



coramVoice)))
getting young voices heard

Messages to the Minister

Building good relationships

Priority number **3**

Background

Back in October 2024, over 300 care-experienced children and young people from across England shared their views with us about what the Children's Minister should focus on. From that consultation, three top priorities were chosen:

1. **Mental health Support**
2. **Listening to young people in decisions about their lives**
3. **Building good relationships**

A National Voice has turned the words and quotes from those young people into a set of specific recommendations. These recommendations have been split into three separate briefing papers, with subheadings that group similar ideas together.

This document includes all our **recommendations** relating to **Building good relationships**. These reflect what young people told us needs to change to help them build and keep relationships with the people who are important to them.

About A National Voice

A National Voice is the national children in care council for England. It is led by care experienced young people aged 16 to 25, known as Ambassadors, from across the country. Together they gather the views of children in care and care leavers, share what young people are saying, and work with decision makers, professionals and government so young people's experiences directly shape policy and practice.

About the order of recommendations

The recommendations in this Building good relationships briefing paper are not presented in a ranked or priority order.

All italicised quotes in this document reflect a mix of the voices of over 300 care-experienced children and young people, alongside A National Voice's work to turn their words into clear recommendations.

Consistency and Stability in Care

Reduce unnecessary placement moves by matching children with carers who can commit long term and helping young people stay in schools, communities and near support networks. This means recruiting more foster carers where there are shortages.

Take steps to keep dedicated social workers and personal advisers, so children don't keep losing the trusted adults in their lives. High staff turnover should be addressed through better support and manageable workloads for workers.

Local authorities should avoid placing children far from home whenever possible. If a move out of area is needed, there must be a plan to support their relationships. This could include a welcome package in the new area and help to stay in touch with siblings, friends and mentors through travel or virtual meetings.

Each young person should have at least one backup trusted adult they already know, in case their main social worker is away. This could be another team member, a previous carer, an advocate or an Independent Visitor, so no child is left without support from someone familiar.

Wherever possible, young people should have a say in choosing the professionals who support them. This could mean being involved in picking a foster carer or being matched with a social worker they feel comfortable with. If a match isn't working, young people should be able to ask for a change, so they can build trust and better relationships.

"Being in care showed me that consistency was very rare in terms of family, social workers, and the individuals in my life."

"Because people come and go from our lives, we don't have the chance to build up a good relationship with them... there's too much change."

Maintaining Relationships and Connections

Social workers should ask young people who is important to them and make plans to support those relationships. Wherever possible, decisions about seeing family and friends should be led by the young person's wishes.

If they want to and it is safe to do so children in care should be supported to keep relationships with friends and brothers and sisters (including half-siblings or those they see as siblings, like foster siblings from past placements). Social workers and carers should help with visits, activities or calls so these bonds stay strong, and young people don't lose touch just because of a move.

Young people should be supported to keep in touch with former foster carers, key workers or other important adults, unless it is unsafe. With everyone's agreement and the right safeguards, this continuity can provide family-like support through transitions.

Family finding (like Lifelong Links) should be offered to all children in care and care leavers. It helps young people reconnect with people from their past, like relatives, family friends, teachers or mentors, so no important relationship is lost.

Independent Visitor support should continue past 18 so young people can keep relationships with trusted volunteers if they choose to.

Care leavers should have access to befriending and mentoring services, as young adults still need consistent support and positive relationships.

"We should be asked more about who we want and need in our lives, whether that's family or workers."

"For many children in care it's very difficult to hold on to relationships because of our experiences and lack of trust...."

Friendships and Normal Life

Foster carers and residential care workers should be trusted to make everyday decisions, like saying yes to sleepovers, school trips, birthdays or friends visiting, without waiting for social worker approval. This helps young people have a normal childhood and not miss out.

Friendships should be prioritised to build social skills and support networks. Foster carers, residential staff and social workers should actively support young people to make and keep friends. Friends should feel welcome at the home and the default answer to spending time with them should be "yes" if it's safe, with help given for transport or arrangements.

Local authorities should organise or fund regular activities, groups and meet-ups where care-experienced young people can connect. This could be youth forums, residential trips, fun days or care leaver hub events. Meeting peers with similar experiences helps young people build friendships and feel less alone.

