

Fosterline Wales Factsheet: Saying goodbye to children and young people

Introduction

Saying goodbye is something that every foster carer has to face at some point in their fostering career. You will experience a range of emotions. Sadness to see them go may be mixed with the pleasure of seeing them move forward in their life.

The Fostering Network believes that foster carers and young people must be supported to develop positive and strong bonds, and be encouraged and enabled to maintain contact once they no longer live together. For more information see The Fostering Network's Keep Connected campaign: thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/keep-connected

If transition planning is done well, children not only show less traumatic behaviour, but they also feel more empowered to develop secure attachments with their new families.

This factsheet looks at good practice and the emotional impact on you and your family.

Moving on

There are many reasons why a child or young person will leave your home. They may be a young adult moving to independence, a child returning to their birth family or moving on to another foster home or adopters.

Sometimes a child will move on because it's just not working out. Foster carers need to accept that there are times when they can't provide the care a child needs. This doesn't mean you have failed, just that someone else's skills may be better suited to help that child.

Change is difficult for children and young people. Moving is a time of upheaval and uncertainty. Making any transition as smooth as possible is in the interests of the child or young person, now and in the future. The child should feel cared for and valued, and will take that with them wherever they go.

It is important for foster carers to let their supervising social worker and the child's social worker know as soon as they feel that they are unable to provide the care the child needs, as support may be identified that could help.

It is useful to make sure that everyone understands your concerns e.g. supervising social worker, independent reviewing officer and child's social worker.

Foster carers will need to check what agreement they have with their fostering agency about what is expected of them in terms of giving notice to end the placement.

Preparing to say goodbye

There's no specific guidance in the regulations and standards for helping a child move on. Here are some guidelines for good practice:

- A statutory review must be held before terminating a placement for a looked after child. (Code of Practice, change of placement Code of Practice 6 of the SSWBA 2014.)
- Follow the agreed plan. You and the child should be consulted. If not, or if anything is unclear, contact the social worker and your supervising social worker.
- Involve the child or young person. Let them know what's going to happen. Make sure they understand why they are moving.
- Make space for the child to talk to you about their feelings.
- Continuity is important. Pass on information to the new carers, including the birth family if they go home, like the child's health records, reports and achievements at school, their savings account and so on. Write something about their likes and dislikes too.
- Use ways appropriate to the child's age and understanding to help the child understand what's happening, such as drawing pictures, scrapbooking, especially written children's stories.
- Encourage the child to tell the new carers about themselves - likes/dislikes/interests/favourite food, TV programmes, computer games etc.
- Life story work helps the child or young person better understand their identity, their life and therefore makes them stronger for the future.
- Be clear who is going to take the child or young person to their new home. There's no set rule for this. Generally, it's best you say 'goodbye' from your home and the child's social worker takes them. If the answer to the question, 'what's best for the child?' is that you do so, consider this, but do not feel compelled into making the move just because it's not convenient for anyone else.

A good move

Involve the child or young person in getting ready for their move. Pack together and choose together what they take and what they wear on the day.

Pack their possessions in suitcases and sturdy holdalls that they keep. Make arrangements for larger items like bikes - your fostering service will help. Encourage the child or young person to take anything that they want to. Don't throw away toys or clothes that are too young for them without careful consideration. There's a danger you will throw away their past.

Include their memory box, photos, mementoes. Copy digital photos to a memory stick. Make copies for your family album.

Enable the child or young person to say a proper 'goodbye' to their friends, school, clubs and your family. Discuss what they are going to say, maybe give them a form of words to explain if they are not sure. It might be appropriate to have a small gathering to mark the goodbye, with family, close friends, anyone significant in the child's life. A gift or a card marks the goodbye too. Find a way of saying, 'I am glad I cared for you, I will remember you.'

Looking after yourself

You are close, you've built up attachments, you've been through a lot together - now that has to end. It's hard.

- Be prepared. Your feelings are natural. Share them in supervision with your supervising social worker and in support groups. Go to training. Know who you can talk to - family, friends.

- Think about what's next. Will you take a break to refresh yourself? Has your experience affected the type of fostering you want to do in the future? Talk to your supervising social worker.
- The young person's move will affect the other children in the household. Your birth children may feel a sense of loss, grief, but may also have mixed feelings. Talk to them and involve them in the process as much as possible as they also need to say 'goodbye'. Involve your supervising social worker. Is there a support group for sons and daughters of foster carers in your area?
- Talk to the other children in the house. They will experience the same range of emotions. Younger children might be confused - why is my foster sister suddenly leaving? Will I have to leave my parents too? Other fostered children may wonder if they are about to be moved on as well. Involve them in the process as much as possible as they will also need to say 'goodbye'. Stand back and reflect on what you have achieved. Recognise success and progress, which often get lost in the busy lives of carers.

How The Fostering Network can help

The Fostering Network offers advice, information and support. Our expertise and knowledge are always up to date and available through our vital member helplines, publications, training and consultancy.

Advice

Fosterline Wales

Call us on 0800 316 7664 from 9.30am - 12.30pm Monday to Friday. If you call outside this time please leave a message and someone will call you back as soon as possible.

You can email us or write to us at:

Fosterlinewales@fostering.net

The Fostering Network Wales

1 Caspian Point, Pierhead Street

Cardiff Bay CF10 4DQ

Support and resources

Our website is an essential source of information, while our online community brings together foster carers for peer support and advice. You can login 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. thefosteringnetwork.org.uk

For web based information visit thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/looking-after-fostered-child/saying-goodbye-children

Training and consultancy

Wherever you are in your fostering career, as a foster carer, social worker or manager, The Fostering Network has a range of training designed to meet your development needs. For more information, contact our learning and development manager, Sarah Mobedji at sarah.mobedji@fostering.net.

About The Fostering Network

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of fostered children to make foster care the very best it can be.

Contact us

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

1 Caspian Point, Pierhead Street
Cardiff Bay CF10 4DQ

Telephone: 029 2044 0940

Email: wales@fostering.net

Web: thefosteringnetwork.org.uk



/thefosteringnetwork



@fosteringnet

© The Fostering Network 2017