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Fostering and adoption learning resources

How to guide



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Introduction

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

- introduce the fostering and adoption learning resources,
- explain how your organisation can use the learning resources,
- help you plan, deliver and evaluate your learning activities.

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 carers/adopters' social workers (supervising social worker),
- Independent Reviewing Officers,
- Social work managers.

Potential learning outcomes

The resources support a range of learning outcomes including:

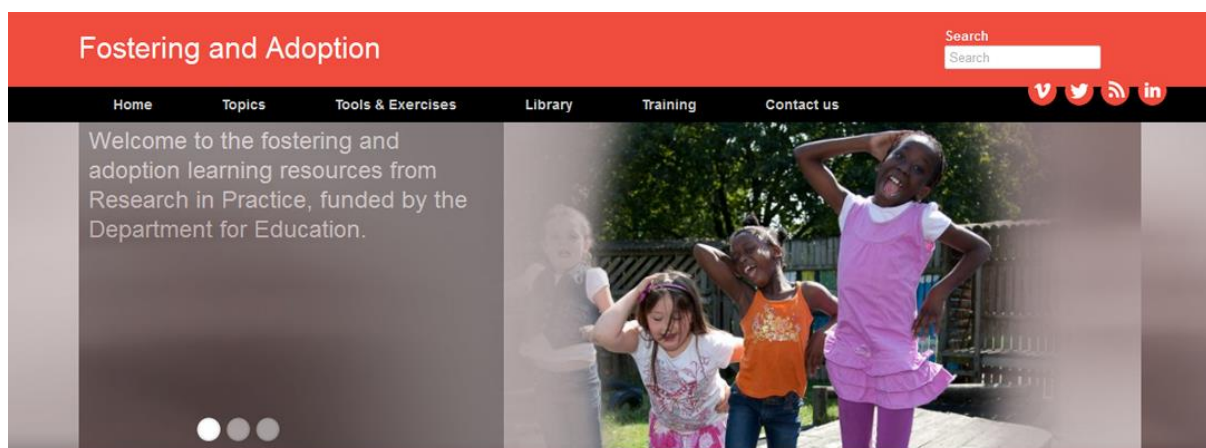
- Improved competence and confidence in working in a team around the child.
- Better able to support the child, birth families, foster carers, prospective adopters and adopters through evidence-informed practice.
- Increased understanding of permanence options.
- Increased understanding of key issues in children and young peoples' 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 these 'How to Guides' to enable organisations to use the materials to best effect and to support you in embedding the learning across your teams. The resources are also supported by How to Guides for supervisors/managers and for individuals, which you can use or adapt to meet your needs.

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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 practiceⁱ, 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

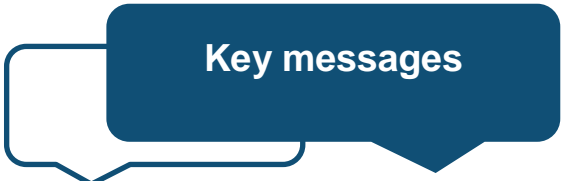





The learning resources cover 16 topics that have been identified through the Improving Fostering Services Programme (Department for Education), which consulted foster carers, practitioners and managers in a number of local authority areas. The key topics have been reviewed through focus groups with practitioners, 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
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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Planning

This audit tool will help you review your current processes against a set of key factors that support training transfer. You will be able to use it to start to plan and prepare how your organisation can use the fostering and adoption learning resources.

The fostering and adoption learning resources, which can be accessed at <http://fosteringandadoption.rip.org.uk> include a range of materials that can be used to develop blended learning activities for both newly qualified and experienced social workers. The aim of this audit tool is to help you review your current processes and identify areas that you may need to address, in order to maximise the impact of the learning activities you undertake with your colleagues.

The impact of the learning resources on practice will depend on the extent to which individuals are able to transfer the skills and knowledge they have gained from the learning resources into their daily working practices. This “use of trained knowledge and skill back on the job” is referred to as ‘training transfer’ (Burke and Hutchins 2007)ⁱⁱ and occurs when “learned behaviour is generalised to the job context and maintained over time” (Baldwin & Ford 1988)ⁱⁱⁱ.

Research shows that there are a number of key factors that can impact on the effectiveness of learning and the extent to which new skills are used (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Pike 2012). The key factors that have been identified are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Factors that influence training transfer: (Pike (2012). *Training Transfer: getting learning into practice*)^{iv}



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Areas to consider during planning

To ensure participants gain maximum value from the learning activities, you might find it helpful to assess not just the design of your planned activity, but also the individual characteristics of participants, as well as the opportunities and support they will have to put their learning into practice. This audit tool contains a series of statements for each of the factors outlined in Figure 1.