Every child in care should be supported to join clubs or activities they are interested in, like sports, drama, art or volunteering. If money is an issue, local authorities should cover the cost. Carers and social workers should help young people find and attend activities regularly.

Each local area should provide special gatherings on major holidays, like Christmas, for children in care and care leavers who might otherwise be alone. Every young person should have somewhere welcoming to go, to celebrate, belong and not feel left out on family occasions.

*"Christmas – lonely...
loneliness in
general."*

*"Good relationships are good
because it would make the child
open up more and be more
trustworthy... adults should be
brave when breaking bad news."*

Respectful Language and Understanding

All professionals and carers should use “language that cares” – positive, respectful words that don’t make young people feel different in a negative way. Training like Total Respect and Language That Cares should be used everywhere, with care-experienced young people involved in delivering it. Small changes, like saying “spend time with mum” instead of “contact time,” can make young people feel valued and included.

Foster carers and staff should be careful about how they refer to young people in front of others, and always check what the young person is comfortable with. For example, don’t say “my foster child” at school unless the young person agrees. Respecting their choice helps prevent stigma and lets them decide who knows about their care status.

Schools and education staff should be “care aware” through training and information so they can support children in care. Teachers should be told (confidentially) if they have a child in care in their class and given important context to avoid insensitive questions. Training should cover things like why a foster carer might attend parents’ evening or why a student may struggle with trust. Schools could also raise awareness in the curriculum or assemblies to reduce stigma and help classmates be more understanding.

“Growing up, social workers would come in and talk about what their Christmas was like – it does affect the young person... it's reality, isn't it?”

“We should have more choice in the professionals who work with us... better matching to help find workers we can really open up to and trust.”

Learning and Life Skills for Healthy Relationships

Young people in care should be taught about healthy relationships, not just topics like safe sex. They need guidance on trust, boundaries, communication and what positive relationships look like. This could be included in life skills or PSHE lessons, with content tailored for care-experienced young people. Learning these skills can help them build stronger friendships, romantic and professional relationships.

Every local authority should have youth-friendly hubs where care-experienced young people can drop in to learn life skills and connect with peers. These spaces should be co-designed with young people and offer workshops on things like relationships, budgeting, cooking and job prep, as well as fun activities.

Local authorities should celebrate and value lasting relationships for young people in care. This could include events during Foster Care Fortnight or Care Leavers Month where young people reconnect with foster families, mentors or teachers. Highlighting these bonds shows that relationships matter and should be supported to last.

"Teaching young people about safe sex rather than healthy, loving relationships – it should include healthy relationships, not just the technical side."

"When I first came into care, I didn't understand how to have good friendships or relationships, so it would be good to have help learning this."

Get Involved

Share your practice or try something new

Across the country, many local authorities, services and organisations are already doing positive work that reflects these recommendations. We want to help highlight what is working well and make sure it reaches national decision makers.

You might:

- already be delivering something that links to a recommendation, or
- have a recommendation you want to focus on in your area and tell us how it works in practice.

If so, we would really like to hear from you.

Please email ANV@coramvoice.org.uk with:

- the recommendation or title you are responding to
- a short description of what you are doing (or what you plan to try)
- where the work is taking place (local authority, region or organisation)
- any outcomes, learning or impact you have seen so far



We may share examples of practice and learning with the Children's Minister and wider partners to help spread ideas and encourage change nationally. With your permission, examples may also be featured on our [Bright Spots Resource Bank](#) so others can learn from what is working in practice.

Stay connected with A National Voice

If you would like to hear more about our work, future consultations or opportunities to involve young people, you can [sign-up to our network here](#).

Thank you for helping ensure care-experienced children and young people's views lead to real change.

THANK YOU!

Thank you to all **325** care experienced children and young people aged 4-26+ who helped us shape these recommendations. Your voices came from **45** different local authorities across England, and together you created a powerful and honest picture of what needs to change. Because of everything you shared, our A National Voice (ANV) ambassadors were able to turn your views into clear, specific recommendations for the Children's Minister.

A huge thank you as well to each **ANV ambassador** for helping to turn these valuable voices into meaningful and actionable messages.

**A
NATIONAL
VOICE**

325

Care experienced
children and young
people

45

Local
authorities

coramVoice)))
getting young voices heard