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Department
for Education

Fostering and adoption learning resources

How to guide



Developed and delivered in partnership by:

**research
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Introduction

The fostering and adoption learning resources include a range of materials that you can use to develop and refine your skills. The aim of this guide is to:

- introduce the fostering and adoption learning resources,
- explain how you can use the learning resources,
- help you identify your development needs and agree SMART learning objectives.

The guide includes

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Why are the learning resources important?

Improving outcomes for children in care and reforming the adoption system are top priorities for the Government.

In 2013, cross-policy area discussions on specialist areas for social worker training identified an urgent need for training materials for children's social workers, supervising social workers, Independent Reviewing Officers and social work managers working in fostering and adoption.

As a result the Department for Education commissioned these training materials, designed to build on the skills and knowledge acquired during the social work degree as part of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) (Source: DfE specification of requirement for this project).

Who are the learning resources suitable for?

The resources are suitable for the following roles:

- Children's social workers,
- Foster carer/adopters social workers (supervising social worker),
- Independent Reviewing Officers,
- Social work managers.

Potential learning outcomes

The resources support a range of learning outcomes including:

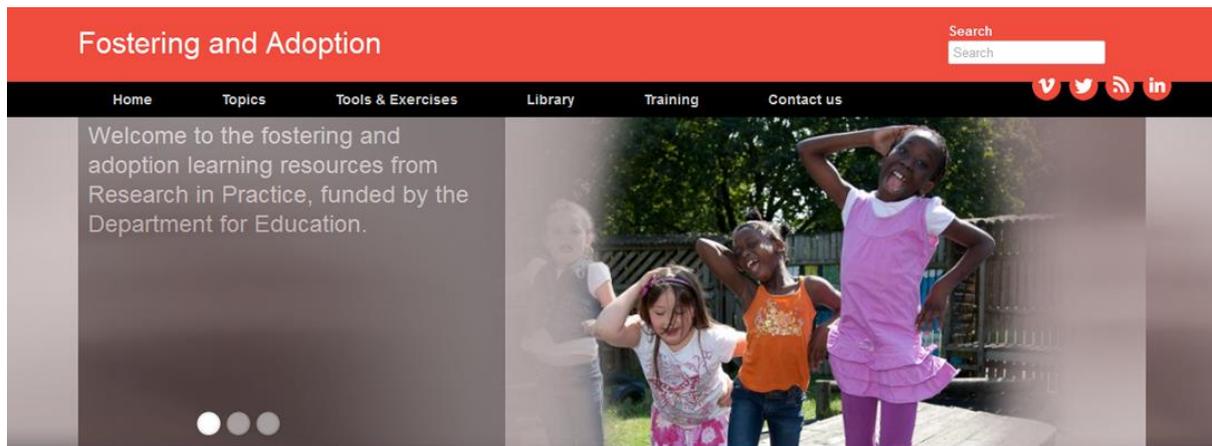
- Improved competence and confidence in working in a team around the child.
- Better able to support the child, birth families, foster carers, prospective adopters and adopters through evidence-informed practice.
- Increased understanding of permanence options.
- Increased understanding of key issues in children and young people's journeys in and out of foster care/adoption.
- Understand the adoption system in the context of current adoption reform.
- Familiarisation with key messages from research in the topics covered.
- Access to resources to inform continued professional development.

We recognise that simply providing access to a suite of online resources is not enough. That is why we have produced this 'How to Guide' to enable you to use these materials to support your continuing professional development.

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The online resources

The content for the resources has been informed by The College of Social Work's Curriculum (TCSW) framework for CPD in this area of practice¹, as well as feedback from practitioners to ensure its relevance and reflect the sector's needs. The learning resources are available through an open access website at: <http://fosteringandadoption.rip.org.uk>



Fostering and adoption learning resources: supporting the team around the child

Improving outcomes for children in care and reforming the adoption system are top priorities for the Government. A key part of that is ensuring that children, parents and foster parents get the support they need from their social workers.

Around three quarters of children in care are in foster care, yet social workers do not always receive adequate training in the specific issues surrounding fostering and adoption.