1. Individual characteristics

Read through each of the statements, which have been identified as key factors in ensuring that *individual delegates are motivated to learn and understand how it relates to their role and the benefits it will provide*. You may find it useful to talk to a number of forthcoming delegates to ask them about their experiences of previous learning activities.

- Individuals understand the importance of the subject and how it relates to their role.
- Individuals are involved in identifying their learning needs.
- Individuals are involved in setting SMART learning objectives.
- Individuals are involved in selecting activities that meet their learning styles.
- Individuals are encouraged to develop a plan that will help them build their skills in stages.
- Individuals have an opportunity to discuss the learning with their supervisor/manager before they attend.
- Individuals understand how they will be able to use the learning in their role e.g. activities, projects.
- Individuals understand how their learning will be reviewed.

Then ask yourself the following questions about the learning activity you intend to deliver/facilitate in your organisation:

To what extent do your current processes ensure that these factors are addressed?	
What actions can you take to ensure these factors are addressed for the fostering and adoption learning resources?	
Which key stakeholders do you need to involve?	
How can you gain these stakeholders' support?	

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2. Training design and delivery

Read through each of the statements, which have been identified as key factors in ensuring that *learning is designed and sequenced to provide opportunities for feedback on practice and enables delegates to develop clear action plans*. Then think about the learning activity you are planning within your organisation and answer the questions below.

- Learning outcomes are identified and clearly communicated for every learning activity.
- Learning activities are designed to help individuals build their skills in stages.
- Learning activities use a variety of methods to meet different learning styles.
- Learning activities provide opportunities to practise using skills and gain constructive feedback.
- Links are made between the skills/knowledge covered during the learning and the processes/systems that are used in the organisation.
- Learning activities are supported by action plans and learning logs to help individuals use the skills in their daily working practices.
- Impact and evaluation measurements are built into the learning activities.
- Learning activities are reviewed and refined to address individuals' needs.

To what extent do your current processes ensure that these factors are addressed?

What actions can you take to ensure these factors are addressed for the fostering and adoption learning resources?

Which key stakeholders do you need to involve?

How can you gain these stakeholders' support?

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3. Workplace factors

Read through each of the statements, which have been identified as key factors in ensuring that *supervisors/managers help individuals identify their needs, review their action plans and gain feedback on their performance*. You may find it useful to talk to a number of supervisors/managers to help you answer them. Then think about the learning activity you are planning within your organisation and answer the questions below.

- Supervisors/managers are involved in identifying learning needs and agreeing learning goals for their teams.
- Supervisors/managers help individuals identify SMART learning objectives.
- Supervisors/managers review learning with individuals during supervisory meetings.
- Supervisors/managers give individuals opportunities to practise using the skills/knowledge they have gained.
- Supervisors/managers create opportunities to discuss and share best practice and learning during team meetings.
- Learning is reinforced through coaching and supervisory support.

To what extent do supervisors/managers ensure that these factors are addressed?

What support can you provide supervisors/managers to ensure these factors are addressed for the fostering and adoption learning resources?

Which key stakeholders do you need to involve?

How can you gain these stakeholders' support?

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4. Subject climate

Read through each of the statements, which have been identified as key factors in ensuring *that individuals and teams are given opportunities to put their learning into practice and share best practice*. You may find it useful to talk to a number of supervisors / managers to help you answer them. Then think about the learning activity you are planning within your organisation and answer the questions below.

- Supervisors/managers receive guidance on how to make links between the skills/ knowledge covered during the learning and the processes/systems that are used in their department.
- Supervisors/managers and other senior figures lead by example.
- Individuals are encouraged to be open to new ideas and share best practice with team members.
- Individuals receive constructive feedback on their practice and performance.
- Teams are encouraged to suggest ways that practice and performance can be continuously improved.
- Teams are encouraged to set joint goals to support the introduction of new skills and methods.

To what extent do supervisors/managers and senior managers ensure that these factors are addressed?	
What support can you provide to ensure these factors are addressed for the fostering and adoption learning resources?	
Which key stakeholders do you need to involve?	
How can you gain these stakeholders' support?	

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Identifying needs

The learning resources include two templates that can be used to identify needs including:

- an organisational needs analysis,
- guidance for supervisors/managers and individuals on identifying needs and developing SMART learning objectives.

Both templates are available in Word, so you can tailor them to meet your organisation's needs.

