



# 'I am more than being in care'

A consultation with children with care experience to inform the recommendations of the Independent Care Review

Children's Parliament  
February 2020



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“It is important that children with care experience think they are loved. Even if they are cared for - they all have the right to be loved.”

- Member of Children's Parliament with care experience, 2019

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# Introduction

The Independent Care Review (The Care Review) was launched by the Scottish Government in 2017 to examine the legislation, practices, culture and ethos of the care system with an aim to make positive changes for children with care experience. The Care Review is a 'root and branch' review, opening up scope for the examination and reform of the entire care system. Central to the success of the Care Review is the understanding that in order to create lasting change for those with care experience, the 'lived experience and wisdom' of care experienced people has to be prioritised and needs to shape the direction of the review. As part of a commitment to listening to the voices of those with care experience, the Care Review has sought out children and young people with care experience to contribute to discussions about care and what would improve the quality of care for all children in Scotland.

As part of the 'Journey stage' of the Care Review, ten working groups were set up to explore issues relating to areas of change and make recommendations relating to their areas of focus. These ten working groups were: Best Place in the World, Components of Care, Edges of Care, Health and Wellbeing, Justice and Care, Love, Rights, Stigma, Stop: Go, and Workforce. The recommendations will highlight practices and policies which are positive and should be maintained or increased, and those practices and policies which are damaging and should be stopped.

Children's Parliament's Seen + Heard Fife group were asked to investigate the recommendations from the working groups, allowing children with care experience to critically consider and use their experiences to feedback on these recommendations. However, due to delays in finalising the recommendations from the working groups, the children took part in more general discussions about care and about the issues and priorities the children felt most important when designing a 'care system' in Scotland which allows all children to thrive.

Throughout discussions with the children, recurring threads kept rising to the surface, allowing us to draw out some key themes for this report. These themes are interrelated and relevant to the specific areas of interest and forthcoming recommendations of the Care Review.

The themes identified by the children are:

- **Relationships in care**
- **Keeping in touch with important people**
- **How decisions are made about us**
- **How we talk about care**
- **Our sense of belonging**

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# Methodology

## Children's Parliament

Children's Parliament is Scotland's Centre of Excellence for children's participation and engagement. Our dream is that children grow up in a world of love, happiness and understanding. Our mission is to inspire greater awareness and understanding of the power of children's human rights and to support implementation across Scotland.

We work creatively through programmes and consultations to improve communication between children and adults and to build relationships based on mutual respect and understanding. This enables us to explore our world together. We provide children with opportunities to share their experiences, thoughts and feelings so that they can influence life at home, in school and in the community through change at a local and national level. Our interest is in working with children, the adults who love and care for them, and the wider community in which they live in order to support our country to meet its obligations to our youngest citizens.

The foundation of Children's Parliament is taking a rights-based approach to working with children, so children can learn about their human rights as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

(UNCRC) and by experiencing these rights through processes, spaces and relationships in which children's human rights are made real. Discussions are framed to support and grow children's understanding of their rights and to support children's abilities to claim their rights.

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## Seen + Heard Fife

Seen + Heard Fife is a creative, human rights-based project for children with care experience, who are aged 9 to 14 from across Fife, supporting them to explore what it means to be healthy, happy and safe in care.

This project is delivered in partnership with the Fife Council Corporate Parent Board and 2bHeard, a project for care experienced young people in Fife. In Seen + Heard Fife, the children participate in a range of creative, reflective and relational activities that help them develop self-confidence, sense of self and identity, build foundations for positive relationships with other children and adults, and speak about their experiences in care in a safe, supportive environment. This programme takes place at the Falkland Centre for Stewardship and the sessions have a consistent structure to them, including shared mealtimes, group and one-to-one check-ins, use of the woods and outdoor spaces, and other group rituals. The children's views and

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experiences inform decisions made by Fife Council's Corporate Parent Board and help improve services for children with care experience across Fife and nationally in Scotland.

Part of the process in the first year of Seen + Heard Fife is Papier-Mâché Week, which asks the children to think about their future self; what kind of person would they would like to be in 20 years' time, what will that person be doing, what qualities will they have, who will be with them. They are supported by professional artists to create a 45cm papier-mâché model of their future self, learning new art techniques and skills, all while thinking about who they are and what they want for their future. These models are then exhibited, and the children share their hopes for the future with friends, family and their network of professionals.

In the second year in Seen + Heard Fife, the children look more closely at the positive and challenging experiences they have had with the care system and what they need to be healthy, happy and safe within care. Using a range of creative approaches, like poetry, art and papier-mâché shields, the children explore their identities, dreams for the future, and understanding of children's human rights and the impact these have on the lives of children with care experience. These messages are then shared with adults, from carers to practitioners to decision makers, so that children's views and experiences can influence changes to policy and practice.

In May 2018, Seen + Heard Fife hosted a 2-day engagement exhibition called 'Process the Meaning' at Fife College, Dunfermline, which showcased all the children's work from their second year in Seen + Heard Fife. Over the two days and five sessions, the children hosted over 70 national and local stakeholders who have responsibilities for children with care experience. By inviting stakeholders into this space, the children were able to share their work confidently and help the adults gain a first-hand insight into their experiences and ask the adults to make a difference for all children with care experience in Scotland.

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## This report

Impressed by 'Process the Meaning', the Care Review commissioned Children's Parliament to facilitate a consultation with the children to further reflect on their experiences in care and feed into the Care Review's final recommendations. This consultation consisted of eight group sessions from September 2019 to November 2019, working with 14 children from across Fife. During these sessions, the children engaged with the co-chairs from the Love Group, the Stigma Group and the Rights Group to share their experiences and views of care.

During these sessions, the children participated in a variety of discussion-based and creative activities to share their experiences in and ideas for improving the care system in Scotland.

The children identified the key messages they wanted to explore further for the Care Review report. Using 'genie lamps', the children identified their deepest wishes for children with care experience. These wishes, as well as other more personal messages, prompted further discussions around the importance of children feeling loved, living without judgement and stigma, staying in contact with people who matter, and feeling involved in decisions being made about their lives.

These were recorded through the children's own writing and artwork, as well as facilitators' notes. The information gathered during these sessions fell broadly into the five themes described above, indicating the children's focus and priorities for what was important about their experiences in care.

'Trash and Treasure' is used in each section of this report - this is an activity that we use to help children discuss the positive and negative aspects of certain issues or topics. The 'trash' is things that are not fit for purpose or do not help children and therefore should be tossed in the rubbish bin. The 'treasure' is things that are positive and helpful and that children want to keep around; things to be treasured. For each of the themes in this report, we have pulled out pieces of trash and treasure as a summary of the children's key points.

We also drew upon previous Children's Parliament work with children with care experience for this report, including the following pieces of work:

- **"Love and protects us forever" (2018)** <https://bit.ly/2RcQ4UA>
- **Happy, Healthy + Safe in Care (2018)** <https://bit.ly/2uELnep>
- **"If an adult just listens..." (2017)** <https://bit.ly/2QOtFOY>
- **Seen + Heard Fife Newspaper (2017)** <https://bit.ly/2QNzJ9T>

Children's Parliament staff drafted this report, based on all the available information from all the consultations related to the care system. The final draft was reviewed and edited by members of the Seen + Heard Fife group to ensure they were happy with the content and messages contained within it.

## About the children

The children involved in this consultation for the Care Review are Members of Children's Parliament (MCPs), who have completed their second year in Seen + Heard Fife. Drawn from across the local authority, 14 children aged 12 to 14 participated in this consultation. These children represent diverse backgrounds, abilities and care experiences, including kinship care, foster care, and looked after at home with the support of a social worker.

The quotes and artwork in this report come directly from children with care experience.

# Welcome from, Members of Children's Parliament

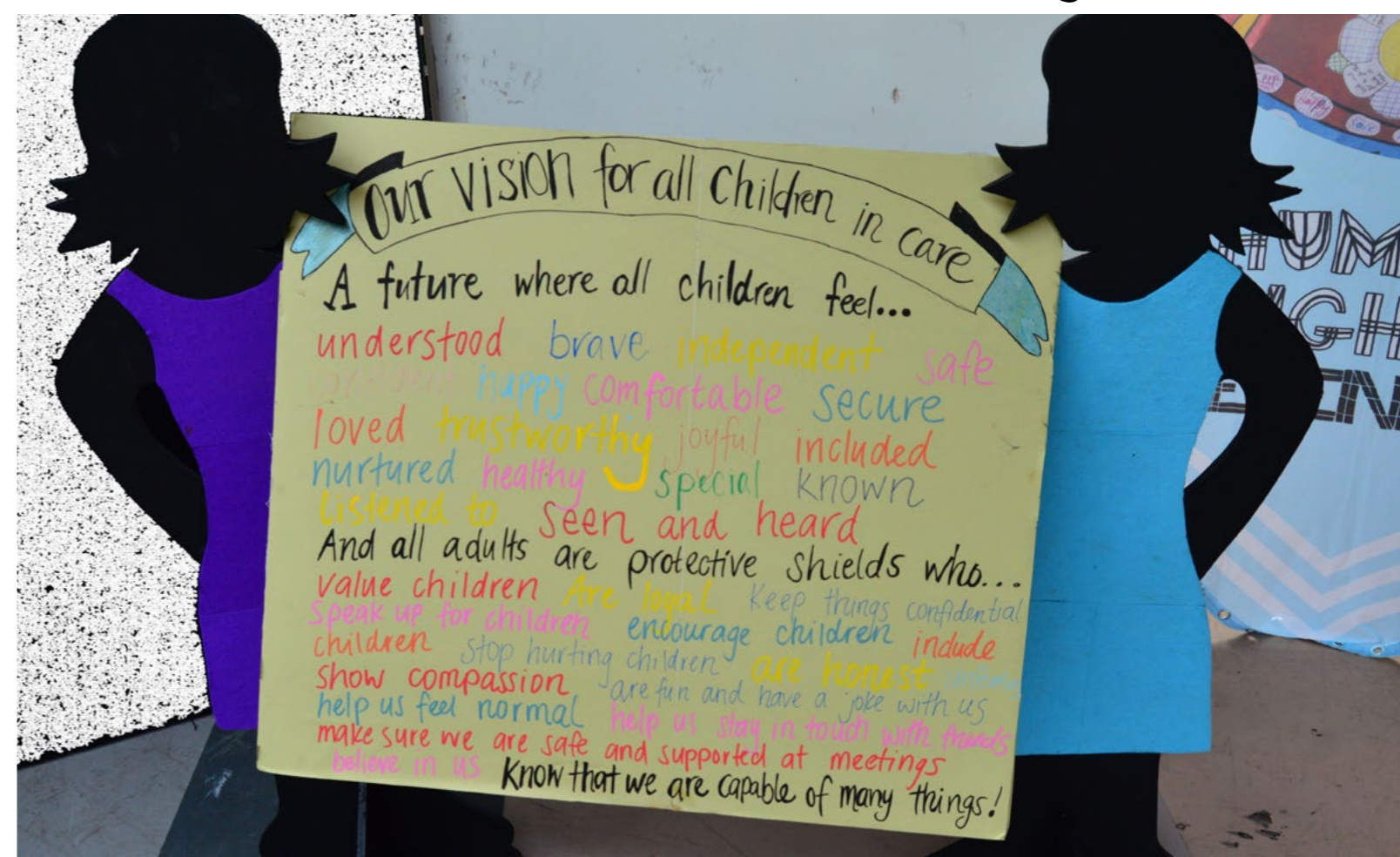
*As Members of the Children's Parliament with care experience, we think this report is important because it's sharing all of our thoughts and opinions about care and things we want to be different and better.*