As a result the Department for Education has commissioned these new training materials and the new continuing professional development guide for those working in fostering and adoption.



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Key topics

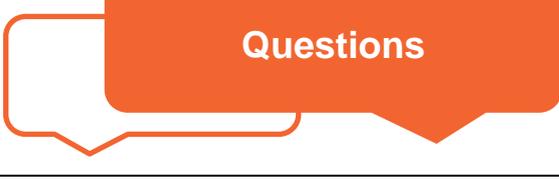
The learning resources cover 16 topics that have been identified through the Improving Fostering Services Programme (Department for Education), which consulted foster carers, practitioners and managers in a number of local authority areas. The key topics have been reviewed through focus groups with practitioners, foster carers and adopters to ensure they reflect the sector's needs. The topics have been cross-referenced against The College of Social Workers' curriculum (TCSW).

Topic number	Topic name	TCSW ref
1	Legal frameworks and statutory guidance	
2	Attachment theory and research	K13,16
3	Child development theory and research	K13,14,16,18 C1,2
4	Early brain development and maltreatment	K13
5	Early childhood trauma and therapeutic parenting	K13,19
6	The impact of and avoidance of delay in decision making	K16, C3,4
7	Leadership and supervisory competencies: reflective practice; case management and tracking	S7
8	Measuring/monitoring parent capacity	K21,S2
9	Communicating effectively with children and young people, birth parents, family and friends	S1 - 9
10	Working in a multidisciplinary 'team around the child': information sharing; clarity of role differentiation	COL1,2,3
11	Analysing and using information to inform decision making	C2,3
12	Developing and monitoring effective care plans: assessing needs; analysis of carer capability/capacity	S1,2,4
13	Matching – for fostering in particular – something all these professionals should do together	S3
14	Placement stability and permanence	K1,2,3
15	Managing risks and benefits of contact	K17
16	Working with birth parents	K15,17,S5

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Structure

Each topic is supported by a set of resources including:

Type of resource	Coding
<p>Key messages</p> <p>Provides an overview of the key messages and research associated with the topic.</p>	
<p>Slide deck</p> <p>PowerPoint presentations covering the key research messages.</p>	
<p>Further resources</p> <p>Provides links to additional reading and references to increase your level of knowledge and support progression.</p>	
<p>Exercises</p> <p>A series of case study-based exercises and group discussion topics.</p>	
<p>Questions</p> <p>A series of questions to support self-directed learning and reflection with a colleague or supervisor/manager.</p>	
<p>Case studies</p> <p>Four case studies that enable you to apply your knowledge to realistic situations.</p>	

The website also contains a library of resources including videos and web links.

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Identifying learning and development needs

You can use the questions in the diagram below to start to think about your learning and development needs. Figure 1ⁱⁱ. Identifying learning and development needs.

1 What do you need to do?

- What skills or knowledge would you like to improve?
- What will you be able to do more effectively if you develop these skills or knowledge?
- How will you be able to demonstrate this?

2 How do you prefer to learn?

- What type of activities will help you learn the new skills/knowledge?
- How will you be able to practise using the new skills/knowledge?
- What support will you need to use the new skills/knowledge?



4 What have you achieved?

- To what extent have you achieved your learning objectives?
- What can you do differently?
- What difference has that made to your role?
- What else do you need to learn or practise?
- What additional support do you need?

3 How will you measure your progress?

- When will you start?
- How will you review what you've learnt?
- How will you apply the learning to your role?
- Who will be able to give you feedback to help you review your progress?
- How will you measure your progress?

Setting SMART learning objectives

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Learning objectives are specific statements that describe what you will be able to do as a result of their learning. SMART learning objectives include:

S pecific	What do you need to know, be able to do or improve?
M easurable	What will you know or be able to do differently? How will you be able to demonstrate this? How will you be able to measure your progress?
A chievable	Is the objective feasible in the timescale? Complex skills can take time to develop and practise, you may find it useful to break your objective down into stages and set yourself milestones that describe what will you be able to do after 3, 6 or 9 months. What support do you need from your supervisor/manager to achieve your objective? What opportunities will you need in order to practise using the skills in your role?
R elevant	How will this skill/knowledge help you in your current role? What aspects of your role will it improve/support?
T ime-framed	Include clear milestones and review dates.