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	Importance			Priority	Method (examples)		
	Low	Med	High		Workshop	Online resource	Self-directed
Legal frameworks and statutory guidance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attachment theory and research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child development theory	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Early brain development and maltreatment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Early childhood trauma and therapeutic parenting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The impact of and avoidance of delay in decision making	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leadership and supervision	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Measuring and monitoring parent capacity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communicating effectively with children and young people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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	Importance			Priority	Method (examples)		
	Low	Med	High		Central workshop	Online resource	Self-directed
Multi-disciplinary working	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Analysing and using information to inform decision making	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing and monitoring effective care plans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Matching	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Placement stability and permanence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Managing risks and benefits of contact	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Working with birth families	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Designing learning activities

The learning resources are suitable for the following types of learning activities:

- workshop sessions,
- presentations,
- facilitated exercises and activities,
- team or group discussions,
- induction activities,
- self-directed learning.

The table summarises how the resources can be used.

Type of resource	Uses
Key messages	Key research messages can be used as the basis to develop the content for a range of workshops or learning activities. The key messages are suitable for introductory and intermediate levels. The key messages are also suitable for self-directed learning, when it is supported through reflection and review with a supervisor/manager.
Slide deck	Can be used as the basis for presentations in workshops, group presentations and team meetings. Provide information on the key research messages. The slides are suitable for introductory and intermediate levels. Also suitable for self-directed learning.
Further reading and references	Provide additional content for workshops and learning activities. Can be used as the basis to develop more advanced learning activities, such as a reading group. Contain links to websites that will enable you to access up to date information. Suitable for self-directed learning, when it is supported through reflection and review with a supervisor/manager.
Exercises	Suitable for group activities within workshops or within team meetings. Exercises can be reinforced through group feedback and the sharing of key learning points. Exercises indicate whether they should be used with one of the four case studies, or if individuals will need access to a recent case. Each exercise includes an indication of time and is available in Word so you can amend them to meet your needs.

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Type of resource	Uses
Questions	Suitable for self-directed learning, when it is supported through reflection and review with a supervisor/manager.
Case studies	<p>The learning resources include four case studies that can be used to help individuals or teams apply their learning to a realistic situation.</p> <p>Each case study is supported by a set of general discussion points.</p> <p>The case studies also support a range of group discussions and exercises that are included in the Exercises.</p>
Library of resources	Can be used during workshops, group discussions, team meetings or as part of self-directed learning.

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Delivering the learning activities

The learning activities support a range of presentation and facilitation styles including:

	Recommended approaches
Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help individuals understand the key messages by providing factual information. • Use examples and personal experience to illustrate points and link the key messages to practice. • Encourage group discussion and participation through open questions. • Keep discussions on track and ensure everyone has the opportunity to contribute. • Record key findings on a flip chart and summarise key learning or discussion points. • Manage the time to ensure the content is covered. • Help learners apply content to their role or situation. • Maintain a positive, professional approach. • Encourage individuals to develop an action plan.
Facilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a safe learning environment where individuals can share ideas and challenges. • Use positive communication skills: listening; reflecting back and summarising to encourage participation. • Ensure all individuals have an opportunity to contribute. • Ask open questions and encourage individuals to build on ideas.
Managing multi-disciplinary groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge that individuals will have different perspectives. • Establish ground rules that will enable individuals to share ideas and challenges constructively. • Avoid jargon and ensure that key terms and acronyms are explained. • Pay equal attention to the different roles and priorities in the group.
Establishing ground rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One person talks at a time. • Confidentiality • Be open-minded and avoid pre-judging ideas or opinions. • Actively listen to other people's point of view. • Ask for clarification or examples. • Base comments on facts and experience.
Handling issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a flip chart to record any issues or questions that cannot be answered or resolved within the session. • Identify who can answer them and agree a way that you can feedback answers to the group.

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Selecting training providers if not delivered in house

Areas to consider when selecting a provider include:

- organisational fit and values,
- how they will tailor the learning to your needs,
- what training methods they will use,
- how they will support the use of learning in the workplace and measure impact.

Points to consider include:

- What experience does the provider have in developing and delivering skills training for your target audience?
- How will the learning be tailored to your needs?
- What actions will the provider take to identify learning needs and tailor the learning activities to meet your needs (discussions and telephone interviews with potential delegates)?
- What learning objectives and outcomes will the activity cover?
- Do the proposed learning methods offer a range of activities to practise using the skills and gaining feedback?
- What templates and processes does the provider use to encourage reflection and develop action plans?
- What evaluation measures will the provider give you^v?

