

# A NATIONAL VOICE

**coramVoice** )))  
getting young voices heard

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**Stable Homes, Built on Love**

**Staying  
Connected**

# Session 12 and 13 - Staying Connected

The two online sessions for children and young people took place on Wednesday 13 March 6.00-7.30pm and Wednesday 20 March 6.00-7.30pm.

The sessions looked at 'Staying Connected to Family and Friends, Brothers and Sisters', starting with exploring the proposals outlined in 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' about building strong and loving relationships.

The first session focused on what children and young people would like from staff and leaders in order to stay in contact with family and friends. The second session explored relationships with brothers and sisters and how delegated responsibility might support staying connected.

## Who we heard from:

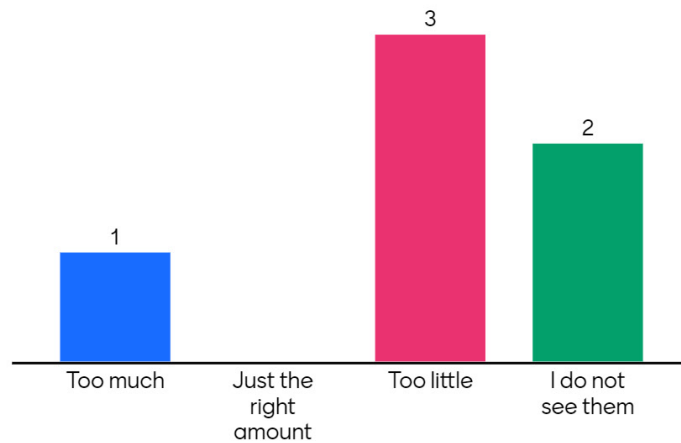
A total of 23 young people attended the session. They were aged 15-25+ and were from across England.

- Basingstoke
- Devon
- Dudley
- East Sussex
- London
- Scunthorpe
- Telford

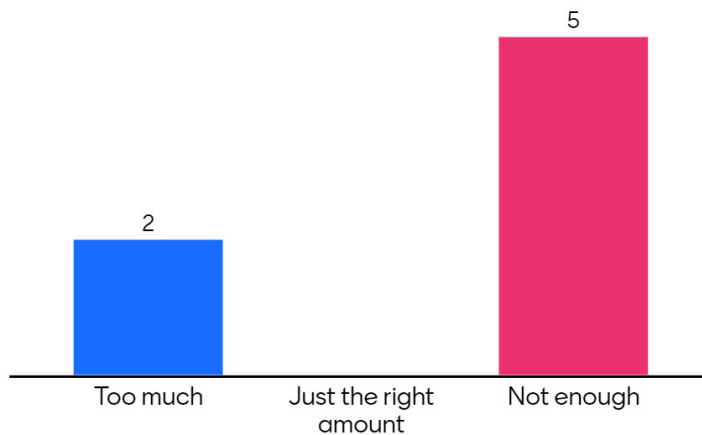


## Family and Friends

How much time do you spend with your family?



How much did social workers focus on staying connected with your family?



## Family and Friends

### What helps build good relationships with your family?

- Family therapy.
- Comfortable surroundings.
- The truth.
- Looking into who my family are, like uncles and cousins that may want to have contact but have no idea how.
- Understanding and empathy.
- Not forcing a relationship before both parties are ready.
- Patience.
- Compromise on the social workers part regarding location, sometimes it's not what's practical but what the young person is most likely to benefit from.
- Time and location. 1 Hour in a contact centre with someone watching your every move and taking notes makes it too awkward. Being able to spend time with my mum doing fun, like the park, and cinema.
- Quality time, good communication, trust, traditions.
- Transparency. Being honest when talking about the likely or unlikely hood of a contact visit.
- Letting things repair over time with gentle help, not forcing things to move to meet a pathway plan.
- Contact centres are built for very young children and older children are often in a room completely age inappropriate.
- Fostering a relaxed relationship, (stop reminding YP's that everything is written down).
- Being able to go and do an activity and having social fund to help ensure there are no financial problems, that way you can take your mind off the direct contact and instead on the activity.
- Looking into how helpful transcriptions of contacts actually prove to be. Are the emotional and psychological effects on both child and parent, worth it?
- Being able to ask my mum about the rest of my family without being told it's an inappropriate topic.