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Additional Statements for Social Workers in Fostering and Adoption

These statements have been cross referenced to The College of Social Work's (TCSW) Curriculum guide on Planning and supporting permanence: reunification, family and friends care, long-term foster care, special guardianship and adoption

The table below provides a key for the cross referencing. Full details can be found in the TCSW curriculum guide.

Ref	Area
	Values, ethics, diversity and rights
V1	Taking a child-centred approach that has a clear focus on rights, developmental needs and potential of the child through to adulthood.
V2	Having a commitment to working collaboratively with all members of all families – birth, family and friends, foster, adoptive, special guardians.
V3	Valuing diversity: awareness of the significance in family placement of gender, ethnicity, class, religion, sexual orientation and disability, and a capacity to reflect on experience and attitudes/practice and to challenge discrimination.
V4	Demonstrating professionalism in all aspects of work with children, families and agencies.
	Knowledge
K1	Policy context of child placement in fostering and adoption. The development of and rationale for the range of permanence options in the context of evidence about outcomes in care.
K2	Recent developments in foster care.
K3	Recent developments in adoption.
K4	Law, regulation and guidance: family placement, role of the courts and care planning/ the IRO.
K5	Family placement theory and research for practice. A critical approach to research methodology, research findings and their application.
K6	Care planning.
K7	Permanence options and outcomes.
K8	Decision making and practice in moving children.
K9	Contact: risks/benefits for infants, children and adolescents in foster care/adoption.
K10	Specific issues: leaving care/staying on with foster carers, siblings, role of the independent reviewing officer (IRO), placement stability, transitions to adulthood from care.
K11	Assessment of the parents' capacity to change.
K12	Interventions/care giving models: social learning (e.g. MTFC, KEEP, Webster-Stratton).
K13	Child development theory and research. Health: physical.
K14	Health: mental.
K15	Education.

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Ref	Area
K16	Emotional and behavioural development.
K17	Family and social relationships.
K18	Identity.
K19	Social presentation.
K20	Self-care.
K21	Caregiving/parenting.
	Critical reflection and analysis
C1	Open-minded/capacity to be curious about behaviour, thoughts and feelings of children and caregivers.
C2	Use of research evidence: linking knowledge of theory and research.
C3	Professional judgement, planning and proactive decision making.
	Skills and interventions
S1	Assessment and care planning for children.
S2	Assessment of families.
S3	Matching children and foster carers/adopters – matching linked to support plans.
S4	Supporting and working with children.
S5	Supporting birth families.
S6	Supporting family and friends carers.
S7	Supervising and supporting foster carers.
S8	Supporting special guardians.
S9	Supporting adoptive parents.
	Contexts, organisations and leadership
COL 1	Promoting multi-agency working in care planning, review and supporting the family placement.
COL 2	Working in partnership with agencies in the statutory and independent sectors to recruit carers, adopters and special guardians; adequate support for children and awareness of their needs in universal and specialist services.
COL 3	Supporting children, carers and adopters in their roles/relationships within professional networks.
COL 4	Taking up strategic leadership roles to maximise benefits and minimise risks in child placement.

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References

ⁱ The College of Social Work CPD Guide on Planning and Supporting Permanence (Nov 2013)
[http://www.tcsw.org.uk/uploadedFiles/TheCollege/Social_Work_Education/CurriculumFrameworkCPD
PlanningSupportingPermanence.pdf](http://www.tcsw.org.uk/uploadedFiles/TheCollege/Social_Work_Education/CurriculumFrameworkCPDPlanningSupportingPermanence.pdf)

ⁱⁱ Wilkinson K, Pike L and Halliday J (2013) Evaluating Training Impact: a Guide from reason (Doing – Research and Evaluation: Planning). Dartington: reason Adapted