

**The
Children's
Society**

Friendship for All

Training for foster carers

childrenssociety.org.uk/friendshipforall

Training
foster
carers to
support
friendship

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Introduction

This training offers foster carers, with the guidance and support of their supervising social workers and trainers, the chance to reflect on the importance of friendship in their own lives and think about the vital role they will play in supporting the children in their care to have fun with their friends.

This is important because our friendships are among the most valuable relationships we have, offering us a sense of identity and belonging. Friendship can increase our resilience, providing a firm foundation for the long-term bonds that will sustain us through our adult life. This training resource acknowledges the profound impact of repeated loss of friendship for children in care, who must often endure regular moves of home and school, sometimes leaving little or no time to say goodbye to their friends. Foster carers who have worked hard to enable the friendships of children in their care to flourish have supported and strengthened this training by sharing their good practice ideas and positive strategies.

The aim of this training resource is:

- To increase and develop an understanding of the importance of friendship in the lives of children and young people in care
- To support local authorities and independent foster care services to safely prepare foster carers to flexibly facilitate the friendships of children in their care whenever possible.

An important contribution towards meeting the relevant Training, Support and Development (TSD) Standards for Foster Carers in relation to children's friendships. Fits particularly well with TSD standards 2.3, 5.2, 5.4 and 5.6.



'This training is fit for purpose and a useful tool for foster carers.'

**The Fostering
Network England**

Learning objectives:

If children in care are to have fun with their friends and build a stable friendship network, they will need the support and encouragement of their foster carers, social workers and professional service providers. Friendship for All's training programme is designed to work alongside existing carer preparation, provide further development for approved carers and assist with supervision of carers who are supporting the friendships of children in their care.

What is included in the training?

- **Perfect day:** A useful introductory/awareness-raising group activity, giving participants the chance to reflect upon personal friendship and how they view the friendships of children in their care.
- **Beliefs activity:** An interactive group activity to consider statements, opinions and facts about friendship.
- **Training scenarios:** A resource to strengthen carer training, supervision and team meeting discussions. The Ben, Hayley and Daniel scenarios can be changed and customised to specific situations and cultural differences as required.
- **Friendship action plan:** An activity designed to map children's friendship and track their unique journey towards making friends, resulting in ideas and/or actions. A useful aid to supervision and carer training.
- **Handouts** to be shared with foster carers in supervision or as part of ongoing training and development. Handouts include: Practical guidance for foster carers to support children and young people in their care to make friends, and a handout on the importance of keeping important items for memory box and life story work.



Perfect day

A fun introductory activity that gives participants the chance to reflect on the challenges faced by children in care when trying to make and maintain friendships.

You will need:

- Plain paper or 'Perfect day' worksheet, which is freely downloadable on the My Organiser page of the website: friendshipforall.org.uk
- Pens, crayons, pencils (optional: old magazines, newspapers, scissors and glue).

Activity instructions:

1. Ask participants to imagine their perfect day with a friend. They can think back to when they were a teenager and what they used to do with their friends.
2. Then (after handing out coloured pens, pencils etc) ask them to make notes or draw pictures to illustrate their 'perfect day' with their friends.
3. Reflect on your own perfect day beforehand. You can share your picture with the group to prompt ideas and encourage people to share their memories.
4. When everyone has finished ask if they would like to share their drawing or description with the group. Give everyone a chance to share their picture. Ask them to describe how they planned their day – what skills, resources, knowledge and friendship experience did they need to make it a perfect day?
5. Next, ask people to work with a partner and to think about the children and young people in their care. Consider the barriers the child or young person may need to overcome to enjoy a perfect day with their chosen friends, particularly if the child has additional needs. Issues may include transport, distance, cost, supervision, confidence, local knowledge, skills and forward planning. Ask each pair to feedback from their discussion. Ask people not to use real names to maintain confidentiality.

Tips for the facilitator:

Discussions arising from this activity may reveal that children in care face significant additional challenges. Here are some points that you can elaborate on if they do not arise in the conversations:

- Foster carers may need to be more involved in the planning of friendship activities. They will need knowledge of the child's friendship history, what they enjoy doing and potential risks. Knowledge of the range of activities available locally, the costs involved and public transport routes will assist.
- There might be less opportunity to be spontaneous, take risks and enjoy the freedoms that are age appropriate. Many venues and activities might not be accessible to them or their chosen friend.
- How does helping the child to enjoy a 'perfect day' impact upon their foster carer and family members in consideration of how the day was planned, how the child's friend is accepted and the interplay in this relationship?
- It is important to be creative and think of ways around potential barriers. Don't be defeatist otherwise young people end up with fewer opportunities again and again.

