

Looked After Children - How can school support pupils entering care?

Overview description

A child who has been in the care of their local authority for more than 24 hours is known as a looked after child. Looked after children are also often referred to as children in care, a term which many children and young people prefer.

Each UK nation has a slightly different definition of a looked after child and follows its own legislation, policy and guidance. But in general, looked after children are:

- living with foster parents
- living in a residential children's home or
- living in residential settings like schools or secure units.

(NSPCC, 2021)

Children may enter care for all sorts of reasons. However, many enter because they have been abused or neglected. These experiences can leave children with complex emotional and mental health needs, which can increase their vulnerability to abuse (Bazalgette, Rahilly, and Trevelyan, 2015; Luke et al, 2014).

Research has shown a strong link between adverse childhood experiences (such as domestic violence, emotional and sexual abuse, physical and emotional neglect), and physical and mental health.

Providing children in and on the edge of care with the support they need, when they need it, can help them to achieve their potential (NSPCC, 2021).

NSPCC research has identified priorities for change to improve the emotional and mental health of looked after children.

Area	How this could look in education settings
<p>Embed an emphasis on emotional wellbeing throughout the system. Professionals working in the care system need the skills and knowledge to understand how they can support the emotional wellbeing of looked after children and young people.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in training that explores attachment, adverse childhood experiences, trauma, and the impact on learning for all staff. This will enable all staff to be able to understand how a pupil may be feeling/acting and understand what their behaviour may be communicating.
<p>Take a proactive and preventative approach. Support for looked after children should begin with a thorough assessment of their emotional and mental health needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining contact with social workers of CIN, Children of the edge of care, so that staff can be aware of if/when pupils are taken into care. • Building and maintaining relationships with pupils at risk of being taken into care so these trusting relationships already exist to support them through the transition.

<p>Take a proactive and preventative approach continued. Support for looked after children should begin with a thorough assessment of their emotional and mental health needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checking in with pupils who are on the edge of care, or being taken into care on a regular basis. This will allow them the space to explore their feelings at less stressful times and support adults around them to know them better. • Pupils who have been taken into care may need additional care and attention to help reduce these feelings of anxiety and blame. • Reducing the academic demand and more emphasis on nurturing support whilst they are adapting to this life change.
<p>Give children and young people voice and influence. Looked after children and young people need more opportunities to identify what is important to them and influence their care.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be an advocate for pupils. Listen to their thoughts and feelings and share this with other professionals. • Provide them with a safe space to explore their thoughts and feelings about what is happening to them. • Provide them with opportunities to decide on how they want to spend their day.

Useful Resources

Geddes, Heather. (2015). Attachment in the Classroom. Worth Publishing.

Bomber, Louise Michelle (2014). What about Me? Worth Publishing.

Hughes, D, Bomber, L., Brisch, K. (2009). Teenagers and attachment-helping adolescents engage with life and learning (2009).

Cameron and Maginn. (2010). Achieving Positive Outcomes for Children in Care. Sage Publications.

Guishard-Pine, McCall, & Hamilton. (2009). Understanding looked after children: An introduction to Psychology for Foster Care. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Activities for exploring emotions

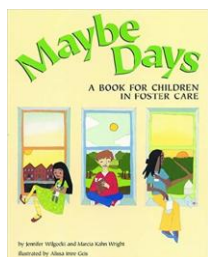
The following resources/activities may be useful in further exploring feelings with children and young people;

- Use of emotion cards to support exploration of different feelings e.g. *'Therapeutic Treasure Deck of sentence completion and feelings cards by Dr Karen Treisman'*
- Present pupils with emotion cards, ask which feelings they experience, share particular examples and ask how they would feel.
- The *'Blob people by Pip Wilson'* is a visual, colouring, resource with probing questions about emotions and exploring different situations and emotions which could be helpful.

- The Emotion card game could also be a helpful resource.
- The *'Therapeutic Treasure Box for working with children and adolescents with developmental Trauma'* is a useful book for ideas of activities for exploring feelings and emotional regulation strategies.

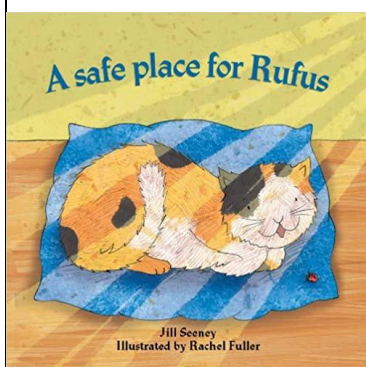
Books to support children being taken in to care

Maybe Days: A Book for Children in Foster Care by Jennifer Wilgocki and Marcia Wright.



For many children in foster care, the answer to many questions is often ""maybe"". ""Maybe Days"" is a straightforward look at the issues of foster care, the questions that children ask, and the feelings that they confront. A primer for children going into foster care, the book also explains in children's terms the responsibilities of everyone involved - parents, social workers, lawyers and judges. As for the children themselves, their job is to be a kid - and there's no maybe about that.