# Family

## FAMILY

How can professionals (social workers, foster carers, support workers, IRO's etc.) support children and young people to stay connected with family?



- I feel like most of my social workers were more focused on getting settled in new environments and schools than keeping contact with my family and friends, but then they'd get annoyed that I wasn't trying.
- On the how long should support last, I believe 25, as from what I've learned, that's what the majority of LAs do, but for some reason it's not overly communicated and I've been confused on it, cause I've had SW whose said up to 25 if your S.E.N.D and 21 if you're not and I've heard others say 25 flat or 21 flat.
- Contact with family also should not be used as a reward that manipulates the relationship.
- There is a way to get a rolling permission, so a way to where they only do a check once and you're free to continue going, for like a year or so, I hope that makes sense.
- Going into care can really affect you friends and family.
- It basically ruined all of my relationships and it is only now they are starting to build up again and that's not just biological family and it's so important for people to get their voice heard and personally I have been trying for like a year and a half now to see my sister.

## Family

- Seeing family in contact centres is pressured and stressful. They're too bright.
- I wasn't allowed to take photos in contact centres.
- Contact is emotional, it felt sometimes that I wasn't allowed to be and this was recorded and judged. I was stopped from seeing family because it was deemed too emotional.
- I was told that we were not allowed to talk about certain topics. We weren't allowed to have honest conversation. It felt forced.
- My grandparents died and I didn't know until afterwards. I didn't get to say goodbye.
- Extended family, such as cousins, are not often considered for contact and communication.
- Seeing family should also not be forced, some people don't want to see some family members.



# Family

## FAMILY

Is there anything else you would like to say about how much you see your family and the important people in your life?

It's been three years since I last communicated with my adopted brother. Unfortunately, three years ago, he was sectioned due to mental health issues. Since then, neither my family nor I have received any updates on his well-being, nor have there been any attempts to reconnect us. Even though things didn't end on a good note, it would be great to know how he's doing or have some sort of contact with him.

My friends lived in the same town as my family. So seeing them meant there was a chance of bumping into my family which caused a lot of anxiety. Foster carers could help by le

As a care leaver, im happy to be able to choose who and when I see people. however, in care I feel like I should have had that autonomy as long as I was open and honest about my decisions

Friends come to the house. That way there is no chance of bumping into people you don't feel safe around and still get to see friends you want too.

W From the chat - Contact with family also should not be used as a reward, that manipulates the relationship

Not being made to see family because it is encouraged by LA that children engage with there family. Listen to what the yp wants to matter their age.

Understanding that the people you want to see are important to you but it may also be triggering due to reminding you of the past. Just be available for after.

Distance.i was moved clear across the city 2 hours by bus so visits were really hard. id be told i 'd half a day with my mum, but that including travel time there and back meant i had very little time

I feel like friends are not considered at all, whilst you may not think they are important every relationship in my life is.

# Friends

## FRIENDS

How can professionals (social workers, foster carers, support workers, IRO etc.) support children and young people to stay connected with friends?

foster carers/  
support workers



Social workers

Feel free to change any placements if they aren't how you like

IRO's

Find ways to make new friends, e.g after school clubs, youth groups/clubs,

Help us come up with ways to prove to you that we can be trusted to see our friends

support the the actual process of reconnecting with old healthy friendships.

Don't need to do extensive background checks on friends for sleepovers, as that's a really fast way of breaking down the friendship

I view the inability to have sleepovers and see friends as a deprivation of liberty. It classes as Not-comparable deprivation as other kids the same age can do those things.

help us fight for the right to see our friends!