Friendship beliefs activities

To help participants consider their own beliefs about friendship and to see that not everybody has the same view when it comes to making friends.

To encourage them to think about the young people they support (or will be supporting) and consider friendship as a fundamental part of that young person's personality and identity.

You will need:

- Scissors, a length of string about three metres long, two sheets of paper, a felt tip pen, printed off set of blue and red statements sufficient for each participant.

Activity instructions:

Cut out each individual statement

- Hand out a set of personal statements (coloured in blue) to the group. The facilitator will need to print off a set of statements for each participant.
- Ask participants to lay out the statements in order, with those at the top being the ones they most strongly agree with.
- If they completely disagree with any statements put them to one side.
- Go round the room and ask participants to share the order they have chosen.
- Have a group discussion about the variation in opinion when it comes to beliefs about friendship.

Before giving out red statements, lay the length of string across the room. Lay the cards with the words 'Strongly Agree' and 'Strongly Disagree' at each end of the line.

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

- Hand out a set of statements (coloured in red) to each participant.
- Ask them to think about each statement in turn.
- When they are ready, each participant should lay their red statement on the line of string wherever this best fits with their own view or experience.

Points to cover

- Friendship is a personal thing and everyone has their own view of what friendship is and what makes a good friendship.
- Young people in care might have very different views depending on their unique life experience.
- The challenges and opportunities presented in the red statements encourage participants to share ideas, creative approaches and safe practice.

**I usually prefer to be by myself
than with friends**

Friends are people to have fun with

My family are my friends

Friends care for and look after each other

**I keep in touch with friends
throughout my life**

**It is better to have loads of
friends than just a few**

**Virtual 'online' friends are just as
important as friends you see in real life**

Pets can be your friends

**Friends are people with the same
interests as me**

Friendship is vital to every child's emotional well-being and educational achievement

It's best to help children make new friends rather than supporting them to stay in touch with friends from their previous placement

Whenever possible, young people should be allowed to have sleepovers with their friends

Young people should be encouraged to choose their own friends

I always encourage young people to bring their friends to our home so that I know who they're hanging around with

With so much going on in the lives of children in care, their friendships can't be a priority

Children and young people should not be using social media, it's just not safe

My 'own children' and their cousins provide ready-made friendships for the children in my care

Ben's story

Ben is 14 years old and likes playing games on his smartphone, Xbox and computer. He is a good-natured boy, shy by nature and prefers his own company. Ben has been in care from the age of five and has lived with three different foster carers. On each occasion when Ben was moved he was required to change schools. Due to unexpected circumstances, Ben's last placement ended and he is to be moved into the care of Neil and Anne.

- What are the important issues for Ben?
- What are the main considerations and challenges for Neil and Anne?
- What can they do to help?
- What support could they gain from professionals?

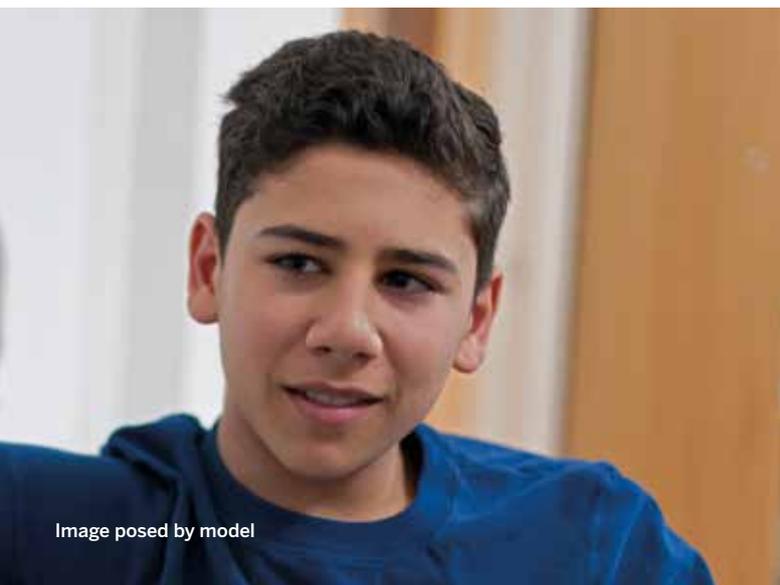
Facilitator's notes/points to cover

Ben is solitary by nature. Friendship may not be Ben's priority while he is managing change/disruption, the loss of familiar routines and dealing with his diagnosis of dyslexia.

