



The  
Children's  
Society

# Friendship for All

*A 'how to' guide to help children in care  
have more opportunities to make friends*

[childrenssociety.org.uk/friendshipforall](https://childrenssociety.org.uk/friendshipforall)

Giving young  
people the  
opportunity to  
make friends.

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# 1 Introduction to this 'how to' guide

## Why does friendship matter to children and young people in care?

Children and young people in care have particular difficulties when making and securing friendships. They are more likely to experience frequent changes of school and home, resulting in repeated disruptions to their friendships.

*'Maintaining friendships can be especially challenging for the 1 in 10 children in care living outside of their home local authority and more than 20 miles from their home communities.'* From a distance: Ofsted (2014).

Not surprisingly, children in care tell us that friendship is vitally important to them, and in some cases the loss of friendship when moving to a new foster carer was the most profound loss of all. Young people reported that their friendships were rarely, if ever, discussed at their review meetings and they had little or no knowledge of their friendship history. A number of young people in care describe bullying as a common occurrence when they start a new school.

Children in care are significantly more likely to have special educational needs and mental health issues than their peers, with many required to attend special schools outside of the community they live in. Seeing friends outside of school can be particularly problematic for this group of children, who may not have autonomy, communication skills and the capacity to use social media. Children in care will need the encouragement and practical support of their foster carers and social workers if they are to have friends.

'67.8% of children in care have special educational needs. 28% of children in care have a statement of education needs or an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) compared to less than 7% of their peers.'  
(DfE 2014).



'There are fears that I might not fit in because of who I am, sometimes people start a fight with you even though they don't know you, just because you're new to the school.'

Foster carers wanting to support children's friendships are sometimes prevented from making what they see as sensible, safe and timely decisions due to how delegated authority is interpreted. The permission of a child's social worker to approve a school trip or 'sleepover' is a requirement in some local authorities and agencies. In practice, securing this permission can be time consuming, often resulting in disappointment and missed friendship opportunities for children in care. While fully appreciating the need to keep children safe, foster carers would like to regularly review delegated authority.

'Not only is there a different interpretation of delegated authority between LAs, there is even a different interpretation between professionals working on the same team.'

**Supervising social worker**

To produce this guide, we have been led by the outcomes of our national survey undertaken in partnership with British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) and the findings of widespread consultations with social workers, children's rights workers, foster carers and children in care. The full document is available on our website's Children in Care section. We found examples of good practice and much enthusiasm for the notion of children enjoying friendship, and yet friendship was not explicitly or consistently included in procedural tools used to support children in care.

A good start to improving friendship outcomes will be an acknowledgement that children's friendships are so important they deserve to be included in friendship agendas and forms, to ensure that no opportunity is missed for children in care to have a friend. We are sharing best practice, tools and forms which can be easily customised to individual organisational requirements. This guide is disarmingly simple to use and there is no additional cost requirement to any developments and changes you wish to take forward.

# 2 Foster carer assessment and panel

The value we put on the importance of friendship for children in care should be acknowledged in Form F assessments, panel meetings and foster carer training.

## Form F assessments

These provide an important opportunity to explore how prospective foster carers view friendship in their own lives and begin to discuss how they will support the children in their care to have the best possible chance to enjoy friendship. This kind of discussion will help communicate to prospective foster carers at an early stage of the process that their agency and/or local authority place a high value on children's friendships, and that foster carers have a vital role to play in encouraging, supporting and sustaining the friendships of children in their care.

Not all Form F assessments include questions and prompts to help pull together a prospective foster carer's views and approaches to friendship. However, there is no reason why additional prompts should not be added in the relevant relationship sections. Foster care services in our Friendship for All pilots now routinely add the following supplementary questions under the heading of relationships:

'The Fostering Network England's newly amended Form F assessment includes specific guidance for the social worker undertaking the assessment, under Section G3.4: play and activities: "What is the experience of the applicant and their own children (if any) of friendships? How would they help a child to develop and maintain friendships?'

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**How important is friendship in your personal life?**

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**How might you view your role as a foster carer in respect of children's friendships?**

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**How might you manage the friendships of children in your care?**

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### Foster care panel meetings

Foster care panels will formulate questions for prospective carers and their social workers as they consider relevant. An inclusion in the Form F assessment relating to the management of friendships may well initiate the interest of panel members and invite them to ask additional relevant questions. There is nothing to prevent individual panel members from exploring friendship and the friendship culture of the

applicant, together with their capacity and state of readiness to manage the friendships of children in care. Such questions might have the added advantage of communicating to prospective carers the importance their panel place on the friendships of children in care. Panel members may not have previously considered friendship as part of their deliberations.