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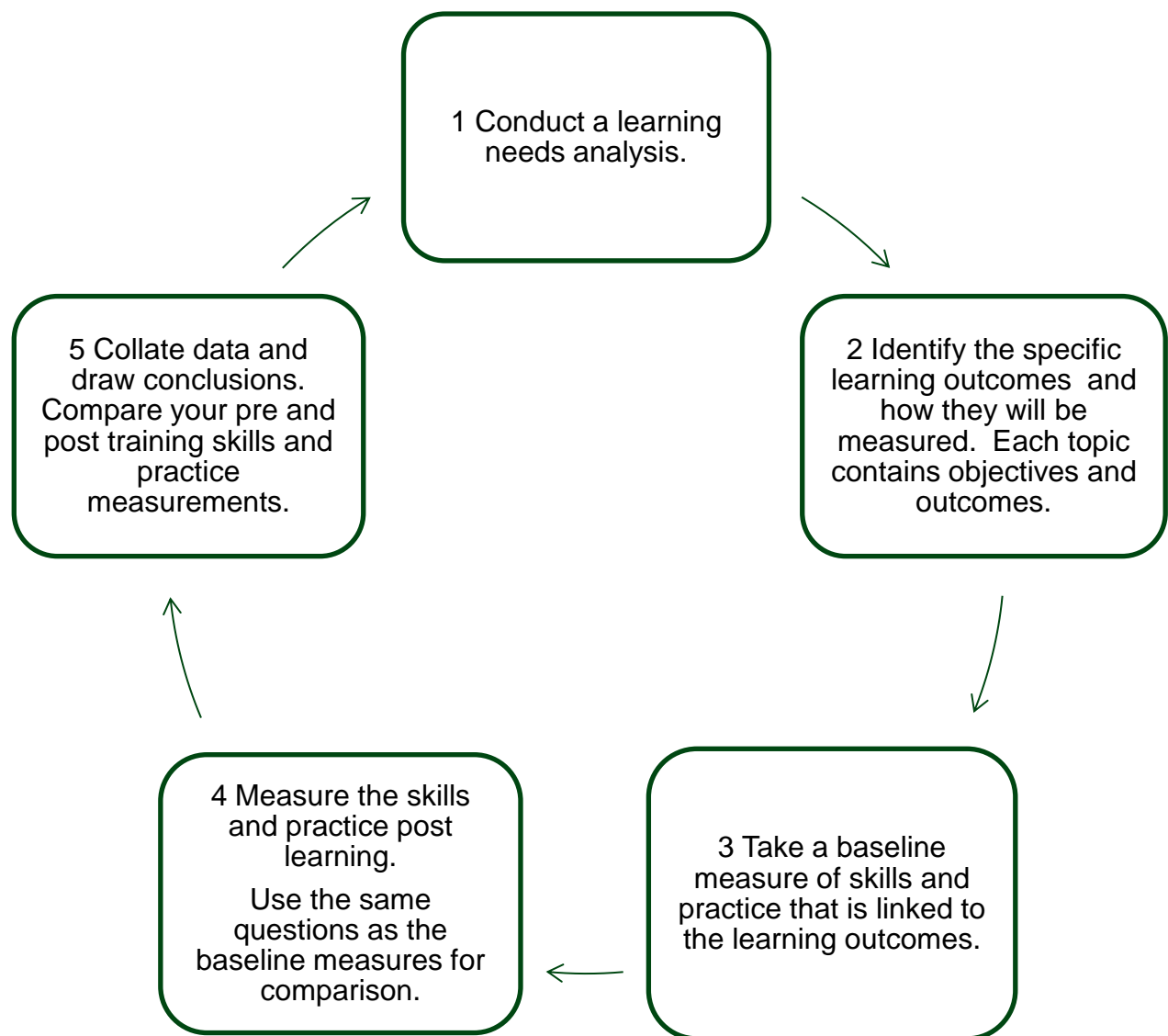
Evaluating your learning activities

Your organisation will be investing considerable time and effort into the fostering and adoption learning activities and it is important that you can demonstrate the benefits you have gained from it.

This guide provides a framework to help you evaluate the impact of your learning and development programme and identify ways that it can be continuously improved in order to support continuing professional development.

Evaluating a learning and development programme will usually follow the cycle shown in Figure 1, adapted from Pike and Wilkinson (2013).