*It's been an important journey for us, so please listen to us because we are the children who are experiencing it right now and we believe that things should change in Scotland for children with care experience.*

*After reading this report, we hope to get everyone's attention, especially people who make decisions about our lives. So that you know what changes children with care experience want.*

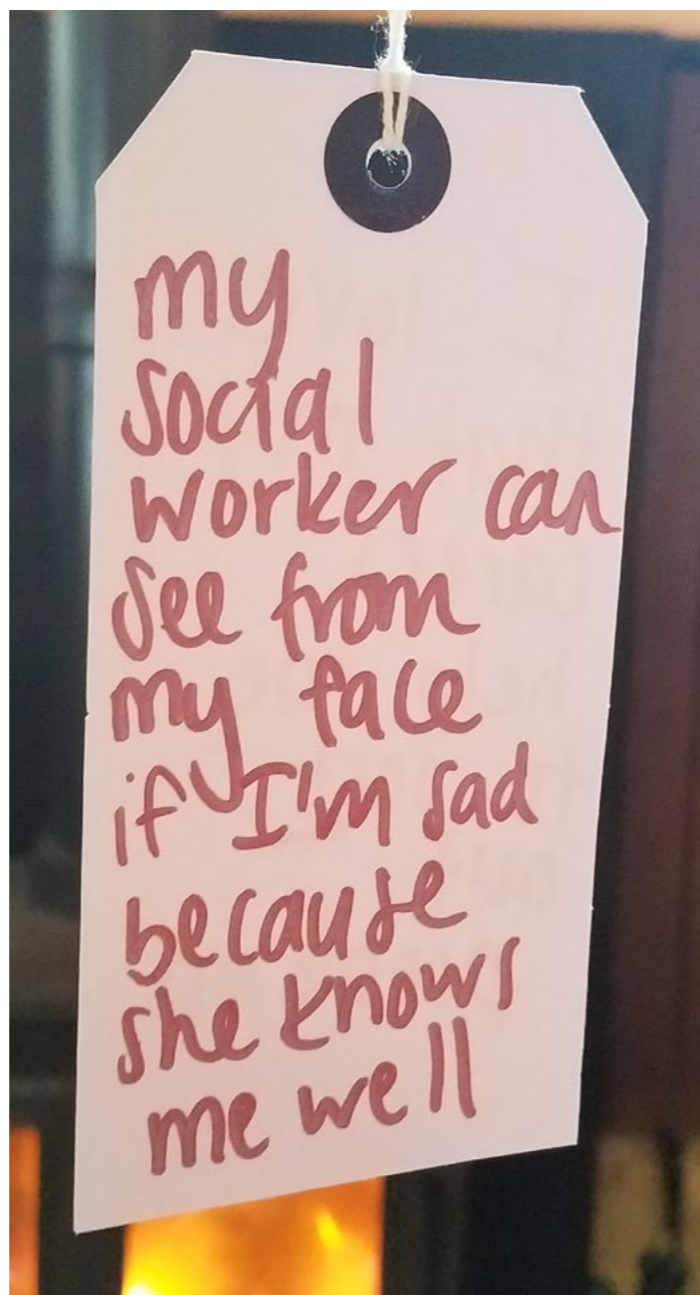
*We feel that this report is a reminder and something to prompt you to actually make these changes to make sure children of all ages in care feel happy.*

*Listen to our voices, because we need this change.*



# Theme 1: Relationships in care

All children value relationships, both with adults and with other children, and want to have opportunities to maintain important relationships throughout their lives. For children with care experience, they are more likely to have difficult or broken relationships due to adverse experiences in their early years and the transient nature of the workforce in the care system. Relationships are particularly important when a child's care experience involves moves in placement or school and changes in social worker. In all relationships, whether with family, friends or professionals, children want to feel loved.



## Love

Children say that love is at the core of all positive relationships and are clear that it is through the process of being in relationships with others that they are able to feel loved and to love others in return.

Children describe experiencing love as being with someone who:

- **Has a big warm heart**
- **Looks after you the way you should be looked after**
- **You know and trust**
- **Pays attention and is a good listener**
- **Is affectionate**
- **Has concern for you, has empathy for you and keeps you in their mind**
- **Spends time with you and makes memories**
- **Remembers important dates, like birthdays or first days of school**
- **Helps you calm down when you are upset, stressed or angry**

Children say that love is one of the most important things for all children to experience and that love is essential for children to feel safe and happy. When children experience positive relationships that involve love, trust, empathy and kindness, they feel "happy, trustworthy, special, smiley and safe". Children say that love is a human right and that all children need to feel loved.

**"It is important that looked after children think they are loved. Even if they are cared for – they all have the right to be loved."**

Children say that having positive and loving relationships feels good in its own right and they also link positive relationships to children's growth and development. Children say that being loved and loving others helps children feel increased self-belief, an ability to cope with difficult situations, and a sense of belonging. Children with care experience say that "life is an emotional rollercoaster" and that having understanding adults around them who can support children when things go wrong drastically improves their lives and helps them to feel connected and resilient.

**"When you have someone who loves you like that around you, you don't feel all alone and helpless, like some random being in the world."**

**"Spending time with each other is more important than money, like even if there was a big pile of money, I think love is when people are just leaving it there and being together."**

**"When things happen, like people die then you end up with a huge hole in your heart and your life. You worry about things like 'will I have to move placement?' but if you have someone who you can talk to then that makes a difference."**

When children talk about relationships in care, they often talk about two related but different types of relationships: those with family (biological, extended), which are often experienced within the context of 'contact' visits, and those

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with other important people, including professionals. Children identified the following (non-familial) relationships as important:

- **Foster family**
- **Social workers**
- **Teachers**
- **Children's Parliament**
- **Family friends**
- **Pets**
- **Friends from school**
- **Friends from sports teams or extracurricular activities**

Children with care experience say that relationships are vital but that they often have difficulty maintaining important relationships because of the way the care system works. Children shared how frustrating and disappointing it was when important relationships were stopped or negatively impacted due to bureaucratic issues, such as social work rules, changes in workers, and placement breakdowns or short-term placements.

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## **Relationships with professionals**

Having real, long-lasting relationships with professionals, like teachers and social workers, makes a big difference in children's lives, particularly around their ability to understand their stories, to learn, and to cope with adversity. Children say that when their workers are consistent, then they feel more comfortable being open and honest with those adults about their past experiences and they can trust those adults to keep their best interests in mind.

However, they say that there are different barriers and challenges which impact on children's relationships with the professionals in their lives. Children say that one of the barriers to being able to form positive relationships with professionals is the changing nature of workers. It is difficult for children when social workers change repeatedly or if they are moved to new schools and they are expected to immediately trust new people. Children often come back to the importance of trust in relationships; trust which is built with adults over time but can easily be destroyed.

**"My teachers at my old school knew me really well, like I'd see them every day, even my P1 teacher and stuff, but then I moved school and all the teachers were like strangers. They were nice, but they didn't know me."**

**"How am I meant to trust a social worker if they keep changing? I've had 16 social workers, which makes it hard to trust."**

**"Please try to keep social workers with children as long as possible and don't change them around. You can't build trusting relationships if you know they will be leaving you again soon."**

**"Changing social workers gets in the way of me being happy with them." "It feels like a betrayal when your social worker leaves and takes all your information with them."**

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**"It is good if I have time to get to know my social worker, I can trust my social worker when they stay with me for a long time."**

**"When you trust, it feels joyful, there's freedom and it's kind-hearted. When there's no trust or empathy you feel angry, broken hearted and tearful."**

Children's experiences with professionals vary and as a result, many children express distrust, anxiety and nervousness particularly around adults who work 'in the system'. While some children feel safe with and respected by their social workers, many children feel that their interactions with social work are negative, frustrating or inconsistent. Children say that social workers can perform an important job: "my social worker kept me safe and looked after me"; however, they want all children to have consistently positive and respectful relationships with social workers and other professionals with whom they come into contact.

For children, professionals in the care system should:

- **Be trustworthy**
- **Be quiet**
- **Be creative**
- **Know about children's rights**
- **Not shout**
- **Be inclusive – "Don't make me feel forgotten"**
- **Be friendly**
- **Have a big heart**
- **Be caring**
- **Have experience working with kids**
- **Be patient**
- **Be funny**

- **Be understanding**
- **Be kind**
- **Be easy to talk to**
- **Want to help you**

Children believe social workers can support children by:

- **Being welcoming and showing you are there to support us.**
- **Demonstrating that you're really listening, by following along when we're talking and asking questions.**
- **Knowing what to do when we are struggling or have an attitude.**
- **Being empathetic – try to relate to what we're going through.**
- **Visiting us before meetings so we know what's going on – otherwise it's awkward.**
- **Making sure that carers have the support they need.**
- **Helping us understand our story and explore our identity.**
- **Never giving up on us.**

**"Sometimes it's things like helping my gran with her messages. That helps us all because then things are easier for her."**

**"There are things social workers can do for a child that can help if they are coming out or exploring their sexuality. For example, they could help them find a LGBT+ group in their area so they can talk to other kids who are experiencing the same things."**

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## Living with a carer

Every child's living situation is different, and some children find it difficult to talk about their past experiences and current circumstances, but they want decision makers to know what it's like to live with a carer. They are very clear that they want all children in Scotland to have good care and grow up feeling loved. When living with a foster or kinship carer, children say that these things are important for them to feel happy and safe:

- **Children need to understand why they are in a foster or kinship care placement.**
- **Children should meet their prospective foster carers before being placed with them.**
- **Children need to be able to build trust with their foster carer.**
- **Children need to feel included in the family.**

***"Foster carers should help children feel part of the family and like we belong, just like other children."***

***"There should be equality for foster children and birth children."***

***"The same rules should apply for the whole household."***

***"Children need a home where they can flourish."***

Children feel that they should have a say in discussions and decisions around potential placements, as these will be carers who will play a critical role in their lives. Children think it is important

that they are able to meet and find out about potential carers before being placed with them. This extra time to get to know people will help children feel that they are being respected and included in the process governing their lives.