### Practice change

Following discussion with Jenny about the importance of a panel discussion in relation to friendship, she agreed to raise specific questions at her next panel meeting for carers seeking approval. Before Jenny had raised the issue of friendship, it was never formerly mentioned, considered or talked about when approving foster carers. Friendship now routinely forms part of the discussion when approving new foster carers.

'I asked the two questions about friendships at the fostering panel and I explained to the group the reasons behind them. One was about what friendships meant to the foster carers and also how would they ensure the children cared for maintained their friendships. I've definitely raised awareness on this, but there is some way to go, as sometimes professionals spoke of maintaining relationships with previous placements, so I had to keep bringing it back to friendships.'

**LA Locality Team Leader,**  
Children's Services and Panel Member

# 3 Foster carer training and supervision

The majority of foster carers will naturally consider that supporting and encouraging the friendships of children in their care is an integral part of their role. Many foster carers agree that this requirement can present them with particularly difficult challenges which need to be addressed in training and supervision.

The complications and barriers to friendship are well known to social workers and foster carers alike. They might include children with learning disabilities and attachment disorders, children who lack social skills with limited practice of friendship, and children being removed from familiar friendships due to their placement being out of county.

The majority of foster carers we have contacted would like to see their training programme reflect the role they will inevitably play on a daily basis in supporting children to get the most out of their friendships, whether this is part of their preparation training or as a development day theme. They would like their agency and supporting social worker to provide them with useful, up to date, local information about activities appropriate to the age and developmental stage of children in their care. A familiar dilemma for foster carers is how to help a child who has significant attachment difficulties and is struggling to make friends.

'It almost feels like the child needs coaching about what to say in certain situations (he often causes offence to his peers) in order for him to develop social skills.'

**Supervising social worker**

'80% of respondents to our national Friendship for All survey do not currently provide their carers with training about how to help children to make friends and nurture friendships. Respondents felt friendship fitted well within the following themes: children with attachment difficulties; disabled children; proactive support for carers; life story work and support for care leavers.'



We have responded to these requests by creating an easy to use training resource that's freely available to all who work with children in care. The training is intended to offer new perspectives, open up discussion about the management of children's friendships, and encourage the sharing of proactive and workable strategies from the experience of foster carers themselves. The training exercises can be downloaded, photocopied and customised to individual organisational requirements and integrate well with carer preparation training. This bespoke training will also be a useful tool when running a friendship-themed development training session and will aid carer support group discussions or supervisions.

**You can download your training using the following link:**

**[www.friendshipforall.org.uk](http://www.friendshipforall.org.uk)**

The exercises allow foster carers to explore how they define friendship compared with other training group participants, identify possible cultural differences and consider what extra help they might need from the community. The training social worker might want to share information about what activities for children are available in the local area, eg, after school clubs, cubs or foster carer network groups where children in care can get to know one another.

### **How can supervision support children's friendships?**

While our survey and consultations identified little evidence of the explicit inclusion of children's friendships in supervision meeting agendas, many respondents think supervision is the best place to encourage and support foster carers. We should make friendships an 'expectation' of carers and not just something they might want to consider. Although 37 respondents talked about 'encouraging' friendship, only one respondent to our survey mentioned this being an agenda item.

To stop children's friendships being lost in the richness of the reporting form language - and to ensure friendships are regularly discussed and actions recorded, friendship should be specifically identified in supervision meeting forms.

### **An extract from North Yorkshire County Council's Record of Supervision visit by foster social worker to foster carer illustrates this document well:**

|   |   |            |
|---|---|------------|
| 5.<br>How are the carers promoting the children's emotional resilience? | (Are children being encouraged/supported by their foster carers to develop skills <b>in building and maintaining friendships</b> and positive relationships?) | Action by: |
|---|---|------------|

Supervisions are the best place to consider each child's friendship needs, offering foster carers the chance to receive advice and practical solution-focussed help when needed. Carer support groups can facilitate valuable discussions and sharing good practice.

The resources we've produced include training scenarios and practical exercises that have resulted in productive discussions and new perspectives for foster carers. Optimising friendship chances for children may well include discussions in supervision about the role of the child's school and how Pupil Premium Plus funding could be targeted towards friendship.