Start finding ways to allow friends over to the home (Residential orientated) I understand why this may not always be possible, but at least look at the possibility

Help with travel and communication

encouraging old frinedships instead of getting angry and labelling us as uncooperative and challenging when we struggle to make new friends

Approve visits without the need for DBS checks. do what normal parents do, after all that's your job.

letting us have sleepovers with our friends. i had a friend that id been having weekly sleepovers with at eachothers house for years before going into care and that was stopped

location. theres stigma being in care and lots of parents dont want their kids to go to a foster home and be involved with social services in any way. so meeting places for friends

being allowed to make frineds with other kids in care. social workers tend to discourage it. we get told we the other kids have challenging behavior or we might share bad choices

## FRIENDS

Is there anything else you want to say about how much you see your friends and important people in your life?

I feel very frustrated at the lack of understanding and support in developing friendships for children and young people. they are vital to development

social workers often actively hinder friendships due to the imagined risks. social workers don't see it as vital and as such its an area that is neglected

most social workers probably don't have friends and therefor struggle to comprehend why they are important.

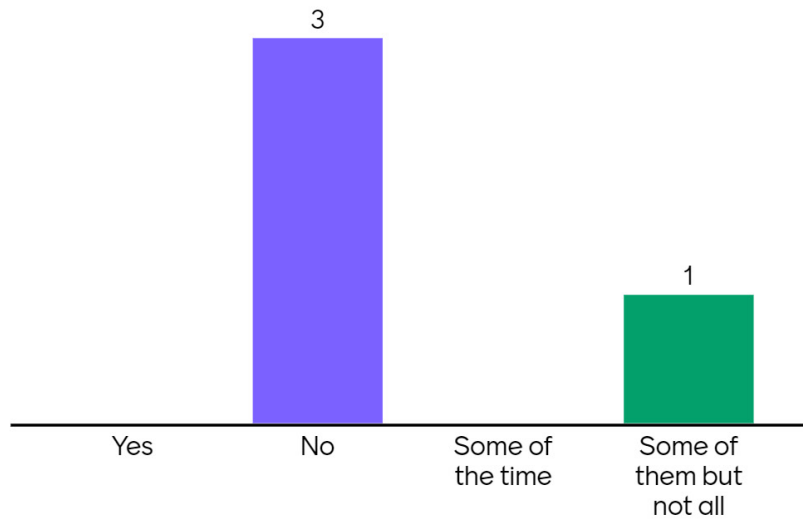
- I don't advocate for this, but the second I got unsupervised friendship time, I absolutely didn't tell everyone what exactly I got up to like going to [a shopping centre], or town and it's sad that the only time to be normal was to break the rules.
- To friends and people around me, the label changed from 'neglected kid' to 'care kid' - both were just as bad
- There has been instances where I have been moved homes after a normal argument with another young person in a home.
- Making friends was really hard.
- Professionals don't ask about friendships.



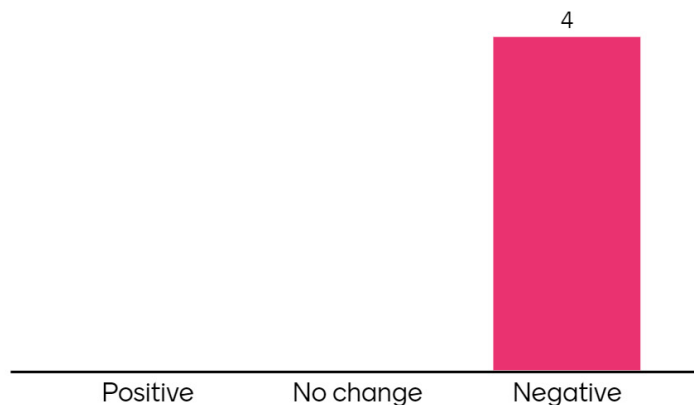


## Brothers and Sisters

Did you live with your brothers and sisters?

