries and fears getting you down? How to prepare for seeing your family and chill-out afterwards.	10	The Rickshaw Challenge's Kieran on his family's ups and downs .

Hey guys!

You've told us that keeping in touch with your family and friends is mega-important to you. It's tough to be separated from people you care about. But we know that lots of the stuff about meeting up with them can be stressful too.

This issue of Thrive is here to help!

We've talked to young people in foster care about their experiences and we've got loads of tips to make things better.

So, whether you're worried about seeing your dad, you want to say hi to your previous foster carers or you'd like some ideas about how to keep in touch with your BFF from your old school, we've got some ideas.

Enjoy!

Thrive xxx

A big up to...

...all the young people who've shared their ideas and experiences with us.

When it comes to writing Thrive, we aim to tell our readers' real-life stories and reveal your smart solutions to problems. Who better to ask? You all live with the reality of fostering day in, day out. Without your contributions, we just couldn't create this mag. Thank you!

A shout out too to Voices from Care, The Fostering Network's youth ambassadors, the NYAS Shout Out group from Caerphilly and Reaching Wider in Swansea.

Good times

'We had a picnic in the park with my mum. She bought some food and made us a big picnic. She brought her boyfriend and her dog along too. I liked the fact that she had already met someone that had helped her get back on her feet.'



When contact goes well!

'The best time was when I had contact with grandparents from my dad's side. It was in their house around Christmas time and there were a lot of jokes and laughter, and reminiscing. And we took a bag of sweets home.'



Keeping in touch with family and friends can be brilliant when everything goes well. Fostered young people in Wales tell us about how they've made it work well

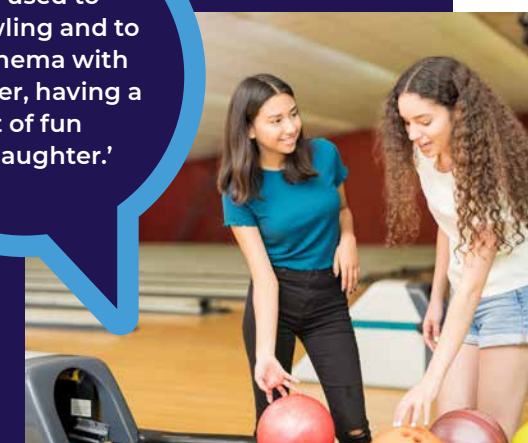
'We went out for food in Harvester with my nan. It was the best because we had a good catch-up and she met my boyfriend.'



'I keep in touch with my mam and nan with phone calls.'



'We used to go bowling and to the cinema with my sister, having a lot of fun and laughter.'



'I wrote letters to mam and dad and they always replied.'



Get in touch

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The Fostering Network



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Contact: be in the know



What is contact? Isn't it what I call 'Family Time'?

Contact is seeing or being in touch with your parents, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, cousins, friends or even former foster carers – anyone who is important to you.

Your social worker and foster carers can help you sort out contact. There are lots of different types – in a contact centre or sometimes out in the community, like in a walk in the park or at McDonalds. Some young people use social media like Instagram or Snapchat to keep connected too.

What is a contact order?

A judge in a court makes a contact order and this sets out which members of your family or other important people you should see or keep in touch with. The order might describe how you can keep in touch, such as by seeing each other face-to-face or through letters or phone calls. The judge may also say that contact should be supervised by someone else, such as your foster carer or social worker.

When are they going to listen to my feelings about contact?

Your care and support plan will include a section about contact with your family and this is usually discussed at your looked after child review meeting. Your independent reviewing officer will talk to you before the meeting to find out what you think about contact.

If you're not happy with the arrangements, you can speak to your social worker or foster carer at any time.

If you need help getting your point of view across, an advocate could help.



'I like to stay in contact with my foster carer because of how much she helped me change my life.'



Lots of young people want to keep in touch with foster families that they've lived with before. The Fostering Network thinks that this is important too and is campaigning to make sure that all young people are helped to maintain connections like this.

If you want to get in touch with a previous foster family, ask your foster carers, independent reviewing officer or social worker to help.

Know your rights!

- ✓ If you're in care, you have a right to see your family and other people who are important to you.
- ✓ But this can only happen if it's safe for you and if it's what is considered to be the best thing for you overall.