***"When I first went into foster care, I had to go into a temporary placement first and when I met my foster carer that was on the very day I moved in. I wished I could have got to know them a bit better. My current foster carers came to me and got to know me in the house I was in instead of just taking me somewhere new."***

***"If you went to a short-term carer and you get used to them and you have to leave that's not good, but if they get to keep you that's really good, you're used to them and feel part of the family."***

***"I think children should have the chance to share their opinions on the people who they stay with. With my respite carer, I met them as soon as I got to the house on the day that I was going to respite and then I just stayed in my room for the most of the time because I didn't really know them, but now that I know them more I am more confident."***

Children say that it sometimes feels like adults don't understand the things that are important to them. When they are being placed in care or moving placement, for example, they also lose contact with their pets and that can be devastating. They want to be able to still see their pets when they are in care.

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- **My dog is like family to me, she makes me feel safe.**
  - **Pets are there to protect you and love you, no matter what happens.**
  - **When you first go into care it is the law to see your family and you get pocket money to see your friends, not so much pets - that doesn't really happen.**

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## When relationships come to a close

Children say that when they create positive and trusting relationships with adults, such as social workers, carers or teachers, then they should have the opportunity to maintain contact with these people once their professional involvement comes to an end. Children say that they do not want to feel that adults only care about them when they are being paid to.

***"I'd like to get to see my old foster carers more. I think about them a lot."***

***"Say if you have a social worker and they leave, you should still be able to keep in touch with them, you can still see them, that should be the same with teachers."***

***"To everyone who is meant to look after me, please help and respect me, take time to talk to me and stay close to support me – stay close!"***

***"I feel like the teachers at my old school really knew me, they helped me and calmed me down. I feel like I'm going backwards now that I'm in a new school"***

Children say that keeping in touch with adults who have been part of their lives is important for them being able to understand their stories. Children need these adults to help them remember important parts of their lives and help them fill in gaps in memory, and thus provide a role which is ***"more than a job"***.

***"Adults need to know that we can't always remember when we were little, like when we were in nursery or P3, so it's good when adults can take photos, otherwise we just forget parts of our lives."***

If it is not possible to continue relationships, then the endings to these relationships require careful consideration and planning so that children feel appreciated, valued and not left behind by adults. Children want to know that they will be remembered by adults and kept in mind. They should then be supported during the transition to new social workers, carers or teachers.

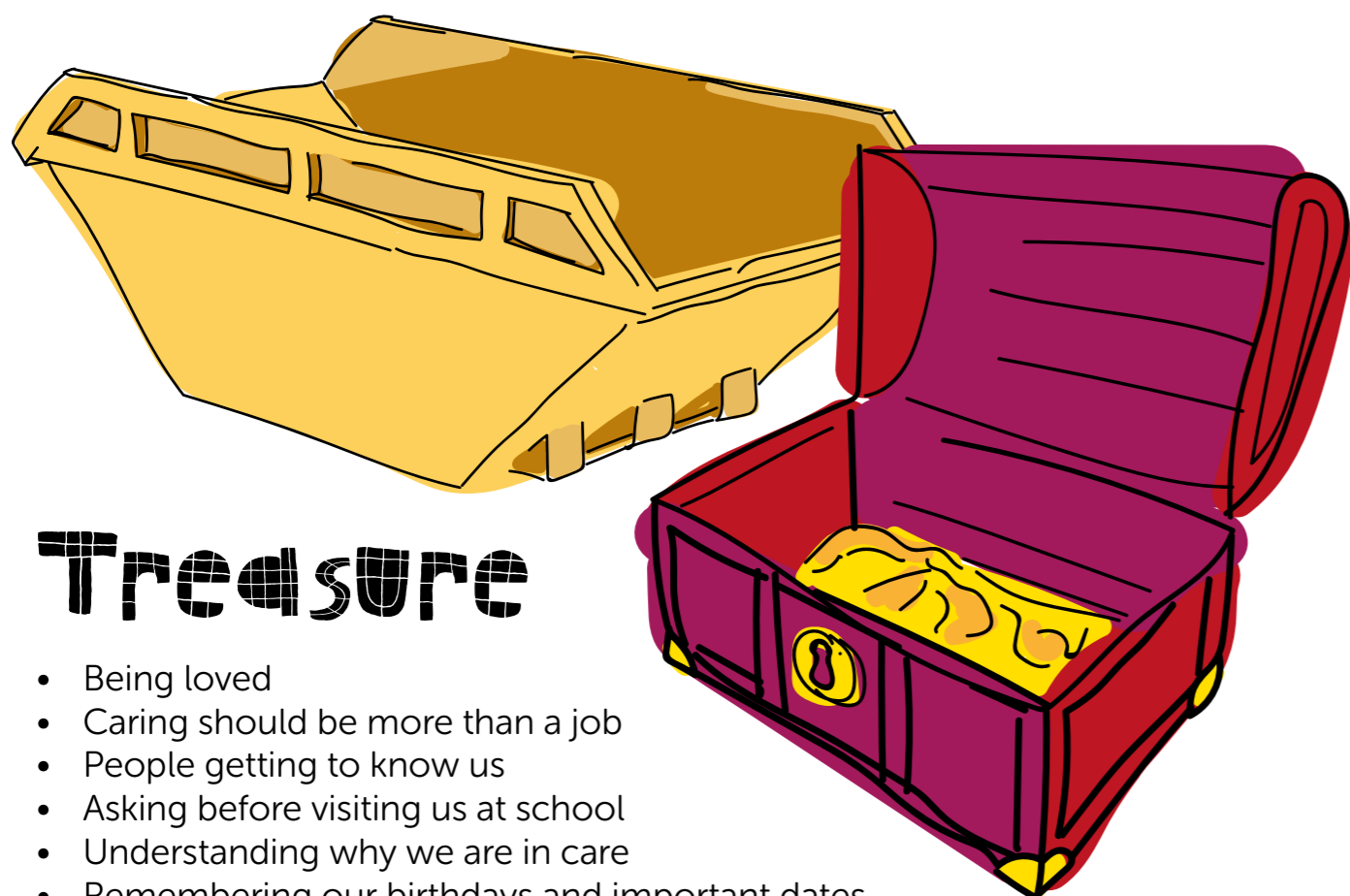
***"People should know that caring is more than a job."***



## Relationships in care

### Trash

- Having lots of different social workers
- Broken promises
- Missing school or activities for meetings
- Not getting to see pets from previous placements/homes
- Not feeling trust with adults
- Not knowing someone who we have to go live with for respite
- Relationships suddenly ending and being expected to just get on with it



### Treasure

- Being loved
- Caring should be more than a job
- People getting to know us
- Asking before visiting us at school
- Understanding why we are in care
- Remembering our birthdays and important dates
- Taking photos and helping us remember our early lives
- Being able to keep in touch with social workers or professionals who are important to us
- Being able to share our opinions on things like who we should stay with if we have to go somewhere short-term
- Getting to know new carers in a safe and familiar place (like our current house) before taking us somewhere new
- Being able to keep in touch with friends from old schools or old placement activities (football teams, gymnastics, Brownies etc.)

**“Something that I think is that your social worker gets to share their opinion on what happens at contact, but you don’t get to share yours. It feels awful.”**

- Member of Children’s Parliament with care experience, 2019

# Theme 2: Keeping in touch with important people



## Biological families

When children are placed in care, they feel very strongly that they should be able to retain ties to their biological families. In addition to seeing mums and dads, the children feel that it is important that they also keep in contact with siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and any other people that are important to the child.

**“You should still keep in touch and know what’s happening with [your family]. Like if you haven’t seen your mum in a month, then she may worry.”**

**“I don’t get to see all my family or my old carers. I see my mum, my sisters and my recent carers. It’s important because they are my family. I wish I could see them more and I wish I could see my dad too, but he has mental health issues.”**

**“They’re your family and you should be able to get to know them and have fun together.”**

When children are in different placements from their siblings, they identify that there are often issues around being able to see brothers and sisters and want support to stay in contact with their siblings.

**“It’s important to stay in contact with your siblings because they are part of your family, your flesh and blood.”**

**“One of my brothers lives far away and we got split up when I was 5, so I’ve never really known him.”**

**“When I don’t get to see my brothers and sisters it’s dark and feels like night-time. Then it is beautiful and happy when we do get to be together.”**

**“Adults should take these things seriously; these are our memories!”**

The children recognise that they might not get to see these people at all or as frequently as they would like. Some of the reasons for not having contact they identify are:

- **It’s not safe for them**
- **Distance – too far to travel**
- **If someone is ill or passes away**
- **If someone is in jail**
- **Someone else makes that decision and doesn’t explain why.**

If contact is not possible, then children say that they need to understand why they are not able to see their family.

## ‘Contact’

For many children, being able to see and spend time with biological family occurs within the context of ‘contact’, both supervised and unsupervised. Children raise many issues around contact, such as the term itself, the frequency and quality of contact, practical issues like location and timing of contact, and how decisions are made about who they have on-going contact with.

Children say that when life events get in the way of contact – for example, being sick – adults should prioritise children’s ability to remain in touch with their family, even if this is inconvenient for professionals.

**“It was really hard when I was sick and couldn’t go see my mum for contact. So I think that they could do things like have a facetime call or something so you can still see each other. That would have made me feel better.”**

Children say that it often feels that adults get to make decisions about how contact works and that this leaves them feeling ignored and unimportant. Children say that it is meant to be their contact so they should be able to make decisions about what happens during contact.

**“Something that I think is that your social worker gets to share their opinion on what happens at contact, but you don’t get to share yours. It feels awful.”**

**“I think on contact they should make sure that the social worker can do the things the child wants to do, like if they want to go walking outside together but the social worker can’t walk for long or doesn’t want to.”**

Children say that the location where contact takes place is very important. When contact happens in social work settings, it can feel more like “a business meeting” and that there aren’t many toys or things to do for children who are a bit older.

**“I think that since you have to go to a contact then it should be colourful and fun and there should be sofas so that we can make memories there.”**

**“I think it can be boring when you are in a room for one hour and you don’t really have a lot of things to do and then if you do start doing something together with your mum or dad you never have enough time to finish the stuff you need to do with them, because then the time is over.”**

Children say that their feelings should be considered when social workers and courts are making decisions on contact. Children feel that sometimes adults make choices for them but don’t actually consult with children, resulting in circumstances that are uncomfortable for them or entirely unwanted contact. In some instances, children do not wish to maintain contact with a biological parent or other extended family member and they want their wishes taken into account.

