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no
typical
care
story

Sharing the experiences of foster carers and
care-experienced young people of fostering
relationships

What is No Typical Care Story about?

There are many young people living in foster care in the UK in the care of foster carers. Foster carers, young people who have experience of foster care, researchers and professionals connected to foster care all agree that **relationships** in foster care are very important. But what are the relationships between young people in foster care and their foster carers **actually like**?

In this project we listened to foster carers and young people with experience of foster care to learn from their experiences of relationships in foster care.

In No Typical Care Story we share some of what these people shared with us along with some illustrations created by a care-experienced artist **David Grimm @DavetheCareBear** inspired by what was said.

Please consider your own wellbeing while learning with us

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"Am I separate or am I the same?"

Young people and foster carers spoke about a spectrum of fostering relationships - some people spoke relationships that were like parent or family relationships, others explained their fostering relationships were very different. Lots of people has experiences that were in between these two extremes - but what things affected people's experiences?

it was quite clear from the beginning that I was different

I weren't treated like i was any different



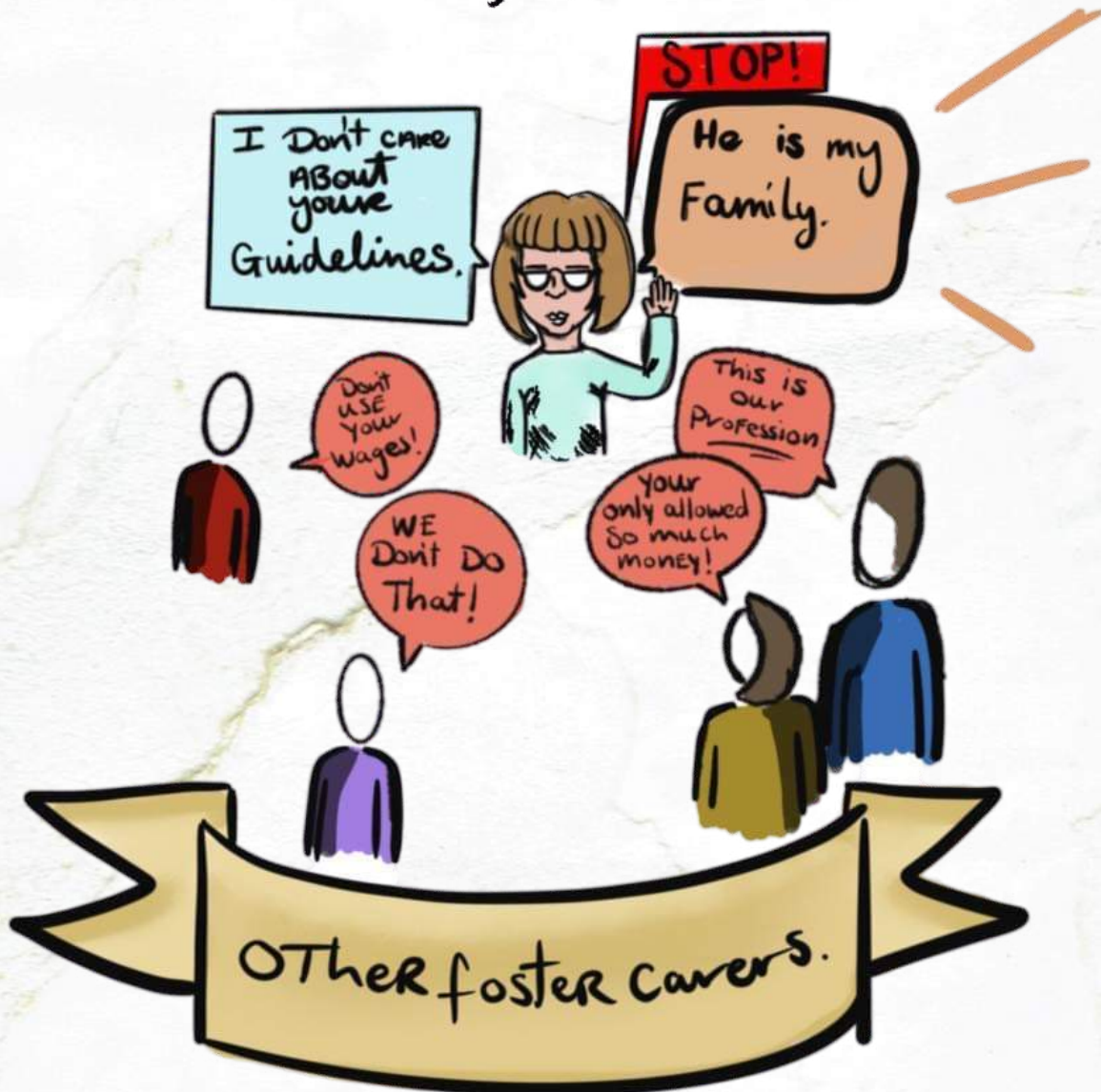
"From the moment I meet the child, my role is to give that child a Safe, Secure, Loving foundation and a Safe place. A Safe Place to make them feel protected, cared for and, if needs be and the child requires it, to make them feel loved and safe."



