

Key Messages

Supporting Each Other

Peer contact between foster carers

The Rees Centre at the University of Oxford published an international literature review in February 2013 on peer contact between foster carers. The report looked at a wide range of recent research to see what it told us about this issue and where more research may be needed.

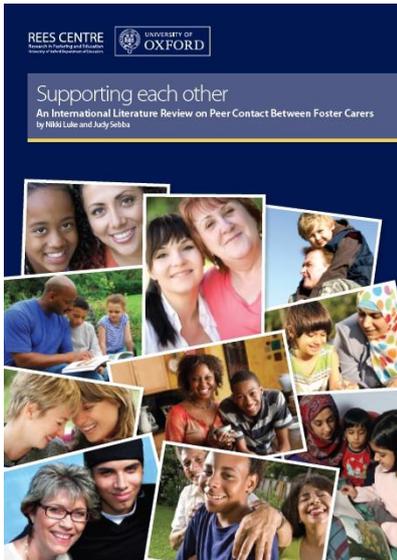
What is the issue?

Most foster carers derive great satisfaction from their role but day to day experiences can be stressful. Stress can damage the well-being of both carers and their foster children, affect the stability of placements and has been linked to people deciding to stop being foster carers.

Lots of foster carers already have good support networks of family, friends and social workers. This report looked at how foster carers support each other, what benefits this brings and how we can make it even better.

How can you improve support and contact between foster carers?

- Every group of foster carers is different, so talk to yours about how peer support schemes can match their needs.
- Make time for foster carers to share experiences and problem solve together during existing training sessions.
- Pair new carers with more experienced ones – use mentoring schemes with clear guidance on what mentors and mentees can expect.
- Offer local and online groups to reduce geographical barriers.
- Offer guidance to group leaders (whether foster carers or other workers) on how to facilitate productive group discussions.
- Develop ways of sharing experiences within the group that don't threaten confidentiality.
- Explore possibilities of 'hub' and 'constellation' communities of carers for mentoring and respite.
- Evaluate support systems to assess whether they are achieving what was intended.



Supporting each other.
An International Literature Review on
Peer Contact Between Foster Carers
by Nikki Luke and Judy Sebba

The full report can be read and
downloaded for free:
[http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/
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What did we do?

The Rees Centre searched for research studies published since 2000 on the topic of foster carers supporting each other. We found 33 relevant studies from the UK, Ireland, North America and Australasia. We looked at these studies to see what they said about the following questions:

“In what ways do foster carers come together and for what reasons?”

“Does this have a positive impact on carers, their foster children and placements?”

“What steps can be taken to improve support and contact between foster carers?”

What did we find out?

- A range of peer support options are offered to foster carers by local authorities and independent foster care providers.
- Not all foster carers have the same needs. This depends on the individual, how long they have been fostering and the needs of the child(ren) they foster.
- Ways that foster carers meet with each other include local support and advocacy groups, training sessions, mentoring and buddying schemes, and informal social contact.
- Regular foster carer support groups benefit from a group facilitator, someone who can guide discussions.
- Contact with other foster carers can provide empathy and shared understanding, concrete assistance, help with problem solving and positive feedback. It can also reduce feelings of isolation.
- Only four studies have looked at direct links between foster carer contact and benefits for carers, children and placements:
 - Two studies showed that when foster carers felt supported, they were more likely to keep being a foster carer and have a more positive attitude to fostering.
 - The third study showed a lower likelihood of depression.
 - The fourth study suggested that increased availability of respite care might help to avoid placement disruptions.