**“What’s the point of going to contact if you don’t actually want to see the person?”**

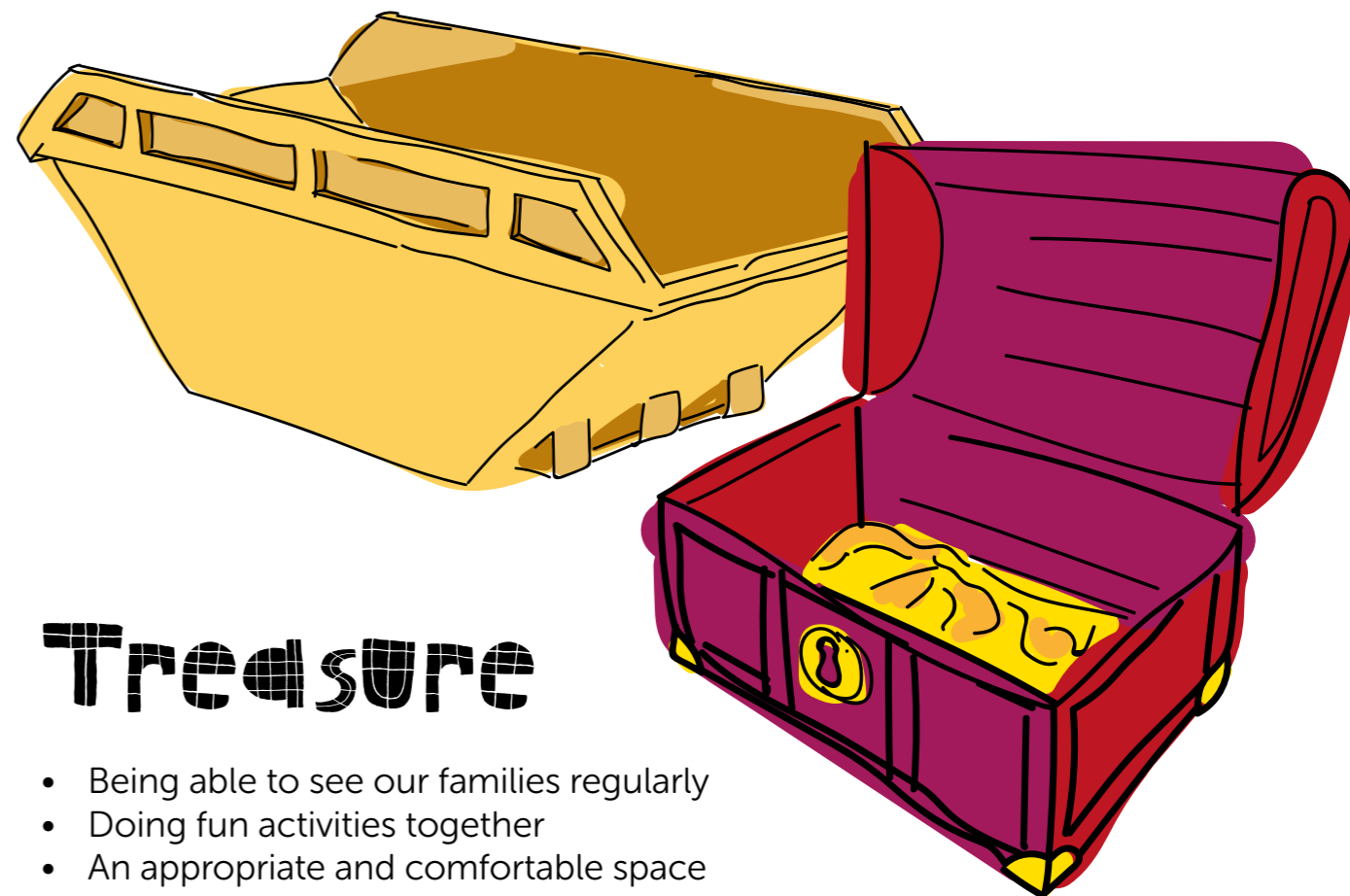
Children say they would feel better if adults around them took the time to understand how they feel before, during and after contact and supported children to think reflectively and honestly about their experiences.

**“It is important that my social worker and carer ask me after contact how I felt about it, because that helps us to think and talk about our feelings and to be able to rethink if contact is good for me or not.”**

## Keeping in touch with important people

### Trash

- Forcing us to have contact with a parent that we really don’t want to see
- Worrying about how our families are doing
- Feeling like we have to choose sides
- Not being able to do activities during contact because social workers don’t want to
- Not being able to share our opinion with people making decisions about contact



### Treasure

- Being able to see our families regularly
- Doing fun activities together
- An appropriate and comfortable space
- Ask us how we feel about our contact
- Being supported to have contact even if circumstances make this difficult, for example facetime/skyping
- Being supported to see our brothers and sisters and spend fun time together making memories

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# Theme 3: How decisions are made about us

For children with care experience, the right to have a say in decisions being made about them is a significant issue, and one they raise frequently. Children want to be part of the decision-making process as part of their everyday experiences and in more formal meetings, like Looked-After Child Reviews (LAC reviews), children's hearing panels and court hearings.

Children feel that it's very important that they have an opportunity to share their views and be taken seriously by the adults in their lives. They highlight that regardless of age, **"everyone should have their own say"**, especially when it is about something that will have a big impact on their lives.

When important decisions about their lives are being made, children feel that they should be included and be able to share their views. They highlight that they have a right to have a say and want to be taken seriously. However, they also recognise that some children

might feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of sharing their thoughts and feelings about what is happening in their families, particularly younger children or children with learning difficulties or disabilities, and early-life trauma. They recognise that there are challenges to creating a system that works for all children, but they think it is important that every effort is made to support all children in sharing their views if they want to.

**"I feel empowered when I know what is going on and if I feel I can ask questions."**

**"It's really frustrating because people are making decisions about you and you don't know the outcome."**

**"I think that when you don't get told things that are important and that you want to find out about and when adults won't tell you, it makes you feel anxious and confused and maybe also a bit worried."**

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**"Not being part of decision making about my life makes me angry and sad."**

- Member of Children's Parliament with care experience, 2019

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## Meetings

Children feel that meetings, like Looked After Child reviews, children's hearing panels and court hearings, are held in formal, unwelcoming spaces and it can be intimidating to attend them and share their views. Children say that the physical setting of many meetings makes children feel small and unimportant and makes it difficult for them to feel comfortable enough to share their opinions.

**"You can go to a meeting and there can be loads of adults and they make us feel invisible."**

**"Sometimes we get taken away from our adults and go to meetings and we don't feel safe."**

**"You can be scared when it's your LAC review and you don't know anything about it! They can feel tense, so I think they should make them less formal, so it is easier to talk."**

**"Having to go to a meeting can feel like a lot of anxiety for a child, like you are going to vomit. Why can't adults make it feel more welcoming? Most of the time we don't even want to be there in the first place!"**

**"In a children's hearing you can feel really small and insignificant because you are just a child and there are all these big adults opposite you and they have notes and you just feel small."**

For some children, attending meetings is a difficult experience. For example, when they do attend meetings, some children feel that they are not supported to take part in a way that feels comfortable or authentic to them.

**"I wish adults wouldn't randomly put me on the spot during meetings, like just suddenly saying 'So what are your thoughts?'"**

**"Sometimes adults just want children there at meetings so they can be evidence of good parenting or something."**

**"It makes you feel really unwelcome if no one introduces themselves to you when you have to go to a LAC review, everyone should make sure the child knows who they are."**

Because of the nature of these meetings, it can seem like every detail of children's lives are being brought out into the open and discussed. Children feel that their privacy is not always respected and that the experience is often embarrassing.

**"I think it can be embarrassing talking to people who you don't know about your life – everyone doesn't have to know everything about you just because you're a kid."**

**"Sometimes you can feel really misunderstood, like when you say something to your social worker but then they might twist your words and then it ends up in a report, then you feel really misunderstood."**

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## Meetings?

**Well, I think that stands for:**

**M**oaning,

**E**veryone is gone,

**E**xtrremely annoying,

**T**ime wasting,

**I**gnoring me,

**N**o one is there,

**and...um not sure about**

**G, um everything**

**is**

**embarrassinG!**

- Member of Children's Parliament  
with care experience, 2019



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For others, meetings are positive and they share experiences of feeling involved in decision-making processes. They link these to having adults involved who ensure that they are informed about what is going on and help them relax and feel comfortable.

**“I got to chair the meeting when it was my LAC review, the guy in charge was really nice.”**

**“I felt safe at my school and so they came and did the review there. That meant I felt more comfortable and that was better.”**

Children who have these positive experiences tend to feel more strongly that children should attend meetings and encourage other children to be part of decision-making processes.

**“I think it’s important to go to meetings. Like the choice where you are staying, before when I was staying somewhere it wasn’t the right place for me. I think it’s really important to be part of deciding what is right for you because even though it’s hard, it’s good. I get to choose if I go there or not – it’s important to know what the right place for you is, even if it is hard.”**

**“Personally I like to go to meetings, I don’t like people talking about me when I am not there. If they get something wrong about my life then I like to be able to correct them, but not everyone is like me.”**

**“For us, it’s our whole lives and it’s really big, but then the Sheriff gets to choose and it’s not big for him. It’s your life and he decides? That would make me nervous.”**

**“Some people here said that they think it would be too emotional and they might start crying. I think children should go to the meeting and talk about how it’s been and then they go home and they send a letter to you. Important decisions should be shared with you in private and with people you trust.”**

Despite agreeing that children should have a say in decisions which impact their lives, children highlight that attending meetings might not be the best thing for all children. They say that it is essential that children are given a choice about whether or not they go to meetings and if they decide to attend, then they need adequate support from the adults around them to take part in whatever way feels right for them.

**“If all children went to hearings, then it’s not really relevant or appropriate for them. Sometimes they are talking about you and what’s best for you and how they want to change things. Sometimes that is a bit much.”**

**“It should depend on what the child wants. I might not want to go to a meeting and it should be my choice. It should depend on what they need. The child should be able to pick.”**

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**“Sometimes children should go to them and sometimes they shouldn’t. Like, my panel is on the last day of term and I got asked to go to it, like hello! They shouldn’t do that! They should make it later! You should get to live your life and be a child. If you get asked to go a meeting it might not be a time that lets you be with your friends.”**

**“Sometimes at a meeting I’ll just be sitting there. And I don’t know what the questions mean so I just say nothing.”**

**“Sometimes you don’t want to go, it can be hard, kids can hear something and they will find it really emotional and you just don’t want to get upset.”**

**“Meetings should fit with what children want and how they want to be heard. Meetings shouldn’t take children away from their schools or friends or normal lives. All children should be able to choose and be supported to choose.”**

Children say that there are things adults can do to make the experience of being part of formal decision-making more positive for children and to make it easier for children to take part. Children want adults to consider ways to use new technologies, which would allow children to share their opinions without having to always be in the room. This could help children who are too shy or nervous to be there in-person but still want to be part of the decision-making process to claim their right to share their views.

Children suggest an overhaul of the meetings process to allow for child-centred practices to be the norm, such as meeting outside under trees when possible, sitting on the floor on beanbags, having comfort toys, food and drinks available, and limiting the number of people in a room.

Additionally, if children want to attend meetings, then they should be scheduled to suit the child’s schedule and needs; for example, children should not have to choose between attending a LAC review and taking part in normal activities with school or their friends.