Consider Neil and Anne's strengths: their local knowledge and experience of caring for teenagers. However, they might be challenged by Ben's reluctance to leave the home, his possible low self-esteem and apparent unwillingness to make new friends.

Neil and Anne might want to start by finding an activity-based group. They might investigate local children in care youth groups where Ben could feel safe to build friendships around a shared experience.

Could Ben's school do more to encourage new friendships? Could their pupil premium be used to set up a new activity or pupil mentoring service? Are there any appropriate out of school or lunch time clubs not known to Ben, for example a computer club where like-minded friendships could emerge? Speak to Ben about it! Has Ben always preferred his own company. He might want to change that. Does Ben want to stay at the same school. Is there a reason he doesn't have friends there? He has not told them he doesn't have friends. Using a smartphone and computer he could have a whole online network of friends which he considers important. Xbox can also be used for socialising when connected to the internet, so it might not appear that Ben has friends when he does.



Hayley's story

Hayley is three years old; she enjoys the outdoors, playing in the garden and riding on her tricycle.

Hayley doesn't know how to play with other children; she is wary of them and likely to hit out if they want to play with her or touch her toys. Hayley has speech and language delay due to an undetected hearing impairment and there is evidence of emotional neglect. Hayley is to be removed from her birth mum and would be placed in the care of Jean.

Jean has been a foster carer for the past 10 years and lives alone. Most of the children in her care have been teenagers and this will be Jean's first experience of caring for a young child. Jean feels reasonably confident and is looking forward to welcoming Hayley, but has little knowledge of what is available locally for young children. Jean and her supervising social worker consider Hayley's need to play with other children, where she can begin to learn how to make friends, an immediate priority.



What are the important issues for Hayley?

- How might Hayley's hearing impairment, speech and language delay and early emotional abuse affect her ability to learn how to play with other children?
- How could Jean manage these challenges? What resources will she need?
- Can you think of any other challenges Jean might expect to face?
- What role could the supervising social worker play in helping Jean?

Facilitator's notes/points to cover

Hayley's impairments, early emotional abuse and lack of play experience is likely to be a significant challenge for her. She may have learning difficulties as a result of undiagnosed hearing loss. Hayley might express frustration when not understood, be possessive about and unwilling to share her toys, not be able to hear and follow rules of a game and unable to make other children understand her.

(The facilitator might want to re-visit the impact of emotional abuse on young children).

To best support Hayley's friendships, Jean will want to get expert advice from the relevant therapy professionals, for example a speech and language therapist, occupational therapist, specialist pre-school teachers and play workers.

Jean's supervising social worker can help advise about local support, for example mother and toddler groups, local nurseries (specialist and mainstream), and meeting foster carers supporting younger age children.

Daniel's story

Daniel is 15 years old. He came to England with his sister from Eritrea when he was 14. Daniel doesn't know where his parents are and was accidentally separated from his sister when travelling through Germany.

Daniel feels very lonely and doesn't want to talk about sad experiences with anyone. Although Amanda and Barry are kind to Daniel he deeply misses his own family and friends. Daniel finds his school is cliquey and hasn't made any friends, but he wants to do well and works hard. Daniel likes football but was bullied at the local football club and stopped attending. Daniel had a big group of Eritrean friends in London who now live in private shared housing.

Amanda and Barry have told Daniel about a weekly drop in for asylum-seeking and refugee children in Oxford, but Daniel feels nervous about going to a new place by himself and does not feel confident speaking English in front of strangers.

- What are the important issues for Daniel?
- How could Amanda and Barry manage these challenges around loneliness? What resources will they need?
- Can you think of any other challenges Amanda and Barry might expect to face?