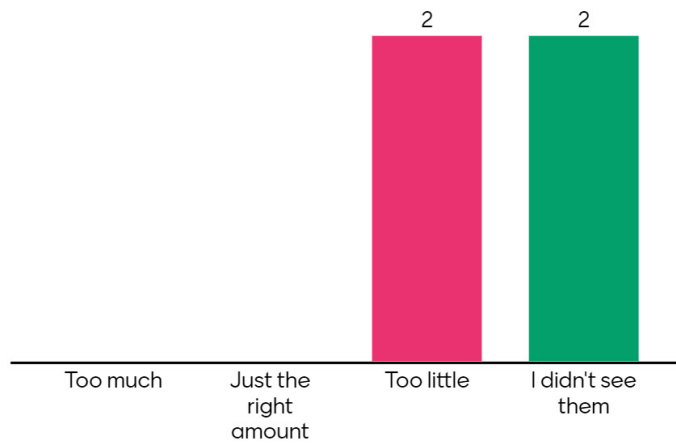


What impact did coming into care have on your relationship with brothers and sisters?



## Brothers and Sisters

How much time did you spend with your brothers and sisters?

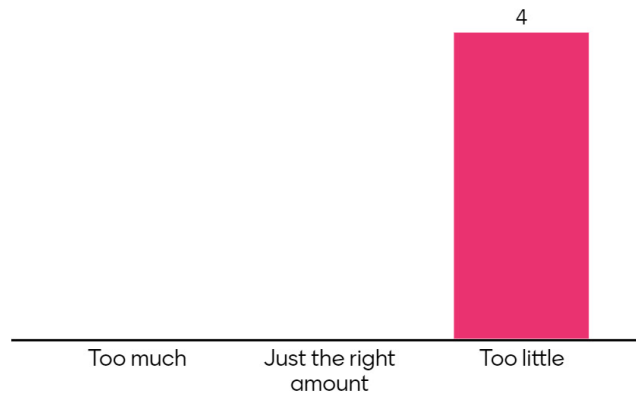


- So the two that stayed together are really close, and I've only just sort of started reconnecting with them because now they're both, 18 and 19 so they're like adults. So they've sort of left care and we sort of reconnecting, but it's really awkward. And then the youngest one, it took forever to sort out any sort of, like, contact or family time. So she was nearly six the first time I saw her after she was born. Really. And that was really hard because she had no idea who I was. So we kind of had to stop after that because it was just really upsetting for all of us.
- Not seeing my sisters starting to really affect me, and I think as I've got older, I've been able to understand the effects of that and able to understand emotions more clearly and understandably.



## Brothers and Sisters

How much did social workers focus on staying connected with your brothers and sisters?



## What helps build good relationship with your brothers and sisters?

- More interaction with siblings, they mainly speak to parents.
- Allowing time together without someone staring at you and making notes the entire time.
- Getting to see them, to talk to them, communicate with them. Being able to form connections and friendships with them.
- Allowing it to grow in as natural of an environment as possible. Its basic psychology that things do not act normally in a fabricated environment.
- Frequent visits, referring to it as family time and not 'contact'. Facilitating the family time when the relationship is fractured, and supporting to rebuild it. Unsupervised family time.
- Being allowed to talk outside of contact centres. Like phone calls, Letters, sending pictures you've drawn or little gifts you've made or bought to each other.
- Not blowing arguments out of proportion. Siblings fight. If we have a disagreement, that doesn't mean we shouldn't be allowed to see each other for the next 3 months. That only makes it worse.
- Don't forget that they are kids and hold them to age appropriate standards.

## Brothers and Sisters

- If there was a negative reaction to contact, they blamed it on contact. They use it as an excuse to deny further contact, and seem to not realise the reason contact is so hard is because we don't get to see each other enough and it is hard to spend so little time together after growing up together and knowing that in an hour you're going to be torn away from each other again.
- We had to fight to get to see our sibling, they never offered contact to us, we had to fight for months. We had to pretend not to be sad we missed our sibling, because we were scared they would take away contact claiming it was making us upset.

## Independent Reviewing Officers

- My IRO is open to having different conversations but also the usual topics which they need to cover. I go shopping with her, go for coffee etc. I think it depends on the individual IRO.
- I couldn't tell you who my IRO is or what they did.
- Education is not the most important thing in life, we aren't taught the things we need to know such as finance, bills, mental health etc. It's just about getting a degree and finding where you fit in society and the system. We are no longer humans, but robots.