**“Meetings like LAC reviews would be better if children were allowed to sit next to someone that they know.”**

**“Sometimes children want space but don’t to be alone so someone should go out of the room with them.”**

**“I think they could make the introductions more fun.”**

**“Adults should give you something to fidget with if you get nervous.”**

**“They should let you have headphones or draw or something, so you can be there but can distract yourself if you need to.”**

**“In my dream LAC review, we would meet outside under the trees and there would be a play area and a cuddly comfort toy. There would be something to drink and maybe even some biscuits!”**

**“They should make sure there is lots of privacy. I’d like it if there were special barriers I could pull up to give myself some privacy.”**

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**“They should have meetings in smaller rooms. Sometimes the rooms are huge and you feel really small and unimportant.”**

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### **Being kept informed about what’s going on**

For children with care experience, decisions are made that impact on every aspect of their lives, from big things like their placement with a foster family to smaller everyday things. Children say that these decisions are often made without consulting them beforehand or they struggle to understand what is happening because they haven’t been provided with enough information. For children, these decisions can feel like they are made and enacted quite quickly and children are left trying to cope and adjust as best they can. In particular, changes in placement or school are particularly upsetting; children are removed from settings and people they are familiar

and comfortable with and thrust into new, unfamiliar environments at very short notice.

Children want to be included in the decision-making process, to know what to expect in terms of the process, and to have enough time and information to make sense of what is happening. They want the adults in their lives to be open, honest and supportive when these big changes are on the horizon. This type of communication is essential at all stages of the care journey, not just at points of crisis or transition. Sometimes children worry that their social workers or carers are keeping information from them and feel that this is unfair.

**“Adults talk about things and they hide things from you. Sometimes they keep secrets and they think we don’t know, but we do know!”**

**“Please don’t keep things from us, that make us feel nervous and worried. But if you tell us it makes us feel better and more in control.”**

**“Let us have an opinion on things before you go ahead and do it – it’s our right to be consulted on matters that affect us.”**

**“When a child has to move from house to house, they can feel scared.”**

**“Ask children what is best for them before making any decisions.”**

**“I didn’t even get to say goodbye to my mum when I went into care.”**

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**“I was just told one day that I was going to move schools. I didn’t even know what was going on. I was only 6.”**

**“Sometimes you never get to say goodbye to your parents when you are going into care it makes you feel heartbroken when you leave your family when you’re going to care.”**

**“If a child is getting taken out of their home and then put with a relative, then social work should make sure that the child actually knows the relative if they are going to go and stay in that house with them!”**

Children frequently bring up the idea of ‘control’ and how little they have of it over their own lives. So many decisions are made about them by various adults, they feel like it is even more important that these decisions are made alongside them, so that they feel a part of the process and have appropriate information and support each step of the way.

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### **Everyday decisions and care**

Children repeatedly say that the rules and procedures which govern their everyday lives can be very challenging and feel unfair and restrictive. Children feel that these rules and procedures often limit the ability of carers to make decisions about them and they state that they want their carers to be able to make everyday decisions with them instead of having to rely on or check with social workers or other professionals. It can feel as if these professionals do not trust kinship or

foster carers to make decisions and children say that this makes them feel different and can place a strain on relationships.

**“My carer should be able to make decisions about things that matter to me, like going on holiday or staying over with friends.”**

**“I think that relationships are more important than rules.”**

**“We shouldn’t have to ask my social worker if I can get a haircut.”**

**“Social work shouldn’t be the ones arranging sleepovers.”**

**“My house had to be checked before my sister’s friend stayed over and it felt weird. I think my Gran should be trusted instead of the police coming and searching your house.”**

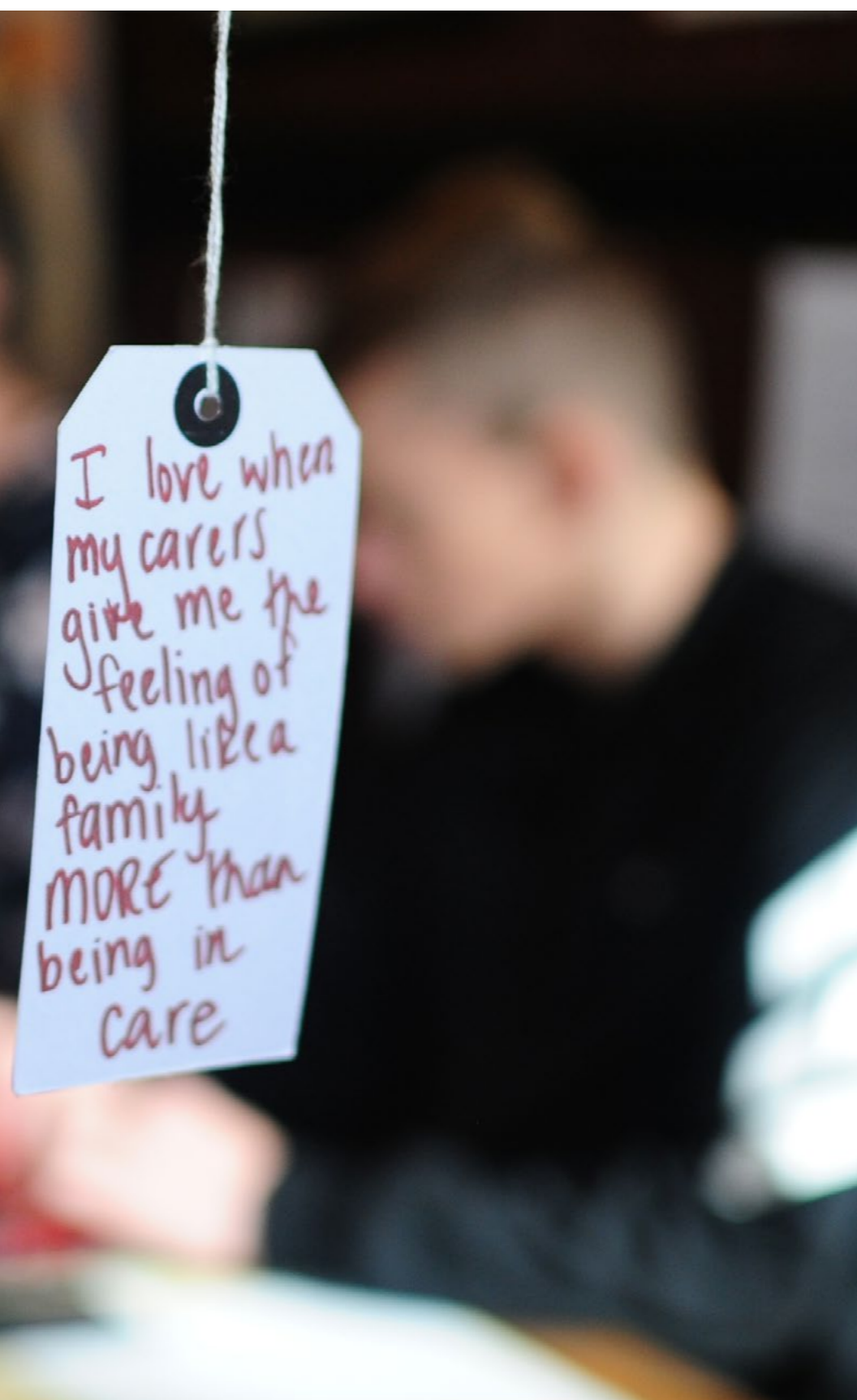
**“Some social workers need to be a little less serious, like it’s not always the worst case scenario, have a bit of humour and actually talk to you instead of telling you ‘this is what is going to happen, on you go’.”**

Children say that they feel different, excluded and not really ‘part of the family’ when rules and procedures get in the way of normal life, especially

when there are other children in the house to whom these rules do not apply. They say that when there is equality and normality in their homes, they feel happy, safe and loved.

**"I love that my carers are fair and treat everybody in the family equally – for example, there are the same rules for all in the household."**

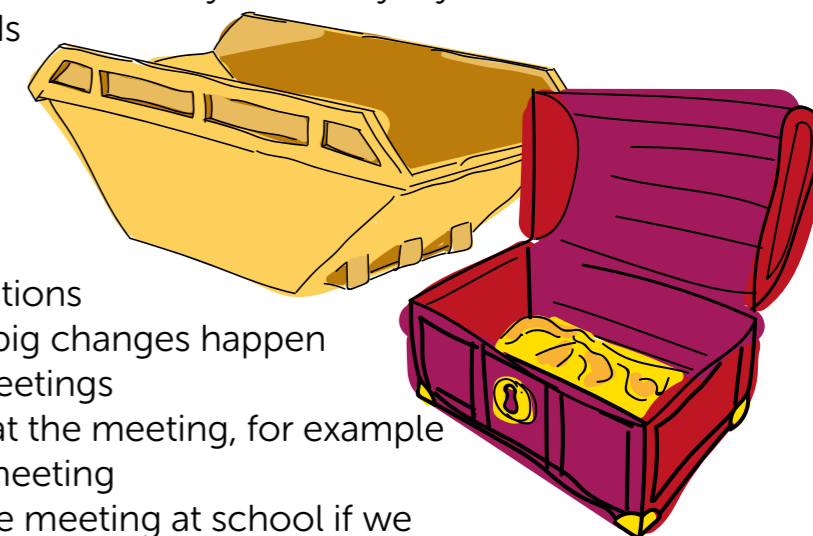
**"If you're with a carer, it should be more like a parent and that would keep you feeling not different."**



## Trash

## How decisions are made about us

- Formal spaces where we feel unwelcome and uncomfortable
- Adults keeping secrets so we don't know what's going on
- Not knowing what information is being shared about us
- When we are forced to move home and school
- Don't ask us the same questions over and over again
- Having formal police checks to be able to have a friend over for a sleepover
- Having social workers who are too serious and always worry about the worst-case scenario
- Having to ask social workers if it's okay to get a haircut
- Having meetings in huge rooms where children feel small
- Having meetings scheduled at times when children have to choose between their right to have a say and everyday activities with school or friends



## Treasure

- Let us know we can ask questions
- Time and preparation when big changes happen
- A child-friendly setting for meetings
- Being able to feel in control at the meeting, for example being allowed to 'chair' the meeting
- Having the option to have the meeting at school if we want so we feel comfortable and safe
- Having the same rules for everyone in the household so that foster children and biological children are treated the same way
- Being introduced in a fun way to everyone in the room
- Being supported in meetings by having options to be distracted like music, drawing, fidget toys or the ability to take some time out with someone you trust
- Having privacy during meetings and decision-making processes
- Being able to contribute to meetings without having to physically be there, for example through recordings or other technologies



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# Theme 4: How we talk about care

**“Remember that being in care isn’t the only thing about us – it doesn’t define who we are!”**

Children say that they are judged by others for their experience in care and that this gets in the way of children being happy and is a violation of their rights. Children feel that there is a stigma attached to being ‘care experienced’ and that this stigma can cause children to feel different, excluded and sad. This difference is highlighted particularly in relation to the language that people use to describe families.

