

Key Messages

Effective parent-and-child fostering What works?

The Rees Centre at the University of Oxford published an international literature review in February 2014 looking at research in the area of parent-and-child fostering.

What is the issue?

Parent-and-child fostering is a specialist fostering arrangement. It helps to support and assess vulnerable parents while finding the best permanent option for a child.

A child or children may live with one or both of their parents in a foster home. This could include parents whose custody of a child is under threat or teenagers who become pregnant while already in foster care.

Some research has been done in this area but we need to know more about how specific aspects of parent-and-child fostering can influence its success. Understanding what makes parent-and-child fostering effective will help to improve it in the future.

How can you improve things?

- Provide more specialist parent-and-child foster homes with dedicated training and support.
- Create both parent and foster carer support networks for those involved in parent-and-child fostering.
- Understand why parents living with their children in foster homes may be reluctant to talk to children's services staff.
- Carry out assessments sensitively to avoid young parents feeling stigmatised.
- Extend support for teenage parents past the leaving care age to ensure better long-term outcomes, particularly around parenting skills, housing and education.
- Collect more data on mothers/expectant mothers and fathers/expectant fathers.



Effective parent-and-child fostering.
An international literature review by
Nikki Luke and Judy Sebba.

The full report can be read and
downloaded for free:
[http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/
research/publications/](http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/research/publications/)

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What did we do?

The Rees Centre looked for research studies and reports internationally in the area of parent-and-child fostering. We included all those that looked at reasons why parent-and-child fostering was 'successful' in the interests of the child. For example, this could involve improved parenting skills or it could mean separation from a parent in the child's best interests.

We found 35 relevant studies and reports from the UK and North America then asked the following question:

“What kind of provision is effective for parents and their children living together in foster homes?”

What did we find out?

- There are more studies on teenagers in care who become parents than on adult parents who move into foster homes with their children.
- Young parents still have the same needs as any young person in fostering: a good relationship with foster carers and social workers, clear house rules, a stable living arrangement, help with substance abuse (where this is an issue), and to have their say in decisions made about their future.
- The foster carer's role in assessing the parent's ability to look after their child needs to be clearly understood.
- The amount and type of help a foster carer will provide in looking after a child needs to be clearly understood.
- Young parents need freedom to be teenagers, for example by the foster carer babysitting occasionally so the young parent can go out with friends.

Young people in these studies commented on their experience of parent-and-child fostering:

- They often felt stigmatised where assessment was built into the foster care arrangement. They felt more was expected of them than other young parents, they were under constant scrutiny, and feared having their child taken away.
- Parents in fostering arrangements felt their relationship with social workers suffered, not seeing them often enough or receiving enough support from them. Leaving care teams, on the other hand, were seen as being more supportive.
- Young parents leaving foster homes often felt there wasn't enough support, in particular with housing, after they had left.