Figure 1. Evaluating learning and development cycle^{vi}:



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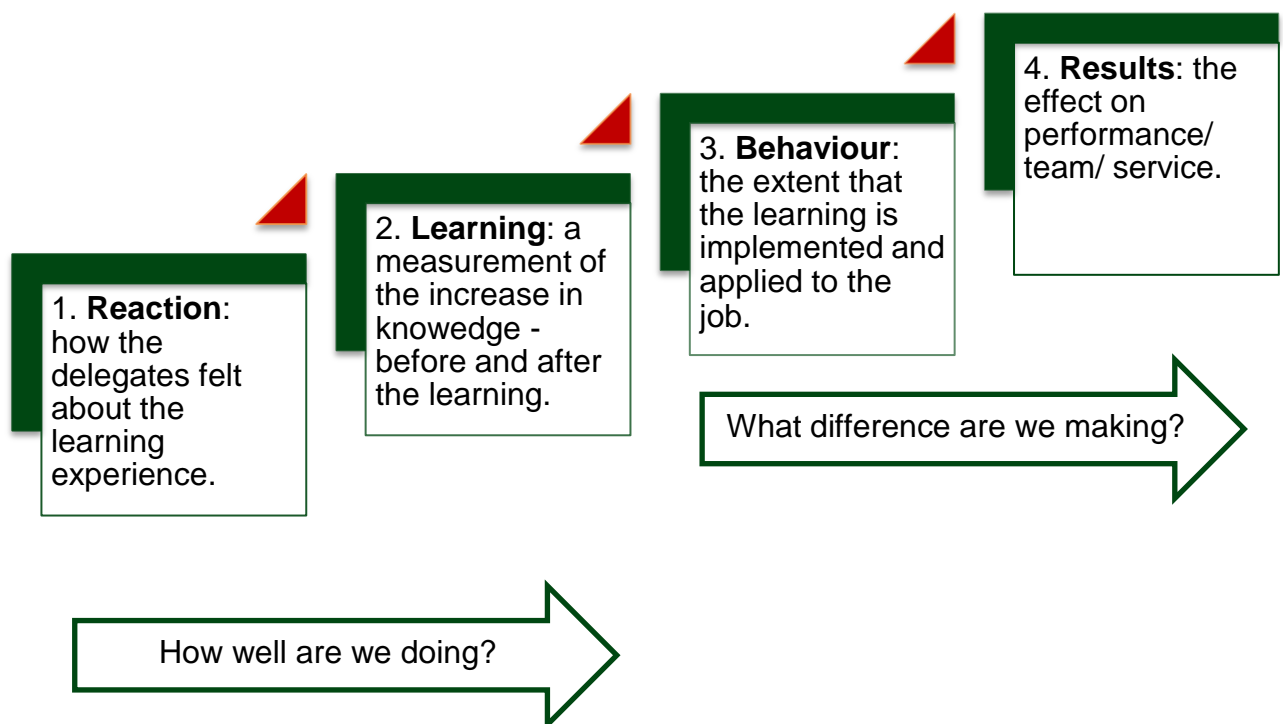
There are a number of ways that you can approach your evaluation depending on your current processes. Friedman (2005)^{vii} identifies three main questions that should be addressed when measuring impact. The table below shows Friedman's questions, as well as some suggested approaches/methods you can use to measure impact.

Friedman's evaluation questions	Potential approaches/methods	Source
1. How much are we doing?	<p>Gathering data to assess the range and reach of the learning and development including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how many training sessions have been run? • how many delegates have attended? • how many teams have accessed the learning and development programme? 	Numerical data taken from training records.
2. How well are we doing?	<p>Quality assuring learning events by assessing whether they have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • met the learning objectives, • used appropriate learning methods, • met delegates' needs. 	Data taken from evaluation sheets or spontaneous feedback.
3. What difference are we making?	<p>Pre and post course assessments to assess:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the extent that the learning is being used in daily practice, • whether practice/performance has improved as a result of the learning and development. 	<p>Pre and post course skills measurements or questionnaires.</p> <p>Implementation of action plans reviewed through supervisory meetings.</p> <p>Follow up questionnaires/interviews /focus groups to delegates and supervisors.</p>

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There are other models which look at the level of evaluating impact. For example, Kirkpatrick's (1977)^{viii} model of training evaluation suggests four measurement levels to assess the impact of training and is shown in Figure 2. These levels can be linked to Friedman's second two questions, as demonstrated below.

Figure 2. Kirkpatrick's (1977) model of training evaluation:



For more information and advice on evaluating training, see **reason's** Evaluating Training Impact Guide: <http://www.reason-network.org.uk/resources/>

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Evaluation planner

Key questions to consider

What will the learning activity achieve?	
What will individuals be able to do or know following training?	
How will you be able to see or measure this?	
How can you collect this information?	
Who do you need to involve?	

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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).

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Ref	Area
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.
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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