*“I really think that teachers should be aware about who you live with so that they don’t make you upset – like if a teacher says ‘go home and tell your parents’ well, I live with my Gran so then I feel different and weird.”*

*“I’ve had something happen at school where it’s been Mother’s Day and I didn’t want to have to do that card, but my teacher wouldn’t let me do one for my Gran, I had to just sit and do something else, I think it was a puzzle.”*

Children say that they are aware that people can get bullied about things that are seen as ‘weaknesses’ or ‘differences’. Therefore, some children are very nervous about people finding out about their care experience in case it provides new information for a bully to use to make them feel bad. The stress and anxiety caused by stigma around care experience can have a negative impact on their mental health, self-esteem and happiness.

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*“I don’t always want to have people know that I’m in care so I call my carer my Gran to my friends, just so that it doesn’t start a big thing.”*

*“When social workers come around school they should take their badges off. Children might not want other people to know they are in care and so they should respect our privacy.”*

*“It’s not good to hide stuff about yourself, but it’s your right to if you want to.”*

*“People shouldn’t be judging you at school. You get judged for having a free school dinner – we don’t want that.”*

*“You can start to feel self-judgement after a while. Like, the more you hide things from others then you’re also hiding it from yourself.”*

*“We just want to feel like anyone else.”*

*“Teachers and school can be really helpful and supportive, but they need to be more discreet about your past and your privacy.”*

Children talk about the impact of language on children with care experience and the way that language can stigmatise children further. Children say that words such as ‘contact’ and ‘respite’ make children feel that they are different from other children and that they feel nervous and stressed about seeing family when they hear those words.

**“I think social workers shouldn’t use the word ‘contact’ they should say ‘family-time’. ‘Contact’ is a strange word to use to mean spending time with your mum and dad.”**

*“Contact shouldn’t be like a business meeting, it should be like family.”*

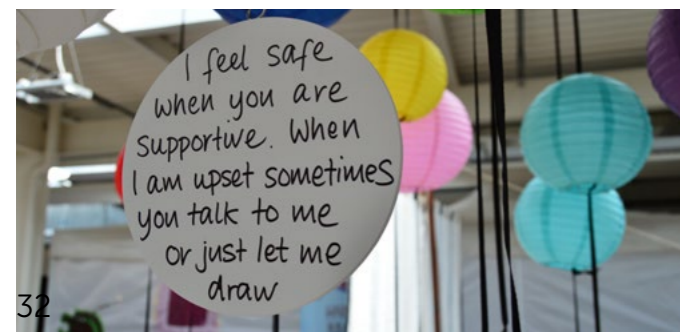
*“When I know I am going to ‘contact’, I feel excited to see my mum but also nervous because I’m worried about social workers or saying the wrong thing.”*

For other children, particularly young children or children who are looked after at home or in kinship care, they may not realise they are in care in

the first place and therefore they struggle to connect with the language professionals use to describe their situations with their lived experiences. These children say they are unfamiliar with the terms 'looked after' or 'care experienced' and that they assumed every child had a social worker because it's what they know as normal. It is important for professionals to remember that each child experiences care differently and that it should not be assumed that a child is familiar with the language surrounding the care system or comfortable having it applied to them.

Children say that their privacy is very important. They feel that due to their care experience, privacy is something that often feels threatened or at risk due to the multiple people in their lives who have and want information about their experiences, thoughts and emotions. They want their privacy respected so that personal information about their background isn't used to judge them, by the adults who hold it or whoever they are sharing it with. Children feel that they often have no control over this information and worry about how and with whom it is shared.

**"I think it can be worrying when your social worker writes information about you and shares it with other people. We should be told what is going to happen with our information."**



**"I don't think teachers should have the right know all the stuff I went through when I was younger; it's super private. They should only know things I think they need to know. I should have the choice to share what I am comfortable sharing with them."**

**"It all depends, when you say all teachers, like maybe only the teachers that you need to know, like at high school not all teachers need to know, maybe only teachers that you are close to and only things that you want to share - if you want to tell your science teacher you can, but I would go to your guidance teacher first, you don't have to tell your guidance teacher everything. I think it's complicated."**

**"I couldn't really care if people know about my story, if people know they know. If people treat me differently, it doesn't really bother me. Teachers might know but shouldn't bring it up or change anything. They might pay a bit more attention to you but nothing much."**

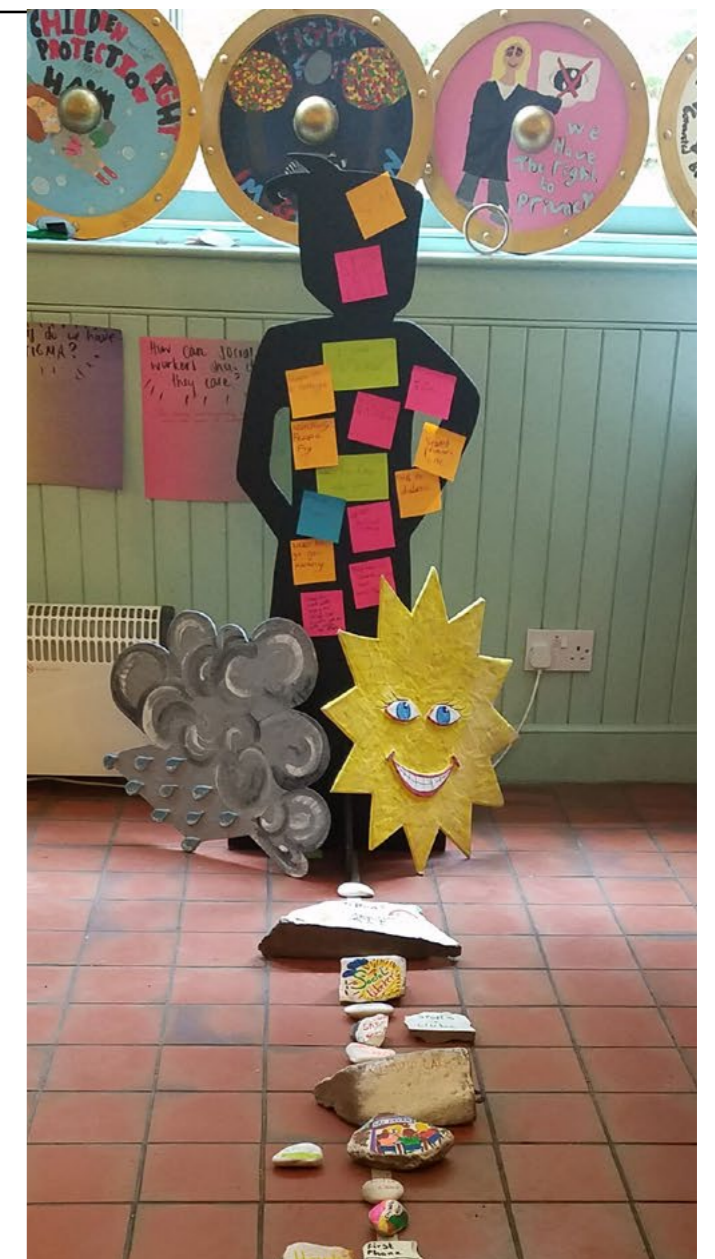
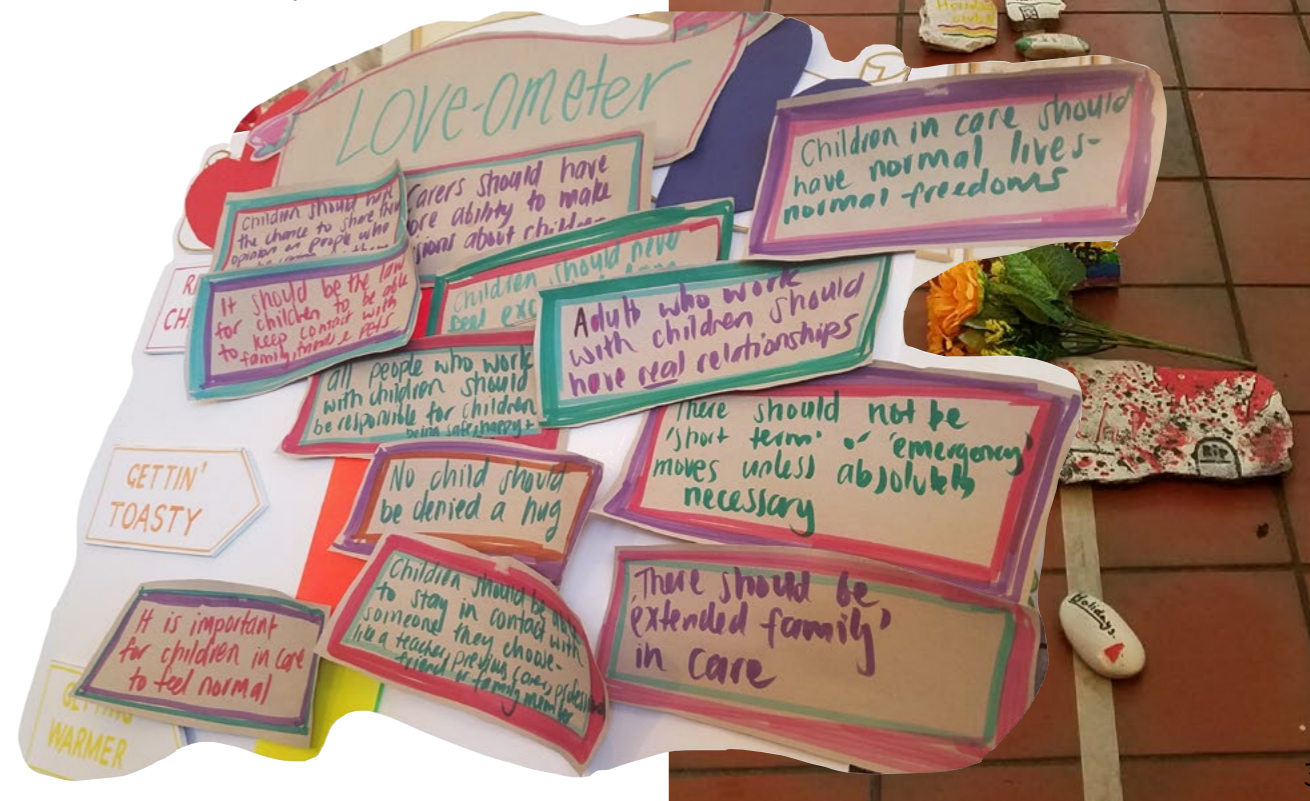
**"I don't want to everyone to know private stuff about me, only teachers who you have a relationship with. You make me feel good if you respect my privacy."**

However, children recognise that there are benefits to adults knowing some important information about them. When adults know about their experiences and needs, then they might feel safe, cared for and understood, particularly if it results in them receiving the support they require.