A Safe Place for Rufus (British Ass/Adoptn & Fostering) by Jill Seeney

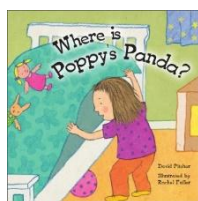


Rufus the cat lives with a family who looks after him, feeds him his favourite foods and gives him lots of cuddles. He feels happy and safe, especially when he is lying on his favourite blue cushion.

But he didn't always feel this way. The family that Rufus used to live with were not kind to him at all. Thinking about his past makes him angry and sad and Rufus struggles to escape from his memories and find a safe place where he can just relax and be himself.

Change and transition, such as moving house, starting a new school or perhaps even leaving home, can cause confusion and uncertainty for very young children. If they have to move from one family to another, the change is often too big for them to full comprehend in advance; no matter how thorough the preparation, the child still has to take a very big leap into the dark. It takes time for children to trust enough to feel safe. Like Rufus, they have to discover a way to banish their fears, and like Rufus, they can be helped by finding a "safe place" of their own.

Where is Poppy's Panda? By David Pitcher



This book is for young children aged three and above, especially those who are adopted or placed in foster care.

Change can cause confusion and uncertainty for children, but particularly for fostered and adopted children. This charming children's story uses Poppy and her lost panda to explore change, continuity, and anxieties about moves, changes and attachment in a way that feels safe and nonthreatening.

Teachers and Social workers can contact the Virtual School EP team for a telephone consultation if you want further advice (lacep@oneeducation.co.uk)

Useful links

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/children-and-families-at-risk/looked-after-children>

<https://afaeducation.org/free-dt-resources/explore-our-resources/10-things-children-looked-after-want-you-to-know/>

<https://teacherofsci.com/looked-after-children/>

How schools can support pupils experiencing a care placement breakdown?

Overview description

Children and young people who are removed from their family suffer separation and feelings of loss. These feelings are compounded when they experience multiple placements (Schofield and Beek, 2005). Placement instability reduces a child's opportunities to develop secure attachments and it may also exacerbate any existing behavioural and emotional difficulties (Schofield and Beek, 2005). This may make it more difficult for children to establish relationships with carers and contribute to further placement breakdown and rejection (Munro and Hardy, 2006).

Behaviours you might see in school during placement change

Challenging behaviours,
Lack of trust in adults,
Trying to exert control with the situations around them,
Dis-engagement and lack of motivation with learning tasks,
Argumentative and provocative behaviour observed with their peers, which may lead to conflict,
Withdrawal from social activity and friendships,
Change in energy levels; may present as overactive or very tired,
There may be a regression to previous developmental milestones or skills, e.g. a child may start bed wetting.

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Things to do when things don't go smoothly

At times, there may be situations where unplanned/emergency change of placement is necessary. However, acknowledging the situation with the child or young person will help to make them feel included.

Identifying key people who will be able to provide the child or young person with information and support at this time. Ideally, this would be an adult with whom they have an established relationship with e.g. a key adult in school.

To share the child or young person's strengths and interests to help build relationships in the new placement. This can be done in collaboration with the child through identifying strengths activities (see useful resources below).

Recognising that the child or young person may need additional support at school, this may look like reducing the academic demand and more emphasis on nurturing support whilst they are adapting to the placement change.

Useful Resources

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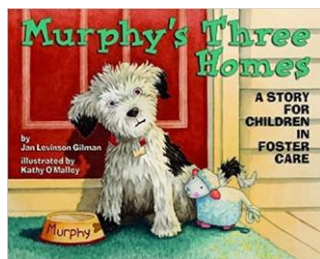
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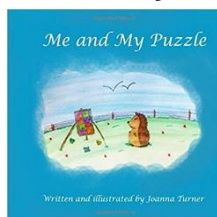
Books to support children going through placement breakdowns

Murphy's Three Homes: A Story for Children in Foster Care by Jan Levinson



Murphy, a Tibetan Terrier puppy, is told he is a 'good luck dog' - he is cheerful, happy, and loves to play and wag his tail. However, after going through two different homes and an animal shelter, Murphy starts to feel like a 'bad luck dog' who nobody wants. "Murphy's Three Homes" follows this adorable pup through his placement in three new homes, as well as through his anxiety, self-doubt, and hope for a new, loving family. Finally, Murphy is placed in a caring foster home where he feels comfortable and valued. He learns that he is not a bad dog after all and can go back to being a playful puppy and a 'good luck dog'!

Me and My Puzzle: A story for children in foster and adoptive care by Joanna Turner



A short story for children who have been through trauma, fostering and adoption. The story follows the tale of a little hedgehog who has witnessed terrible things, he is fostered and stays with two families, before settling in to his forever home. He experiences a variety of emotions including fear, anger and sadness, but eventually through creating a jigsaw puzzle of his life he can see how all the pieces might not match but he can make them fit together and live happily.

Teachers and Social workers can contact the EP LAC/VS team for a telephone consultation if you want further advice.

Please email: LACEP@Oneeducation.co.uk to request a booking form.

Useful links

<https://www.scie.org.uk/publications/guides/guide07/placement/placement/>

<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/transition-passport?pdf=coronavirus-toolkit-managing-transitions>

<https://mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/media/2062/coronavirus-toolkit-managing-transitions.pdf>