Funded by

Department for Education

Supervisors / Managers

Fostering and adoption learning resources

How to guide

Developed and delivered in partnership by:

research in practice

action for children

TACT

How to guide

Guidance for Supervisors and Managers

Introduction

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

- introduce the fostering and adoption learning resources,
- explain how you can use the learning resources,
- help individuals identify their development needs and agree SMART learning objectives,
- provide individuals with opportunities to use the skills and knowledge they gain in their roles.

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 Guides' to enable you to use the materials to best effect and to help you embed the learning with your team. The resources are also supported by How to Guides for individuals.

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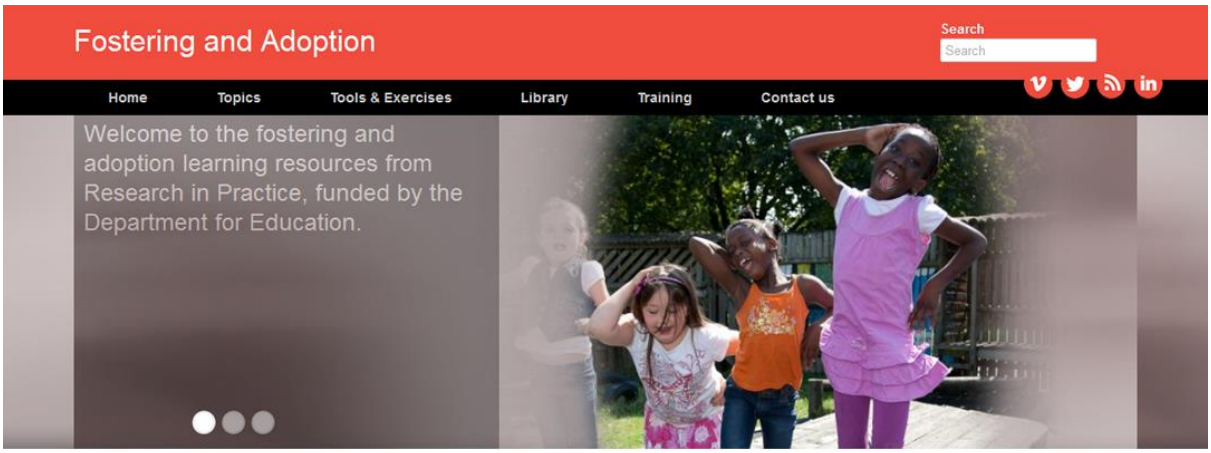
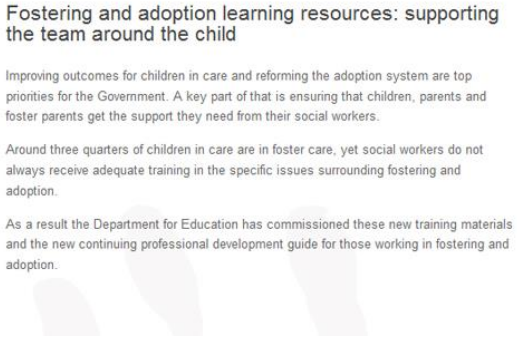
The online resources

The content for the resources has been informed by The College of Social Work's (TCSW) Curriculum framework for CPD in this area of practice, 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





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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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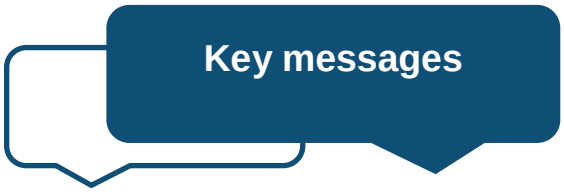
Structure

Each topic is supported by a set of resources including:

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

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

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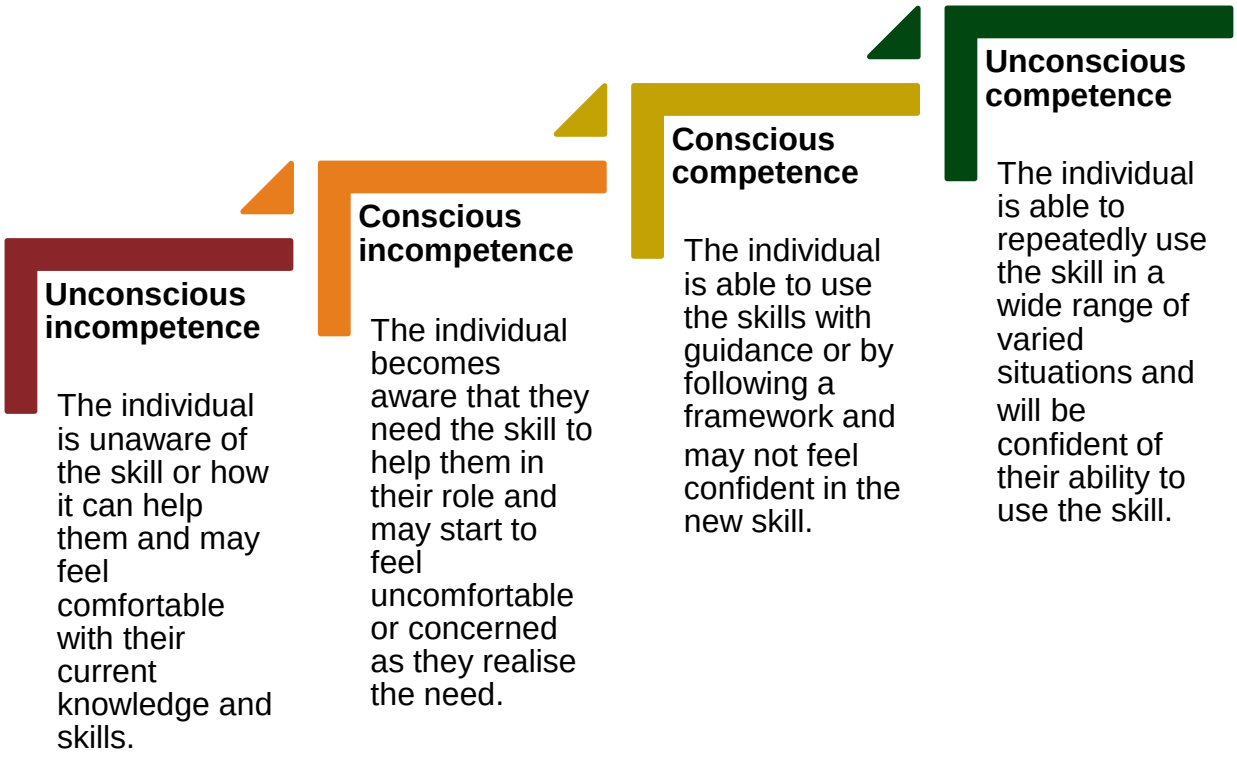
Learning a new skill

Learning a new skill takes time and the stages we experience are shown in Figure 1. You can support your team as they learn or refine their skills and knowledge by helping them: understand the importance of the skill, review their progress and providing constructive feedback.

Figure 1. Conscious competence ladder



The conscious competence ladder has been attributed to Noel Burch of the Gordon Training organisation and has been used since the 1970's.

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Some suggested actions are shown in the following table.

Learning stage	Suggested support
Unconscious incompetence	• Help the individual identify their needs by providing constructive feedback on current performance and explaining how it will help them.
Conscious incompetence	• Help the individual by reviewing what they have learnt from the activity, providing opportunities to develop and practise new skills, as well as providing constructive feedback on performance.
Conscious competence	• Help the individual by providing coaching or shadowing opportunities to reinforce skills. • Provide constructive feedback and recognise achievement.
Unconscious competence	• Help the individual maintain skills by providing ongoing feedback. • Encourage the individual to share their knowledge with the team.