Image posed by model

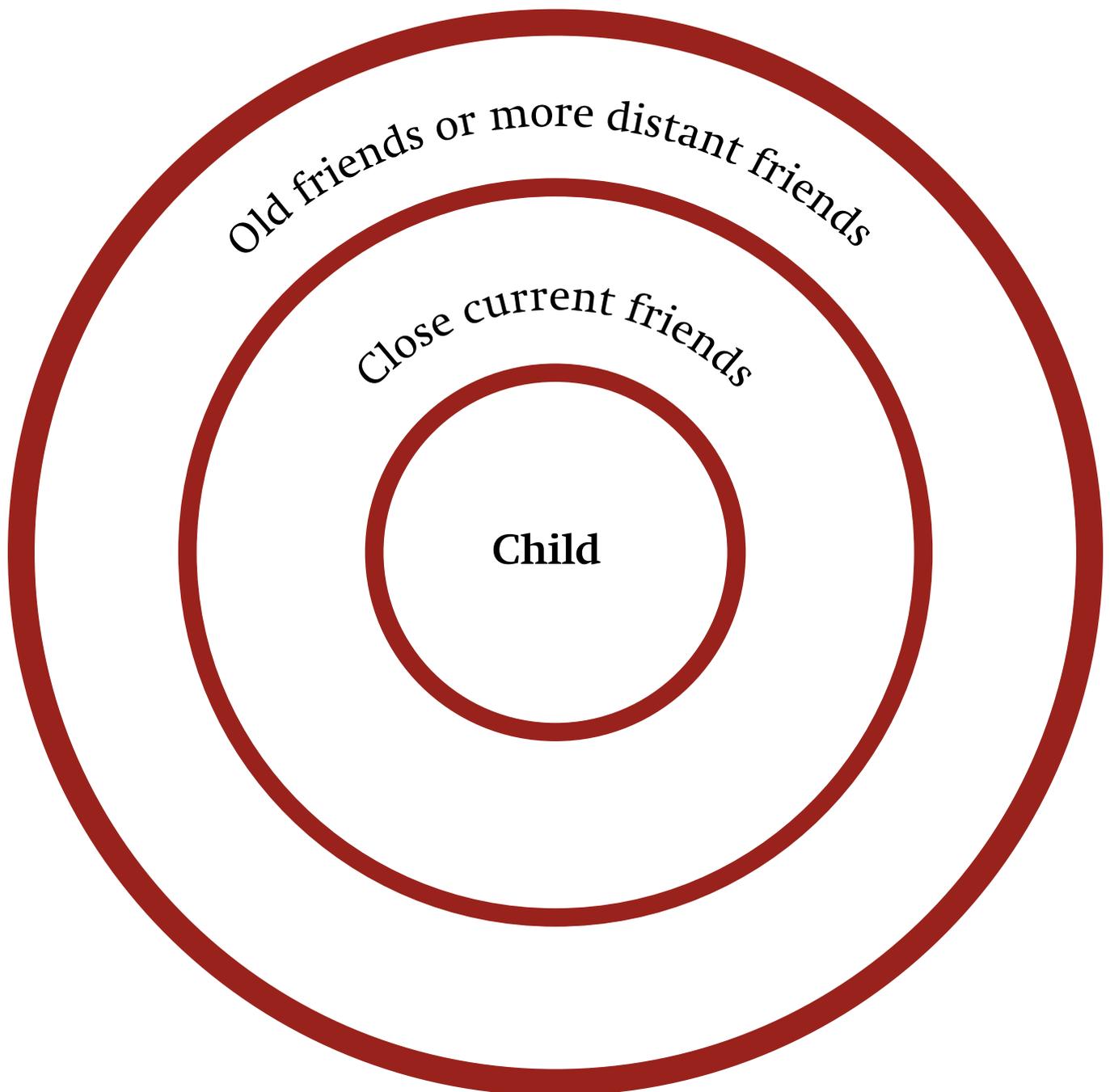
Facilitator's notes/points to cover

Ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural links with members of the young people's own countries of origin can help to create initial feelings of comfort, security and companionship, reducing the isolation associated with migration. However, not all young people want or need those links to the same degree.

Young people's concepts of religion, culture and identity are fluid and may change over time, and overgeneralising assumptions are not helpful.

- Amanda and Barry might support Daniel to visit his friends in London.
- Build Daniel's confidence – for example there might be a local mentoring scheme which offers Daniel some additional support to get involved in activities that interest him, eg football or participate in the drop-in.
- Daniel might be supported to use social media. His confidence might grow if he's offered the chance to also contact other young people who speak his language.