# 4 Writing agreements and protocols

## **Pupil Premium Plus**

Children may benefit from additional support and encouragement at school to help them overcome obstacles to friendship. If difficulties with friendships are considered to be a priority for children, then they should be acknowledged and recorded in children's Personal Education Plans (PEPs) in consultation with the designated teacher and child's social worker. The schools Pupil Premium Plus (currently £1,900 per pupil) is intended to support and promote the educational and emotional development of children in care, offering an important additional resource which could be used to encourage friendship and help manage the issues that make friendships difficult. For example, schools could provide additional lunchtime assistants, mentors, independent visitors or even an older pupil, to help children make new friends, join in with playground games or get involved in lunchtime clubs. They might use their Pupil Premiums to pay for a school counselling service offering much needed therapeutic support that can help children manage their relationship difficulties (some schools already use their Pupil Premium Plus in this way). Foster carers expressed an interest in exploring how children's PEPs could be better utilised as an effective vehicle for addressing the friendship challenges for children in care:

'Opportunities are being missed to discuss children's friendship aspirations in their Personal Education Plans.'

## **Foster carer**

School leaders, including governing bodies, have a duty to ensure that Pupil Premium funding is not simply absorbed into mainstream budgets, but instead is carefully targeted at the designated children.

Schools have specific staff with particular responsibility for children in care, working in partnership with their local Virtual Headteacher.



### Personal Education Plans

Should provide clear prompts to ensure children's friendships are considered and recorded when agreeing an outcome. City of York Council's PEP forms have been strengthened to include clear references to friendship throughout the form:

#### Agreed Outcomes:

'Areas for setting outcomes can be personalised and could include communication..... community participation, ....personal and social development, friendship, play, leisure and independence.'



### Millthorpe Secondary School is one very good example of a school committed to encouraging positive relationships for children in care by:

- placing children in the same tutor group as existing friends where possible
- placing children in the same tutor group as friends from the same feeder primary school
- finding out as much information about the young person's hobbies and clubs or groups they attend outside of school, so that pre-existing friendships with children who already attend the school are not overlooked
- encouraging the inclusion of children in care in extra-curricular activities which will support friendships, for example Duke of Edinburgh's Awards scheme
- enabling their pupils to remain in their school when they are placed with a new foster carer to reduce or avoid disruptions caused by changing schools, particularly when children have readily established friendship groups
- including friendships for discussion in reviews and recording actions in Personal Education Plans
- including friendship in the school's curriculum
- ensuring copies of learning diaries, school reports and certificates are held in school as a back-up after originals are given to the young person, to ensure this information is not lost.

# 4 Writing agreements and protocols ...continued

## Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans

Approximately 28% of children in care nationally will have special educational needs requiring them to have an EHC plan. As their plans are designed to be flexible, personalised and outcomes focussed, there is an opportunity for children and their foster care families to highlight the importance of friendship in their reviews and ensure EHC Plan outcomes reflect this need.



'EHC Plans provide a holistic approach, preparing children for life in their own community, to be independent, this includes friendship.'

**Lisa Able**  
SEND Manager, City of York Council

The prevailing view - that children's friendships are too important to be overlooked or disregarded - is not always acknowledged in the forms used to govern and guide practice. Yet our research has demonstrated that friendship inclusions and prompts in these forms can make a difference to how we view, discuss and record the management of children's friendships, which are of course integral to the Every Child Matters 'enjoying and achieving' outcome. Foster carers often receive little or no information about previous friendships, which puts them at a significant disadvantage when supporting a child in their care to overcome previous attachment difficulties, help a child make new friends or help them to stay in touch with the special friend they left behind.

'The lack of communication between the child's social worker and their foster care team means vital information, including knowledge of previous friendships, is not passed on.'

**Foster carer**

'There's nothing in the placement agreement about the child's friendship history and how we can best manage his future friendships.'