## Delegated Responsibility

- I don't think foster carer's should have that power, regardless of whether they are a young person's legal guardian.
- I've had it recently raised to me at our care experienced council around who's responsibility for signing school trip and other consent forms falls too, which provides barriers for making friends/staying in touch with friends at school and college wondered if that's something other young people on the call have experienced?
- I just don't think that it is fair that we feel different and restricted to do things.

# Brothers and Sisters

How can professionals (social workers, foster carers/support workers, IRO's) support children and young people to stay in contact with brothers and sisters?

## Social workers

**Stop removing children**

If we have to be split up, don't send us to completely the other ends of the city from each other, how are we supposed to stay close to each other if they live nearly 3 hours away?

**Never split us up**

Keep them together, don't split them up - if they want to be together

Trying absolute hardest to source foster homes with capacity for a sibling group, if not, explaining clearly why this isn't the case.

## foster carers/ support workers

**Actually show up, and not an hour late**

Call the people looking after our siblings themselves and arrange a park visit or cinema trip, or anything if contact times are taking a long time to sort out

Let our sibling actually have the cards and letters we made them

Facilitate meeting with siblings outside of arranged family time

Connecting with the foster carers of your young persons sibling

## IRO's

By actually asking if we've seen our siblings and questioning why if the answer is no.

Check diligently on progress or action points at children in care reviews. Ensure that all other professionals involved are completing action points, monitor the young person.

- It feels like a lot of people claim that they try and keep like the relationships between siblings as close as possible, but it doesn't actually seem to happen.
- I haven't spoken to my younger sister at all since I moved into care. I haven't seen her.

Should foster carers be able to have more power to arrange meeting up with brothers and sisters?

Depends. If it would mean I could see my sibling more, then yes. If they could stop me seeing my sibling, then no

I think it should be a decision focused around what you and your siblings want, with mainly safeguarding rather than restrictions

Upon completion of a proper risk assessment that is updated and monitored. And with proper assurance that the foster carer is capable of managing risk where is any

I would like siblings to have more power to arrange meet ups



## Brothers and Sisters

- I think it depends on like how close you were with those siblings prior to going into care like. Seeing my younger sister for the first time was really difficult and it was mostly my foster carer who arranged it and I was really thankful that she tried it kind of did more harm than good because it was really difficult when she didn't know who I was. But on the flip side, it's like really hard.
- I thought it was a middle ground there somewhere where like if you're close to your siblings already, your foster carer should be able to say hey, let's just go to the park. Let's see your siblings. I'll be fine. But like, if you've had almost no contact prior going into care, then maybe it should be done in a more sort of professional route.

Should social workers keep brothers and sisters together?

Yes. Care is terrifying, forcing siblings apart unless absolutely necessary, and hopefully temporary, feels cruel

Yes when able, though this is statistically impossible. There should be more of an effort

Where possible at all. absolutley yes

**YES**

## Brothers and Sisters

If you are a care leaver and your brothers and sisters are still in care – how can you keep in touch with them, what would you want to know about your brothers and sisters?

They should use anything that they want to communicate and see each other as much as they like.



# Key messages to policy team

- Young people believe there should be more support given in how to continue good relationships with family, friends, brothers and sisters.
- Social workers and PA's are important to developing strong, healthy and respectful relationships.
- Young people highlight barriers such as transport and red tape to keeping in contact with important people.
- Young people highlighted that seeing family, brothers and sisters shouldn't be a reward or punishment for behaviour.
- Young people highlight within some relationships arguing and being upset is normal. Relationships take time, trust, understanding and empathy to develop.
- Social workers and PA's should remove barriers to children and young people being able to have strong and loving relationships with the people that are important to them up to the age of 25.
- Social workers and PA's should talk to young people about the people that are important to them and check that things are still as they would like them.
- IRO's play an important part in ensuring contact with family, friends, brothers and sisters and should spend time getting to know young people and talking to them about these relationships.





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