Guidance to improve behaviour for learning for looked after children.

This guidance does not provide a quick fix for vulnerable children. It offers a series of intervention practice which has been shown, over time, to improve the behaviour for learning of individuals and groups.

“How many children are there in our schools who have been and remain misunderstood? The longer we fail to connect with them in their ‘alien worlds’, the longer they miss out on so many opportunities in school that could help them to realise their potential, and the more they are at risk of being excluded or developing mental health difficulties.” Louise Bomber, ‘Inside I’m hurting’, 2008

“Teachers can turn these children around by being tolerant and giving them faith in themselves” Molly - Foster Carer.

“I had one child from when she was five years old until she was ten. She went to the local school. They didn’t know what had hit them at first. The special needs teacher helped me a lot by listening; listening is very important.” Rosalie - Foster Carer

“As victims of circumstances beyond their control, children with disrupted childhoods can be left insecure and vulnerable. Feelings of loss and abandonment make the child very anxious, fearing further rejection and uncertainty. This is shown in attempts to control what is happening around them.” Anne Peake, ‘Attachment and the consequences of disrupted childhood’, 2009.

A recently published Ofsted report said, “Nationally, children in care are eight times more likely to be permanently excluded than their peers. The schools in the survey sought to minimise exclusion for this group of young people. The most effective means involved close work with the local authority to develop programmes for managing behaviour. These focused on early intervention and on providing appropriately challenging alternative provision; for example, work with local authority behaviour management teams and involvement in initiatives such as behaviour for learning and anger management courses.”
Below are some useful generic ideas that may help to start understanding these children in a way which is simple and easy for the child to cope with and non-disruptive to staff and other peers.

1. **Be informed about where these children have come from both physically and emotionally when they first arrive in a new school.**

   Use some or all of the following resources to aid this process:
   
   - QCA Behaviour Profile which assesses emotional, behavioural and learning issues in an easy to access way.
   - The Boxall Profile is more time-consuming but gives an overview of developmental and diagnostic areas for children between 3-8 years old. Following this assessment recommendations are given to aid in the classroom.
   - If a strengths and difficulties questionnaire has been completed by foster carer and/or social worker this may also offer important insight into any on-going emotional, social, peer or conduct issues.
   - The young person or child’s views may also be relevant and informative. These should routinely be collected before or during all personal education plan (PEP) meetings. Some children or young people may find it easier to express their opinions about school by using drawing, powerpoints, one to one ‘chats’ with a trusted adult etc.
   - Discussion with the foster carer is vital as they know the child and can often give ways in which the child copes with change, meeting new people and generally their emotional well-being.
   - Reports and paperwork from the previous school. Please contact the Virtual School if these are difficult to obtain.
   - Social Workers are also very knowledgeable and may be able to give some information on problems which the child may have encountered. Obviously, there are some facts which are not legally allowed to be given out for safeguarding reasons.
   - Make sure that relevant outside agencies (who have been involved with the young person) have assessed the child. These may be Educational Psychologists, Attatch team, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Speech and Language Team (SALT) and health professionals.

2. **Communicate with key staff to ensure that the pupil is receiving consistent messages.**

   - All staff working closely with the child should be aware of triggers or issues which may cause any emotional upset. This should be on a ‘need to know’ basis as most looked after children have many issues with too many people being involved with them and ‘knowing their business’.
   - Cross-agency meetings can be invaluable and allow all to work together to implement strategies linked within school and at home. Ensure that all staff are aware of who these
vulnerable children are and regularly discuss any changes in strategies employed in school following these meetings.

- ‘Team Teach’ strategies may be needed if there are behavioural issues and this is useful for all vulnerable children within school. The 6 stages of crisis plan from this training is useful in supporting behaviours which may be exhibited.
- Personal Education Plans (PEPs) are statutory and must be completed every 6 months. If issues arise within this time then please contact the social worker, foster carer and the Virtual School to organise an early meeting. This plan is useful to discuss all issues relating to the looked after child, their emotional, behavioural and educational needs.
- Establish trust by building in time, space and a nurturing adult or older peer to listen to the child, enable them to express their feelings, reduce anxiety and when the time is right reflect on their behaviour, discuss what has gone wrong and plan joint strategies for coping. This may also include a Home-School Diary which is a great link between foster carers and teachers; it sometimes pre-empts new issues which may be starting.
- It is essential to build an early rapport with foster carer/s as they are corporate parents for the child and should be treated as parents in all aspects of school life.
- Safeguarding issues are important when dealing with children in care and thus the social worker must be contacted with regard to other relevant adults linked to the child. They can send any school reports, individual education plans, newsletters and invites to school events or parents’ evening to the relevant persons if this is acceptable. Always check with the social worker before any communication is had with any other adult/s apart from the foster carer.