"You can't do that!"

There are a lot of rules and regulations that foster carers have to follow and things which are very different in foster care some different relationships - like needing to make notes and attend meetings. These social care structures can change what fostering relationships feel like.

"I mean we get given guidelines, you should only spend £50 on Christmas etcetera. I have actually been criticised in the past because other foster carers have said to me 'you're actually using your wages as a teacher to support the child you're with, we don't do this and we don't do that' but mine get the same opportunities as my own children would get... I understand we are professionals but I see it as more inclusive that he's now part of the family and I will treat him the same as I will treat my own children and he doesn't see any difference."



"They can love two families"

Fostering relationships can be complicated because most young people in foster care also have birth relatives. Some foster carers and young people thought a lot about these other relationships and how they impacted upon making new trusting bonds with foster carers.

The reason that the relationship started to build was that we have the meetings with mum and they would, he would see clearly from the onset my respect I have for his mother. Regardless of what mum had done or how mum had treated him I had such a respect for his mother. Then when we were around the table in a meeting room he would see that I would never say anything negative about his mum."



"I can't stand that word"

There are lots of specific words that are used to talk about fostering relationships that we don't use when talking about other relationships between caregivers and children. For example, 'foster carer', 'placement' and 'stability'. The young people and foster carers did not all agree on what terms they preferred to use but they felt very strongly about their individual choices about language.

"I'd never be able to call them... even though I've been with them longer than I've been with my mum... I could never do it... call them mum and dad!"



"I don't really like that words to be fair, I keep telling the kids don't call me a foster carer. Just call me P, I don't really like... I think it's derogatory towards the kids."



"I didn't want to accept it"

There are lots of things which can make it challenging to create new, trusting, close fostering relationships. Lots of young people spoke about 'waiting for it to go wrong' as a result of difficult previous relationships they might have had with adults. Foster carers also spoke about feeling 'vulnerable' to opening themselves up to new fostering relationships as they were worried these might end and they might be left hurt.

"I actually feel more comfortable being called chloe because I feel like it will break my heart even more when... if she does walk out of our life one day if she'd always called me mum."



"I didn't expect to be who I am today"

Even though lots of young people and foster carers described the barriers to developing trusting relationships - once these hurdles were overcome many people spoke about the life-changing impacts of these new fostering relationships.

"They had high aspirations for me. They didn't want me to do what I'd class as what society expects of Looked After children. For me it is what they would want for their own children to achieve."



"it's changed me to how I am today because they were able to build my trust [...] I really think they helped to heal me and to accept that help and care"

"Because, no trust is a big thing, if you don't have any trust, then it just doesn't work at all. Because, if I trust someone then I trust them with, like, deep secrets and that. And you don't want you don't want them going around and telling everyone so if you can't trust anyone then it really reflects on you and you feel like you can't tell anyone and it just builds up inside."



This resource was created in collaboration between Eva A Sprecher, Dr Eleanor Armstrong, Ikesha Tuitt, Debbie Hill, the care-experienced artist David Grimm (@DavetheCareBear), and of course the participants in this research work who are:

Young people: Pete, Freddy, Frank, Stefan, Kayla, Alex, Leigh, Jade

Foster carers: Chloe, John, William, George, Aleks, Jo, Nathalie, Bella, Louise*

The research for this project was approved by the UCL Ethics Committee (14653/002) and supervised by Dr Michelle Sled and Dr Nick Midgley

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*Please note all participant names are pseudonyms