**"If you have a rough day at school, teachers can know why you are having a rough day. Teachers might get asked about LAC review information and so they might need to know things to add to that. I think all teachers should know."**

**"With teachers they should know who is and who isn't in care, but they shouldn't make it obvious - but if someone who is in care acts up, just accept it and talk to them about in privately, don't make a big deal about it in class."**

When thinking about the stigma around care experience, children say that everyone in Scotland needs to have a better understanding of what it means to be in care and how that experience shapes their lives. They want people to know that even though they are in care, they are 'just like any other kid'. Children want decision makers and professionals to actively combat the stigma that children with care experience face.



## How we talk about care

### Trash

- Feeling different, unequal and left out
- Someone talking behind our backs, spreading rumours and making things up
- Being bullied because we are in care
- Teachers not being discreet when they check in with us or talk about our care experience
- Saying 'contact' and 'respite'



### Treasure

- Using inclusive language
- Believing in us for who we are and our dreams for the future
- Taking off identifying badges when social workers visit at school
- Talking to us about which adults know information about our lives
- Understanding that sometimes we might have a tough day and need extra understanding and support
- Explaining what you are going to do with our information
- Teachers understanding that some things can be difficult for us because of our past experiences
- Talk about 'family time' or 'seeing each other' instead of contact

# Theme 5: Our sense of belonging

Children with care experience say they face specific challenges to feeling that they belong - at home, at school and in their community. This feeling of 'otherness' permeates all aspects of their lives.

The many rules and procedures surrounding children with care experience can disrupt their sense of normalcy - from being taken out of school for a meeting to being asked to choose between attending a meeting or a school event to being required to go through formal processes in order to have the same experiences that their friends are having, like sleepovers and school trips.

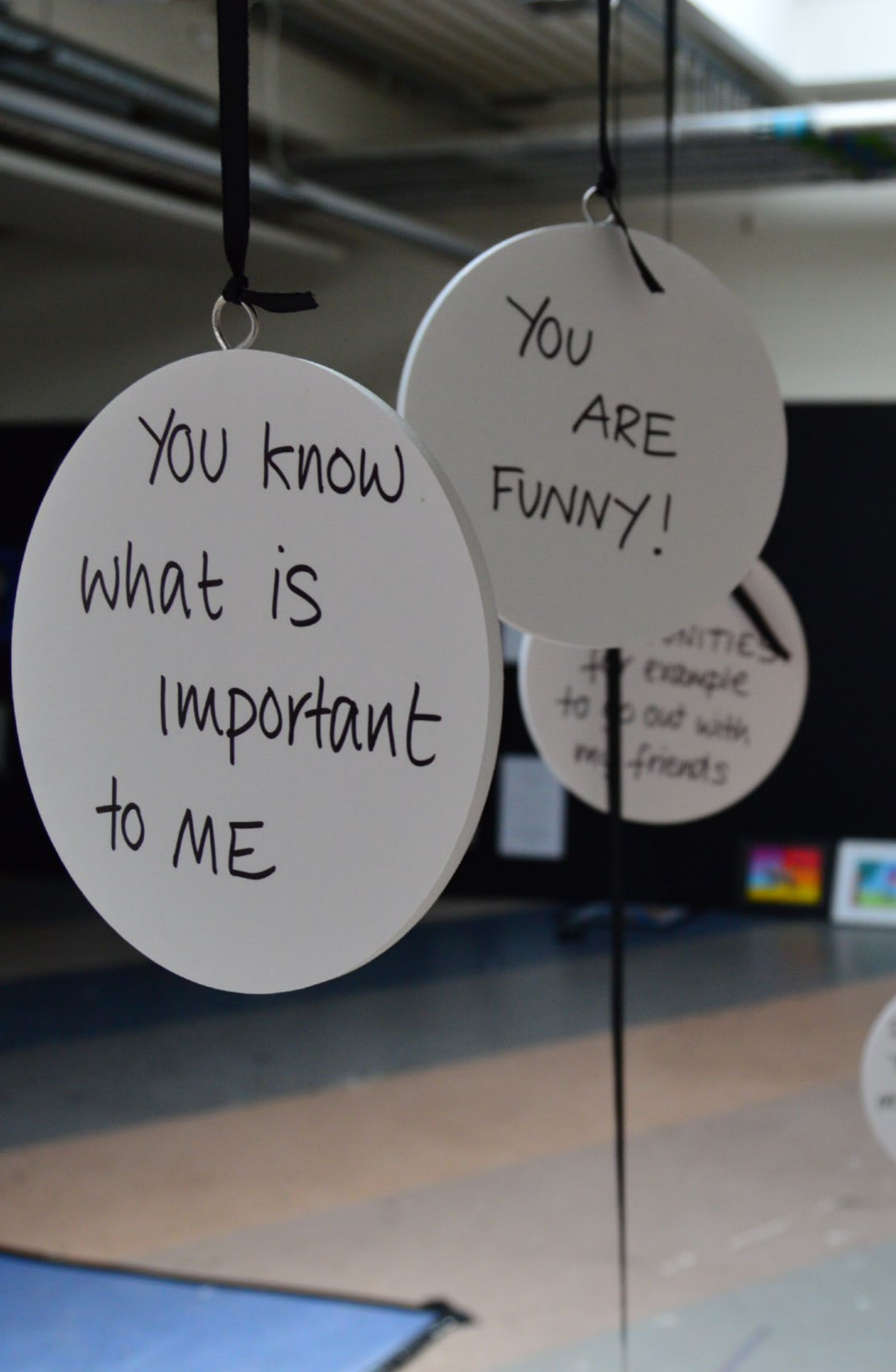


**"There is equality and there is equity - it's hard to feel normal when you are living differently from other children."**

**"Children in care should have normal lives and normal freedoms, children who are not in care get treated differently, like say a kid in care wanted to see their friends sometimes the police would get involved to make sure it was a safe place for them to be involved. It makes you feel like you are being held back from visiting a friend at home because it doesn't respect your right to privacy."**

**"Letting you have a normal life and be free is loving - it's like the adults are saying 'be free my little child!'"**

**"My life has been really hard and it's not fair. I wish I could just live in one place forever because I keep moving and then I make friends and then lose them, make friends and then lose them. I just want to be in the right place to call home."**



## Belonging at school

Children say that it can be difficult to feel that they belong at school because of differences in their living situation, which can feel highlighted and conspicuous in a school setting. Children say that most of all they want to feel 'normal' but that this is a constant challenge when children are in care.

**"Social workers could ask before visiting us in school. Sometimes nobody knows we are in care and we just want to be like everyone else."**

**"If I'm running late and get somewhere five minutes late everyone over-reacts and it feels like I have no freedom, I think that's because I am in care that they get so over-the-top so please give me some freedom and stop worrying so much!"**

Children also link the feeling of belonging to feeling that they belong within their friendship groups. For children, making and having friends makes them feel valued, likeable and accepted and the loss of or disruption to these relationships can impact negatively on how children see themselves. Children say that adults need to remember just how important friendships are to children and consider ways to support children to make and maintain friendships.



**"Friends make me happy, friends help you keep happy and positive by being in your life. It is important that my social worker understands that friends are important and I need to be in contact with them."**

**"I think this is extremely important that if you have friends and then you move placements you should still get to see these people, and see them for most of your life. I have a couple of friends and the only time I see them is if I can keep in touch through the phone."**

Children say that there are aspects of being 'in care' that make it difficult to feel normal within their friendship groups and this can complicate friendships.

**"It can be hard if you are in care and you are trying to have friends because stuff like police checks on your friends and stuff is annoying. There should be normal parenting when you're in care."**

**"I think if you're in care you should get free travel so you can see friends and family – we were asking for free bus passes for everyone in care, so they can keep in touch with people even if they can't get a ride in a car or if they don't have the money."**

Children feel that there is a lot of pressure to be 'normal' and not stand out due to their care experience. For some children, this means hiding parts of their lives that cause them to feel different, which can result in shame, worry and stress. When this happens,

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forming and maintaining friendships is difficult as there is a barrier to being able to share their true stories and trusting that their friends will be understanding and accepting.

**“I don’t want all my friends to know about me being in care, I tell some of them but not all of them. They want to know where you’ve been because you’ve been at a meeting and when you don’t want to tell them it can start fights; they just don’t understand.”**

**“If you are at school you have friends but often they don’t know that I am in care – I only tell people I trust. That is because I do not want to be treated different or feel that someone feels sorry for me.”**

**“Sometimes you fall out with friends because you don’t want them to know when you had a meeting with a social worker for example. They don’t understand that you don’t want to share everything.”**

**“I don’t want people at school to know that I’m fostered because I think that kids might tell other kids and then they’d be asking me questions and I’d feel really stressed. I’d feel like I was different than them and they might bully me.”**

**“It is hard if you have a meeting with social work and you are off school and friends ask you: Where have you been?”**

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## **Belonging at home**

Children also talk about the importance of belonging within their families, which for some children will mean their biological families and for others this means their foster families or kinship families. Children say that belonging can be something as simple as spending time together or being trusted to be part of the family routines and chores and having the same rules as the rest of the family.

**“I love when my carers give me the feeling of being like a family – more than being in care.”**

**“I like that I have a job to do, like I like being asked to do the hoovering at home.”**

**“I love when my carers go out with us and take us to places or on holidays, they spend family time with us.”**

Children say that there are practices and processes which make them feel that they do not belong in their families. These include issues discussed earlier in this report such as being required to get permission from social work to attend parties, go on sleepovers, attend school trips and get haircuts.

Children say that belonging shouldn’t be an ‘only sometimes’ feeling and that children should be able to be with people who they trust and feel safe with, which is why they feel that respite can be a particularly damaging practice. Children’s experiences of respite are that it can be a scary, upsetting and awkward

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time and that they feel left behind and excluded from their family. Sometimes, children have to stay with strangers while their foster family go away on holiday, which is both uncomfortable and upsetting.

**“Sometimes carers go on holiday and you have to go into respite while they go away, it can feel like you are really left out.”**

**“I felt okay going to my respite carers because I knew them from school, but I was still nervous. If I had to go to someone I didn’t know, then I’d feel really scared.”**

**“All children should get given presents at Christmas and birthdays, and social work should make sure no one gets left out.”**

**“I think it can be really awkward and hard going to stay with a new respite carer, you feel like you can’t talk to them or have a laugh.”**

This might require significant changes to the systems surrounding respite and short-term placements, including alternative care options such as ‘foster aunties/uncles’ and being able to go stay with known and trusted adults outside the ‘care system’.

**“When I went to respite, I didn’t even know the person. Children should be able to be with someone they know, like someone from Children’s Parliament or something so they feel okay.”**

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**“I think it would be easier for children to stay with people they already know if they have to go to respite. Why can’t there be people like an aunt or uncle who take you out to do fun stuff, like on the weekend and where you could also stay overnight if you needed to?”**

Children say that being given opportunities to belong and feel normal is important and helps them feel that they are not the only ones going through difficult situations. Children say that all children in care should get to be part of groups where they can meet and have fun with other children who have care experience. For some children such groups are the first time they have been able to talk freely about shared experiences with other children who are also in care.