3. **Identify vulnerable times and trigger points so that planning and support can be implemented.**

- Vulnerable times may be the start of the day, unstructured times such as breaks/lunch times, lessons the child finds difficult, transitions between lessons. Buddies or older peers may be a great help at these times.
- When the pupil is upset, overwhelmed or challenging, remaining in the classroom is not the best option for the child, their peers or staff within the class. Identify a safe place where confrontation is less likely and where there can be safe supervision and nurturing.
- A small, tight team is involved directly with the pupil keeping change and transitions to a minimum. Staff need to realise that they are going to have to build trust and gently challenge the pupil’s internal working model as survival strategies are in place because of previous relationships with adults.
- Emotional and social tasks and expectations are differentiated to the pupil’s emotional and social age rather than their chronological age.
- Remember to plan for times when stress and emotional levels may be heightened for looked after children e.g. birthdays, Mother’s and Father’s days, Christmas, special anniversaries such as coming into care or relatives’ deaths. These times need to be recognised either by organising other curricular activities or just making sure that staff are aware and more prepared if they occur.
- Disclosures about past happenings are not uncommon and as the young person becomes more comfortable in their new surroundings or with certain members of staff, they may begin to recount past happenings. Please let the social worker and foster carer know if this happens and obviously document any conversations which may be relevant. If these disclosures become fairly common place and obvious then outside agencies may be needed such as CAMHS or Attach.
- When planning curricular activities be aware of certain subjects such as biographies, most looked after children will not want to discuss their early years or have only sad memories. Hospitals, Police or Fire services or even holidays may also raise bad memories.
4. **Plan for and be aware that these pupils may have one or many of the following tendencies:**
- Often fiercely independent
- Lack of interest in school work
- Doesn't think ahead
- Difficulty fulfilling homework requirements
- Daydreaming - child may appear 'absent'
- Poor concentration - (too involved in basic emotional survival to develop skills or be settled in the learning environment)
- Unpredictable outbursts which may be consequent on triggers of past experiences (see point 3 above)

Ofsted’s survey into exclusions and behaviour surrounding looked after children says that some pupils were put on to specific ‘flexible curriculum’ or alternative curriculum pathways which involved time spent at the local college or with a work placement provider. Looked after children were encouraged to stay after school to be involved with other children in additional enrichment activities (especially where it was an extended school) and staff were at pains to secure a safe and supportive learning environment.

If the child’s behaviour begins to show more persistent problems then a **Pastoral Support Plan and/or Behaviour Support Plan** must be written. This should be shared with all staff working with the young person. The Behaviour Support team are also a valuable resource. All looked after children are entitled to ½ day’s support from this team if necessary. This is a resource which could be used if any young person displays behaviour issues which have been addressed within the school and are continuing to prove an issue.

Many looked after children are more than able to help plan the strategies employed within school themselves, particularly secondary pupils. This may be in the form of set targets, behaviour strategies, contract style discussions or a reward system. It is always in the pupils best interest if they have had some say in what the outcomes should be and how best to achieve them.

"**Persevere. The road will be long and there will be ups and downs along the way. You can make an invaluable difference.**” Deborah B Plummer, ‘Helping children to cope with change, stress and anxiety’, 2011.

The Virtual School provide and organise training in a variety of areas including PEP training, Attachment training, the legal and statutory needs surrounding looked after children, foster carer and social worker training.

There are many other agencies who may be involved with the young person such as: 
- **ATTACH**- work with carers, social workers and the child to aid with attachment issues.
- **CAMHS**- Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service.
- **MTFC**- Multi Dimensional Treatment Foster Carers. This team supports highly vulnerable children on a 24 hour basis for approximately 12-18 months. They attend PEPs and work closely with school and foster carers.
- **PCAMHS**- Primary Children & Adolescent Mental Health Service.
- **Educational Psychologists.**
- **Oxfordshire Hospital School, Outreach Team.**
- **One-eighty**- a company who inspire young people on the fringes of education. They provide bespoke 1:1 tuition in and out of schools working with the schools and agencies.
- **Early Intervention Hubs**- situated throughout Oxfordshire to aid in many aspects of young people’s lives including, Youth offending service (YOS), not in education, employment or training (NEET), and many other Early Year’s needs.
This is by no means an exhaustive guidance but should be an aide memoire to help these vulnerable children remain in school and reach their full potential academically, emotionally and behaviourally.

April 2013 SM