Real life stories:

Playing and chatting

Swansea uni student Teg was separated from her brothers and sisters when she went into foster care. But she and one of her younger brothers came up with an imaginative way to re-connect

I went into care just before my 17th birthday. I had contact with my whole family, but I didn't like it. I just wanted to see my three younger siblings. They all had contact together, but I wasn't allowed to be part of it.

One of the first things I bought with my own money was an Xbox. My 11-year-old brother had an Xbox too and he explained it to me. I really loved video games and we played together online. It kept our bond going.

With the Xbox you can play with other people, or you can do private chats. My brother and I had small conversations. We didn't talk about heavy topics, but I asked him how school was or what he was up to and we shared funny stories.

'Sibling relationships are really important – I love my younger sister and brothers. It's nice to have someone to relate to who is a similar generation to you.'





I miss my sis

Q I don't know when I'm going to see my big sister again. She's moved a long way away, but I really miss her. What can I do?

Matt says: **You've got a right to keep in touch with people who are important to you.** Big brothers and sisters can give you really good advice and support when you're feeling low, and they often understand exactly what you're going through.

It's important that you **tell your social worker, foster carer or independent reviewing officer (aka IRO) that you'd like to see your big sister.** You can also talk about it in your looked after child review meeting.

If you need help to say what you want to happen, all looked after children have the right to be supported by an advocate. Depending on where you live in Wales, the **National Youth Advocacy Service** or **TGP Cymru** can provide you with an advocate who will either help you to get your opinions across or speak up for you. You or your social worker can contact NYAS on **0808 808 1001** or see **youngpeople.nyas.net**. TGP Cymru is on **029 2039 6974** or see **tgpcymru.org.uk**.



A PROBLEM SHARED

Ask Matt...



Social worker stress

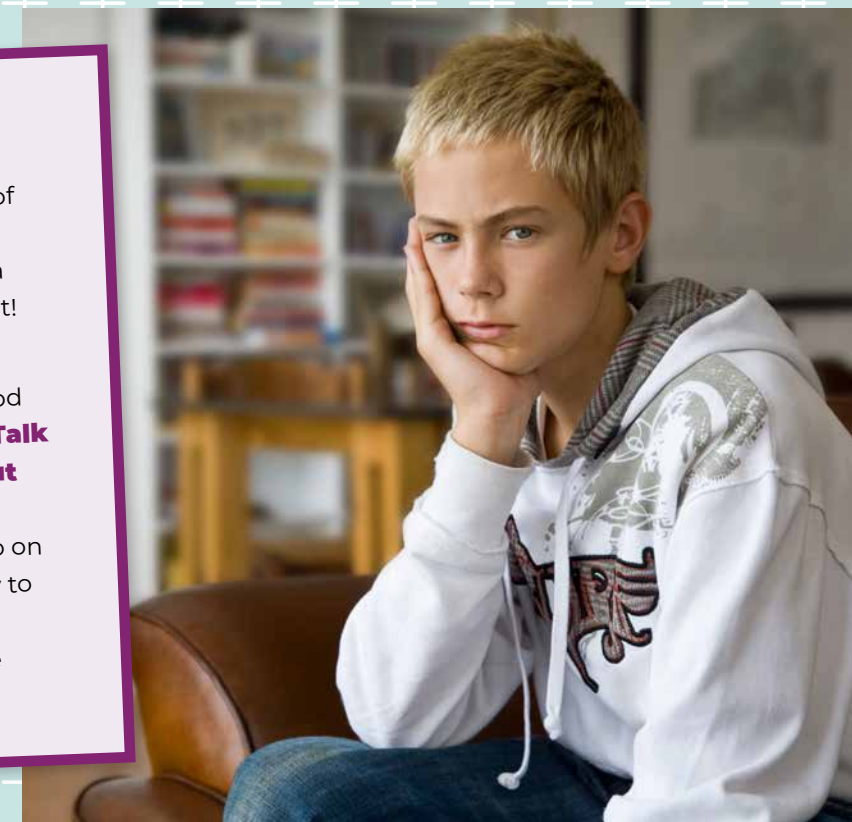
Q My social worker comes out with me and my family and just sits there wearing his massive social worker badge and writing in his notebook all the time. It's really clear to everyone else nearby that we're not a normal family and it's super embarrassing.

Matt says: **Your meetings with your family might have to be supervised by your social worker to ensure that you're safe and that everything goes well.** But he doesn't have to make it really obvious that he's your social worker. Ask him to explain what he's going to write about and if he could write things down afterwards. And why don't you see if he'll take off his badge too?