Who are your foster child's friends?



Use this diagram to note down who your foster child's friends are (using the headings as a guide). This can be used in supervision or training, or can be completed with children and/or young people. This will help you to understand your child's friendship network and consider how well connected they are with new and old friends.

Where is your young person on their journey to making friends?

(Your child may not fit one of the descriptions exactly.)

1. They have no friends and no confidence or lack the skills to make new friends.

2. Can chat with other children but has difficulty maintaining friends for whatever reason.

3. Has some friends on and off at school and is wanting to learn about how to nurture and keep a friend for longer.

4. Has friends and can maintain friendships but doesn't see many friends outside of school.

5. Very socially confident, has a solid group of friends. Can manage conflicts and can share and compromise. Sees friends regularly outside of school.

Friendship action plan

What can you do to help them progress on their journey?

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What can your child do to help themselves progress on their journey?

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What could school or other professionals involved do to help them progress on their journey?

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Practical guidance for foster carers to support children and young people in their care to make friends

In writing this guidance we are mindful and respectful of the significant challenges faced by some young people in care. Foster carers report feeling helpless when young people's desperation for friendship means their behaviours sometimes 'scare off' their new friend, or when they share inappropriate personal information with their friend. Other carers report the opposite: that their young person is shy, introvert and clingy, refusing any attempt to help them make new friends.

Decades of research suggests that parents play a big role in teaching children how to make friends. The most popular kids are prosocial—i.e caring, sharing and helpful. They also have strong verbal skills and know how to keep their selfish or aggressive impulses in check. Most of all popular kids are good at interpersonal skills: empathy, perspective-taking, and moral reasoning.

(Slaughter et al 2002; Dekovic and Gerris 1994)

Many young people who are in care have not developed the skills and techniques involved in making and maintaining friends. We do know however that friendships matter more than almost anything to young people. Evidence from research shows that having friends impacts on a child's health, happiness and well-being. We also know that

not having friends as a child can impact on adult emotional and mental health.

Developing the skills to make friends is not a quick process for some young people but there are some things you can do as a foster carer to improve their skills and give them more opportunities for friendship.

Finding out what you have in common

Young people often discuss common interests with each other. So talk with your young person about their interests and respect them.

You could talk about anything, including:

- Food
- Music
- Sport
- Apps
- TV programmes
- Computer games
- Celebrities
- Pets
- Books
- Anything that interests them...

Show how to ask other people about their interests and keep a conversation going by not asking closed questions. Encourage them to identify things they have in common with friends and be positive.

Provide opportunities

Encourage inviting friends home after school for tea or just to hang out together. Make sure they know that this is okay and that their friends will be welcome. If you are going on an outing or trip at the weekend, ask if they would like to invite a friend along. This will also give you a chance to observe them interacting with their friends, and you may spot ways in which they can improve their communication skills.

In consultation with foster carers nationally, here are some of their thoughts on providing opportunities for friendship:

Be prepared to travel to areas where the child's friends are, including places where they make new friends.

Foster carer

When my child came to live with me I kept him in his original cub group so that he could keep his friends. That worked well for him.

Foster carer

Find out more about your child's interests; help them become part of the community, joining groups that best meet their interests.

Foster carer

Get them involved in loads of groups and clubs. They are bound to drop a few but if they try everything they will find something they like and will hopefully meet other young people with the same interests.

Foster carer

Be a good role model

Talk to your young person about their feelings and emotions, even when they are displaying negative or aggressive behaviours. They need to be able to reflect on their own behaviours and attitudes and should feel safe to come and speak with you so you can help to keep them safe. Children and young people learn from watching their parents and carers and practising their social skills at home in a safe environment. Give them chance to practise and always try and model the behaviours you would like them to display.

Learning to listen

Teach your child to be an 'active listener'. The key points are:

- When someone is talking show you are listening.
- Say 'yes' or 'mmm' to show you have understood.
- Make eye-contact and nod to show you are listening and you are interested.
- Face the person speaking but don't get too close.
- Ask further questions to show you are interested and you have heard what they said.

You can practise all of these techniques with your young person and see how it feels for them.