**“I like getting to meet people that are in the same circumstances as me. And you also get to be friends with them too.”**

**“It’s comfortable and safe here [a group for children with care experience] to talk about being looked after, being in care, social workers, carers because everyone here is a team and we’re all in care.”**

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## Children's Rights

For children with care experience, they have already had adverse experiences in their early years – possibly violations of their human rights – which resulted in them being looked after in the first place. As they grow up in care, it is still possible that not all their rights will be respected, which can pose further problems for them in the future. With so many adult gatekeepers around them, children with care experience being able to fully experience their rights is directly linked to whether or not those adults fully understand children's human rights - children are reliant on individual adults to ensure their rights are respected, protected and fulfilled.

**"I think sometimes children in care find it harder to get their rights. I feel like I have always had my rights. I've never had them denied for me, I've always known what they were. But I know that's not the same for everyone."**

**"I think adults should protect children from harm, they should be protective shields and keep children safe."**

**"I think all children have the right to live in a home where they can flourish, like a flower."**

**"Adults need to know about rights so that they can teach them to children and when the adults have children of their own, they can help them get their rights too."**

**"I know that children have the right to be looked after by carers, like I am with my carers."**

**"Children's rights are important because they make a child's life liveable."**

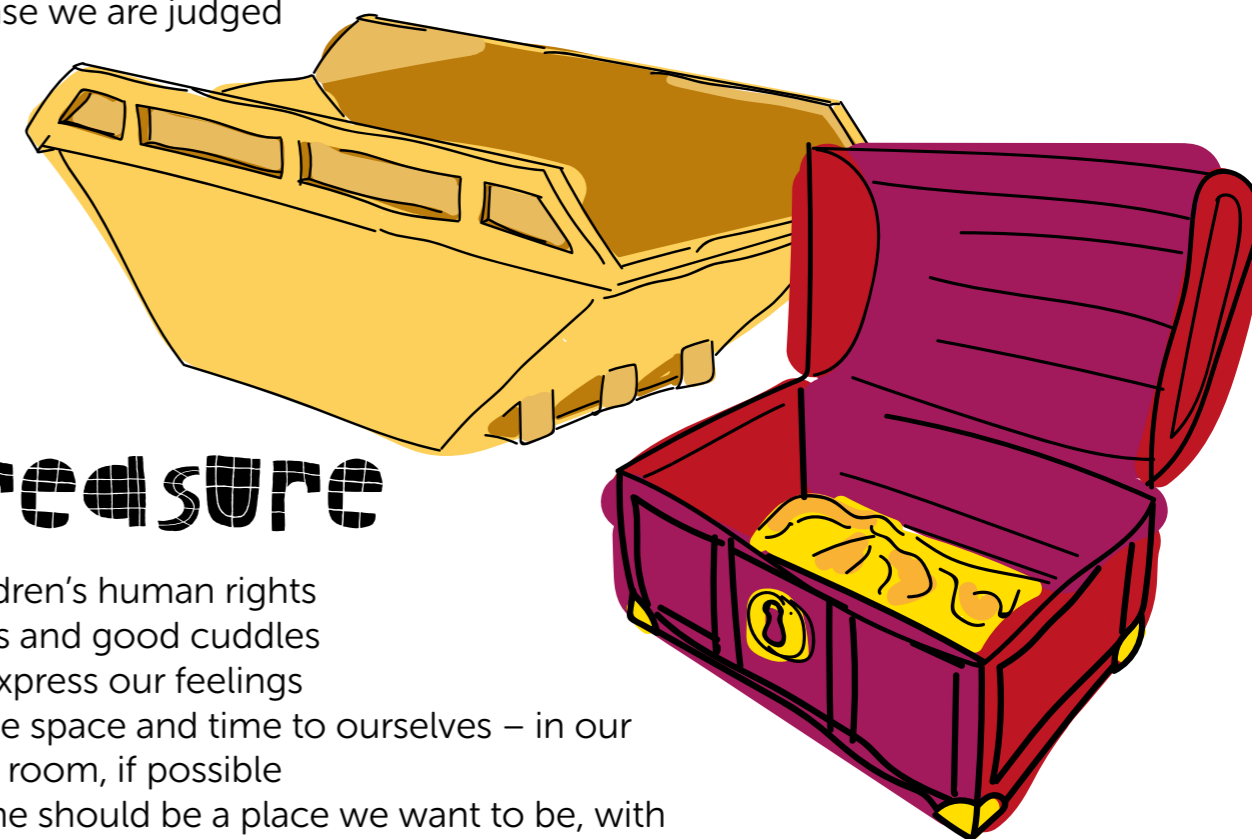
Children identify that while individual experiences of care may be positive, they also recognise that not all children have positive views of the care system as a whole. Truly transformational change requires care experience to be rooted in children's human rights; all professionals working with children in the care system need to fulfil their duties in respecting, protecting and fulfilling those rights.



## Our sense of belonging

### Trash

- Being treated differently to other children in the house or at school
- Feeling lonely
- Being called out of class to meet with our social workers
- Having to go on 'respite'
- Not being included in family holidays or special occasions
- Feeling pressure to hide our experiences in case we are judged



### Treasure

- Children's human rights
- Hugs and good cuddles
- To express our feelings
- Some space and time to ourselves – in our own room, if possible
- Home should be a place we want to be, with people we can talk to and where we are nurtured, comfortable and relaxed
- Being able to play with friends and take part in clubs and activities
- Having fun with our family and going on holidays together
- Having family time
- Being able to meet and spend fun time with other children with care experience
- Going on holiday with carers and feeling part of a family

# Seen + Heard Fife's Key Messages

## **Love.**

Love should be at the heart of all relationships.

## **Relationships are essential.**

Children find changes to social workers, carers and schools difficult and it is important that the professionals involved in a child's life remain as consistent as possible. They also need to maintain relationships with family, friends and other chosen people. Policies and practices need to ensure that these relationships are given full consideration.

## **Being in care does not define children.**

Children with care experience want to be known for their entire selves and given the freedom to self-disclose their care experience. The stigma children face about being in care needs to stop and adults need to lead the way by using inclusive and supportive language.

## **Children's right to privacy must be prioritised.**

Children's right to privacy must be prioritised when professionals are performing their daily tasks. Social workers should remove identifying badges when entering schools and consult with children to ensure they are not being taken out of their favourite class or made to feel abnormal or different. Information should only be shared on a need-to-know basis and this information should not be used to judge or further stigmatise a child.

## **There needs to be equality and equity for children in care so that they can lead a 'normal' life.**

Children need to have adequate support for learning and as many opportunities to succeed as possible. They need to feel like they belong with the families they live with, whether in kinship or foster care, and want to be treated like the other children in the family. Policies and practices which make children feel excluded from 'normal' life should be stopped.

## **Respite is challenging for children.**

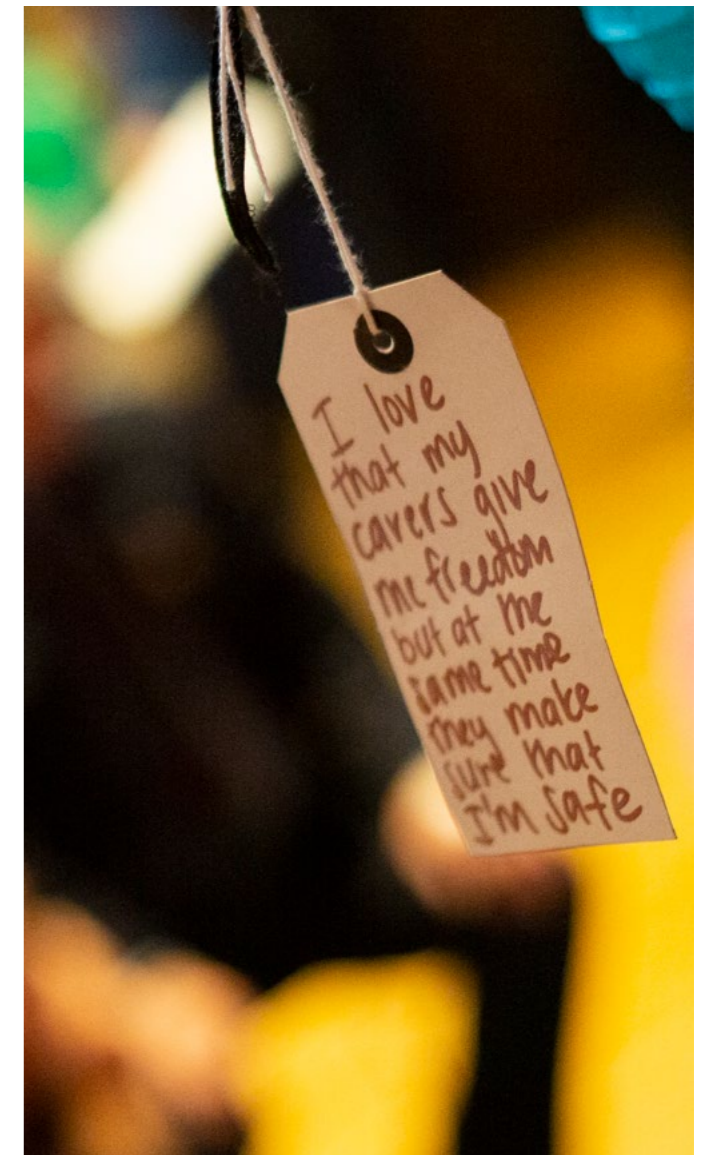
Respite is challenging for children and should only be used in emergency situations. Consideration should be given to alternatives to respite, including wider networks of care such as 'foster aunts/uncles', who are known to the child and can provide 'sometimes' care. Additionally, as an alternative to sending a child on a traditional 'respite' stay, which may or may not be with someone they know, looking for opportunities for adults who are important in that child's life (for example, staff from third-sector organisations, extracurricular activities, or support services, teachers, friends' families, etc.) to be able to support them in order to provide a continuity of relationships and feeling of family/extended family.

## **Language contributes to the stigma around care.**

Children often do not understand or identify with the professional language used to describe their situations. Language which makes children feel different, marginalised or like they are involved in business transactions instead of relationships should not be used. For example, children say that 'contact' should be renamed and suggest alternatives, such as 'family time' or 'seeing each other'.

## **Children want to be involved in making decisions about their lives.**

In formal meetings, adults need to make an effort to ensure that children feel comfortable and safe; this requires serious consideration to the structure and logistics of their involvement. Children should have the choice to be involved in meetings and they should not be forced to attend if they do not feel comfortable or able to participate. However, it is important that children are informed about any decisions and updated about changes to their care experience in a sensitive and appropriate way.



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# Readers' reflections...

We hope that this report has helped you to consider the lives of children with care experience. We have provided this space for you to reflect. Perhaps, with a cup of tea.








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