More fun please

Q I don't want to meet my family in the horrible council office again – it smells of gone off coffee, the chairs are dirty and there's nothing to do. They have this manky sofa and there's not enough room for us all to sit on it! Why can't we do something more fun?

Matt says: I agree – a boring office is not a good place to enjoy spending time with your family. **Talk to your social worker or foster carer about other places you might like to go.** But remember that although you might want to go on a crazy day out, that might not be the best way to develop your relationship with your family. Together, I'm sure you can come up with some ideas that'll keep you all happy and safe!



Got a problem? Get an answer you can trust, right here.

Q I'm seeing my mum soon, but I'm really nervous about it because I'm never sure if she's going to turn up and, when she does, we always argue. Do I have to see her so often?

Matt says: It sounds like the thought of meeting your mum is stressing you out. Ask your social worker or foster carer to help you think of some things to talk about that won't result in a big row. You could **take along some photos of what you've been doing recently or a game to play too** and these might keep your minds off the difficult stuff.

How often you see your mum will be stated in your **Contact Order**, this is when the court says how often you should see or speak to your mum. **If you want contact to stop with your mum you should discuss your feelings about this with your social worker.** It might be better for your relationship with your mum to stick to different types of communication, like telephone calls or texts for a while.

This might be a good time to have a big review of the contact that you have with your relatives. With the help of your foster carer, social worker or advocate you could write a list of the people that are important to you, think about how you'd like to keep in touch with them and how often. You can all discuss this at your next looked after child review and then change the contact section in your care and support plan.



Contact conflict

Don't get stressed

TAKE CONTROL!

Seeing your family can make you experience a whole range of emotions

Before contact, you might worry about things like this:

'What are we going to talk about?'

'What are we going to do?'

'Will I enjoy it?'

'Who is going to be there?'

'Will my mum turn up today?'

'Are there going to be any arguments?'

After contact, you could have these sorts of feelings:

'I feel happy that things have gone well.'

'I'm excited about the next contact.'

'The weight of worrying about them has been taken off my shoulders.'

'I'm confused because I don't know who to believe.'

'I'm bored because we were having fun and now I don't know what to do.'

'I'm tense and upset.'



It's normal to feel nervous before you see people who are important to you. Preparing yourself really well can help.



Zoe says: 'If you're stressed beforehand, do something you enjoy. I listen to music.'



Ollie says: 'Find out as much as you can from your social worker about who is going to be there, where you are going to go and when you will go home.'

You might feel emotional after meeting up with your family or friends and this can make it really hard to concentrate at school or relax when you get home.



Alun says: 'I like going for a nice walk with my foster carer afterwards.'

Tina says: 'Don't bottle things up. Have a chat with your foster family about what happened.'



Real life stories:

Kieran's on a high!

18-year-old Kieran, who has been in foster care, recently took part in the BBC Children in Need and The One Show's Rickshaw Challenge. He tells us what the 400-mile journey was like and gives us an insight into his own family's ups and downs

What was the Rickshaw Challenge all about?

I was part of a **team of six young people**, helped by BBC Children in Need, **who rode in a rickshaw more than 400 miles** over eight days. We set off from Calais in France, cycled through the Channel Tunnel, then headed north through England and Wales towards the finish line in Manchester.

Since 2011, The Rickshaw Challenge has raised more than £21 million for BBC Children in Need.

What was the Rickshaw Challenge like?

It was amazing! It was kind of nerve-wracking, but the support from the public was incredible. I'm still on a proper high from it. And **the other young people who did it too are like my family now**.

What sort of relationship did you have with your family when you were in foster care?

I saw my mum quite a lot, but actually **having that much contact wasn't great**. I'd get back from seeing my family really angry and upset, and that didn't help at school either. My social worker and my foster carers suggested that we cut it back, but I didn't listen to them.

Since the Rickshaw Challenge, you've been more in touch with your dad. What's that like?

I was never really close to my dad. I knew he was there for me, but because he lived far away I didn't see him very often. After the Rickshaw Challenge, **he got in touch and said he was proud of me** and I've got to know him a bit more now. It's a bit weird, but it's nice.

You're 18 now. What are your ambitions for the future?

I'm at college studying to become an electrician. Hopefully, I'll find an apprenticeship and then have my own business one day.

Young people in care get a really bad reputation and they are told they will never really amount to anything. I did the Rickshaw Challenge to inspire young people to do something that they've always wanted to do!