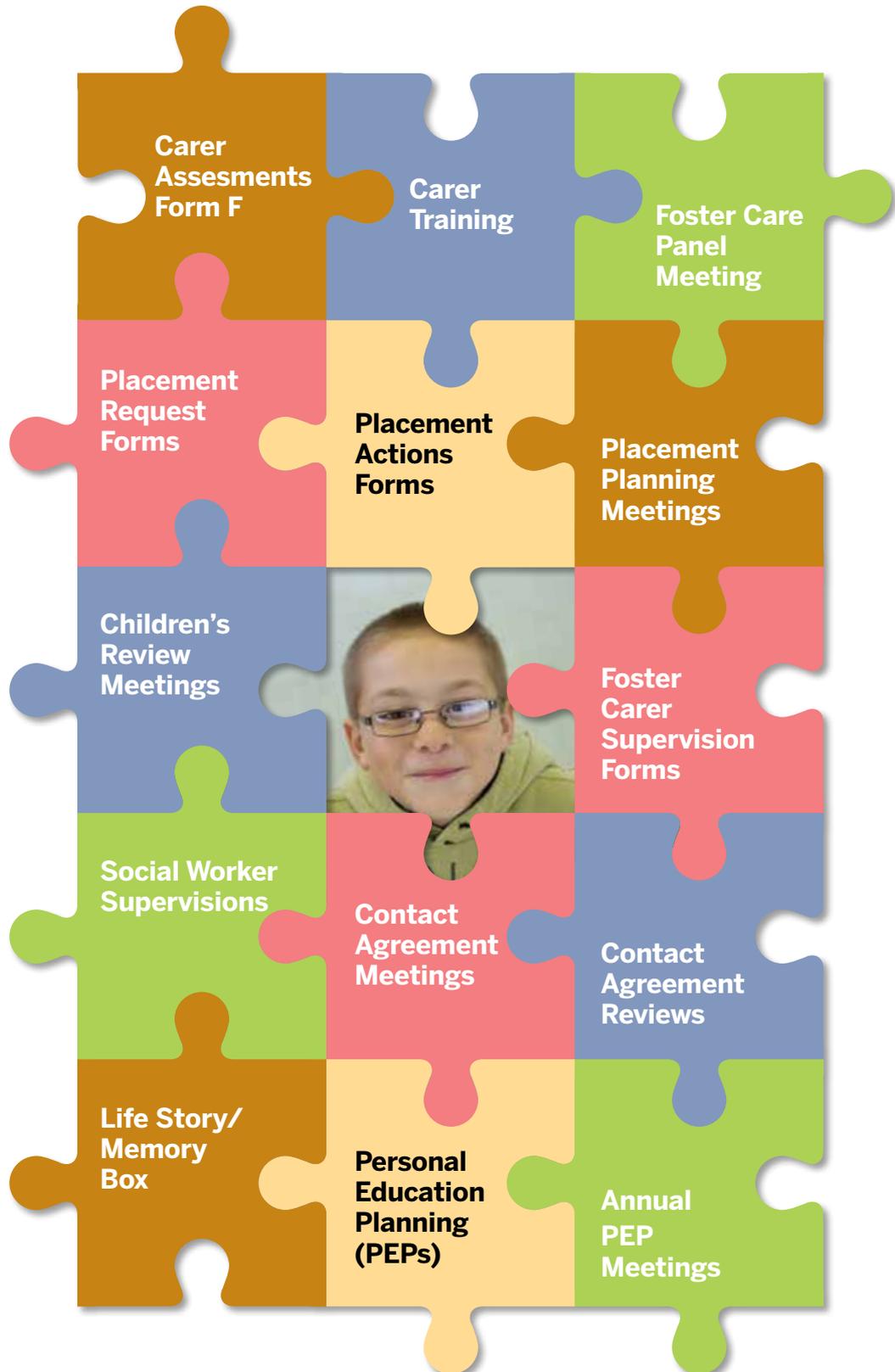
**Foster carer**



**When so many challenges to having friends already exist for children in care, it is vital that the forms used to support children in care are fit for purpose. The task of embedding appropriate friendship prompts and reminders throughout children's social care forms will require minimal effort, incur little or no additional cost and help achieve improved chances for children in care to have their friendships acknowledged, considered, discussed, agreed and recorded.**

# 5 Keep friendship at the centre of your service for children in care

Only when children's friendships are included in agendas, acknowledged in placement planning meetings, discussed in supervisions and are an integral part of children and young people's reviews, are we truly respecting the importance of friendship.



Visit our website to download this guide and other resources.

**[childrenssociety.org.uk/friendshipforall](https://childrenssociety.org.uk/friendshipforall)**

# The Children's Society

**It is a painful fact that many children and young people in Britain today are still suffering extreme hardship, abuse and neglect. Too often their problems are ignored and their voices unheard. Now it is time to listen and to act.**

The Children's Society is a national charity that runs local services, helping children and young people when they are at their most vulnerable and have nowhere left to turn.

We also campaign for changes to laws affecting children and young people, to stop the mistakes of the past being repeated in the future.

Our supporters around the country fund our services and join our campaigns to show children and young people they are on their side.

**The  
Children's  
Society**

## **For further information contact:**

The Children's Society  
Edward Rudolf House  
Margery St  
London WC1X 0JL

Supporter care team: 0300 303 700  
**[childrenssociety.org.uk/friendshipforall](http://childrenssociety.org.uk/friendshipforall)**

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