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Identifying learning and development needs

To gain maximum benefit from the fostering and adoption learning resources your team needs to identify their learning needs and agree learning objectives. Learning objectives are specific statements that describe what an individual will be able to do as a result of their learning. SMART learning objectives include:

Specific	• What does the individual need to know, be able to do or improve?
Measurable	• What will the individual know or be able to do differently? • How will the individual be able to demonstrate this? • How will the individual be able to measure their progress?
Achievable	• Is the objective feasible in the timescale? Complex skills can take time to develop and practise, you may find it useful to help the individual break their objective down into stages and set milestones that describe what they will be able to do after 3, 6 or 9 months. • What support do you need to give the individual to help them achieve their objective? • What opportunities can you give the individual to practise using the skills/knowledge they have gained?
Relevant	• How will the skill/knowledge help them in their current role? • What aspects of their role will it improve/support?
Time-framed	• Include clear milestones and review dates.

Taking the time to develop SMART learning objectives, will help you and your team ensure that their learning is relevant to them, increase their motivation and enable them to measure their progress. Figure 2 provides a range of suggested questions that you can use to structure your discussion with your team.

Figure 2[i]. 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?

Reviewing learning

At the end of each learning activity individuals are asked to reflect on what they have learnt and complete an action plan showing how they will use the skills. You can use these action plans as the basis for reviewing learning with your team and providing constructive feedback. Key areas to consider include:

1. Make sure the individual is clear about the purpose of the review, which could include checking:

- how they felt the learning activity went, how useful it was, or how relevant it was to their role;
- identifying any support they need to help them implement their action plan and use the learning they have gained;
- identifying opportunities for them to practise using their skills;
- reviewing progress against the learning objectives;
- providing constructive feedback;
- providing coaching opportunities;
- checking that the objectives have been achieved;
- recognising and acknowledging competent performance and achievement.

2. Give individuals the opportunity to evaluate their own performance against their action plan in order to:

- promote trust;
- reinforce the value of SMART learning objectives;
- demonstrate the importance you give to the fostering and adoption learning resources;
- encourage reflection.

3. Give individuals the opportunities to suggest ideas and improvements to encourage them to:

- contribute ideas;
- consider alternative ways of learning;
- encourage continuous improvement.

Checklist to support your team's learning and development

The aim of this checklist is to help you plan how to support your team and ensure they are able to use the skills and knowledge they gain from the fostering and adoption learning resources in their roles.

As a supervisor/manager you have an important role in:

- enabling your team members to identify their learning needs and goals;
- using your supervisory sessions or 1-to-1 meetings to help your team members review their learning;
- providing opportunities for your team members to practise using the skills and knowledge they have gained
- creating opportunities for your team to share best practice and learn from each other.

The checklist below lists the key factors that help individuals identify their learning needs and use their new knowledge in their working practice. Please read through the checklist and circle **Y**es or **N**o for each of the items. There is space for you to write any actions you need to take to ensure you have addressed each of the areas.

1. Helping individuals identify their learning needs and goals

I have planned how I will:		
• Explain the importance of the learning and development activities and show how they relate to individuals' roles.	**Y**	**N**
• Allocate time so that individuals can identify and prioritise their learning needs.	**Y**	**N**
• Agree SMART learning objectives with individuals.	**Y**	**N**
• Encourage individuals to select learning activities that meet their preferred learning styles.	**Y**	**N**
Actions		

2. Using your supervisory meetings to review learning

I have planned how I will use supervision meetings to:		
• Allocate time to discuss the learning activities with individuals before they start the training.	**Y**	**N**
• Review the learning that individuals have gained and identify next steps.	**Y**	**N**
• Make links between the learning and the processes/systems that are used in the individual's role.	**Y**	**N**
• Review progress against the individual's action plan and / or learning log.	**Y**	**N**
Actions		

3. Providing opportunities to use the skills and knowledge

I have planned how I will:		
• Support opportunities for individuals to practise using the skills/knowledge they have gained.	**Y**	**N**
• Create / enable opportunities to discuss and share best practice and learning during team meetings.	**Y**	**N**
• Encourage colleagues to suggest ways that practice and performance can be continuously improved.	**Y**	**N**
• Provide constructive feedback on their practice and performance.	**Y**	**N**
Actions		

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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.

Ref	Area
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.
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.

Ref	Area
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.

References

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