When their children and young people are in conflict with friends or don't have any friends, carers may find **active reflective listening skills useful**. Active listening can be a powerful tool when encouraging children to talk about their hurt, anxiety or anger.

Listen to the feeling behind the words

Try to put a name on the feeling

Let them clarify if you get the feeling wrong.

Simple comments: **'you feel bad about that', 'you seem to be saying' ... 'sounds as if you're'...** can offer new insights and open up a dialogue that will be more productive than endless questions. Active listening can be the beginning of working out solutions together, avoid the child 'being the victim' and help the child learn the life skills they need to build friendships. Use active listening selectively and avoid over-use.

Try not to be negative about the behaviour or character of the friend who is causing the problem; rather help the child to gain an insight into the thoughts and feelings which lead to the

behaviours of their friends, and learn the skills they need to deal with them. They may be friends again tomorrow!

You shouldn't be working alone

If your young person is having significant difficulties with making and managing friendships you should seek support. It is crucial that everyone involved in your young person's life is aware that this is an issue and should be working to the same plan to resolve the difficulties.

You should mention in your own supervision that this is an area that you need more support with and talk with your supervisor about what additional help might be available. It may be that they could speak with the young person's social worker and perhaps make a referral to your local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) team for more intensive support.

Every publicly funded school in England receives a Pupil Premium Plus (additional funding) to raise the attainment of pupils in care, and close the gap between them and their peers. They should have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) that is drawn up by schools and carers in partnership. When children's friendship difficulties are highlighted as an area of need, a specific PEP target related to friendship might be agreed and an intervention funded from the Pupil Premium if this is appropriate. For example schools may be encouraged to spend their Pupil Premium Plus budget on direct support in the playground, lunch time or after school clubs. This could be a mentor or non-teaching assistant.

If your young person has Special Educational Needs (SEN) they may meet the criteria for a Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The EHCP is another opportunity for you to mention the issue of friendship and make sure that everyone involved in your young person's life are doing all they can in their own capacity to support them with friendships.

If friendship can be included in the EHCP or PEP then it will be considered every time the plan is reviewed and you can keep a check on progress (hopefully!) being made.

In short, you should be using all of the support networks available and not try to manage this alone.

Life Story/Memory Boxes

Once a young person is placed in your care it is part of your responsibility to help that young person keep a consistent record of their life and their achievements or significant experiences. This information may be used to put together a Life Story book by a social worker or support worker, or it may not, but either way it is important to keep it carefully. Without this help, young people can grow up and find they have no photographic or written reminders of their childhood and an incomplete sense of identity.

If young people move placements repeatedly they are faced with having to make new friends many times. Therefore it's really important, to help them keep records of names and photos of friends so they can stay in touch with them or reconnect with them when they are older.

Here are some tips and ideas about the sort of things you should keep (memories can be recorded in lots of different ways – they don't have to be a written record in a book or diary):

- School or class photos (make a note of names on the back – especially names of friends)
- Party invitations
- Thank you letters
- Certificates from school or any extracurricular clubs
- Photos of friends from parties or school
- Examples of school work or special drawings
- Diaries or accounts written at school or at home
- Letters from friends or family
- School reports
- Swimming badges or any trophies or awards
- Uniforms or school ties.

This is not an exhaustive list and just gives you an idea of the sort of things you should help your young person to keep. If you have your own children think of the kind of things they kept or you kept for them.

Top tips

Work together with your young person: If the child is old enough and is able to, they should be included in recording memories and should take as much responsibility as possible for this.

Make a Memory Box: Get a sturdy cardboard box and some stickers, glitter, pens or anything that can personalise and decorate the box. While you are working together you can discuss the sort of things they would like to keep. The box can then be kept in a safe place to store anything that they feel is special and they will want to remember.

Keep a copy: Make copies of everything that can be easily photocopied or stored electronically just in case it gets lost or damaged. Your young person may want to rip up diaries or photos if they have had a fall out with a friend or just had a bad day.

Think about the future: Children in your care may not seem so interested in keeping these memories when they are younger, but as they get older they will want to look back and you can play a key role in making sure these memories are not lost forever.

'I don't have any photos of me at all from when I was little; I don't remember who I was friends with and wish I had something to help me remember.'

16 year old girl in a foster care placement

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
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Names used in this report have been changed to maintain anonymity. All scenario photos posed by models.

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