

## Key Messages

# Fostering: The impact on foster carers' children

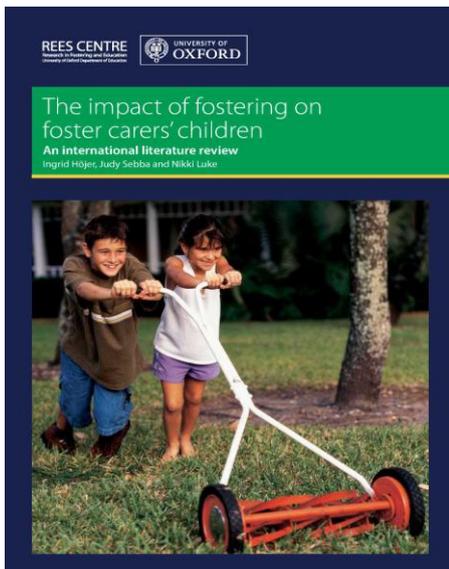
The Rees Centre at the University of Oxford published an international literature review in October 2013 on the impact of fostering on foster carers' children. The report looked at a wide range of recent research to see what it told us about this issue and where more research may be needed.

### What is the issue?

Children are often fostered within an existing family unit. While foster carers are well prepared for fostering, the sons and daughters of foster carers can receive less attention, both in research and in practice. By studying existing research on how fostering affects the sons and daughters of carers, we can learn what type of support these children and young people might need and help them be better prepared for their role.

### Call to Action

- Ensure that children and young people are involved in their family's decision to foster.
- Provide ways to access information, positive and negative, about fostering.
- Allow children and young people to know more about particular children coming to live with them.
- Limit particularly sensitive information about foster children (for example concerning experiences of abuse) where appropriate.
- Reduce feelings of exclusion by protecting time for the children of foster carers to spend with their parents.
- Promote open discussions of difficulties to help children in foster families cope with change.
- Prepare children in the foster family for the ending of placements.



The impact of fostering on foster carers' children by Ingrid Höjer, Judy Sebba and Nikki Luke.

The full report can be read and downloaded for free:  
<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/research/publications/>

For further information about the work of the Rees Centre or to request free hard copies of our reports, please contact the team by email to [rees.centre@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:rees.centre@education.ox.ac.uk)

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## What did we do?

The Rees Centre searched for research studies published since 1990 which looked at the experiences of foster carers' own children. 17 studies from the UK, US, Canada, Sweden, Belgium and Spain were identified. We looked at these studies to see what they said about the following questions:

How well are foster carers' children prepared for life in a family that fosters?

What impact does the presence of looked after children and young people have on foster carers' children?

## What did we find out?

**Children and young people need to be involved in the family decision to foster.** The evidence from this review suggests that fostering will have an impact on their lives and they need to understand how and in what ways they will be affected.

**Being informed about all aspects of fostering, positive and negative,** makes sons and daughters of foster carers feel involved. **Providing information,** not only in the initial phase of fostering but throughout the entire fostering process, is important. Some fostering providers run peer support groups for carers' children but robust evaluations of this type of scheme were not identified in the research review.

**Knowing more about each particular foster child** can reduce conflicts. By making it easier to understand and cope with difficult behaviour, relationships between carers' children and foster children can improve.

**'Protected' parenting time for foster carers' children is important.** Foster carers need to find time to spend with their own children who otherwise may feel excluded in the family and forgotten by their parents.

**Limiting information** may be appropriate for some children of foster carers who do not want to be too involved. Sensitive information, about abuse and neglect for example, may be too challenging.

**Allowing opportunities for open discussion** of difficulties with parents and/or social workers allows foster carers' children to cope better.

**Preparing carers' children for the ending of placements can be one of the most difficult aspects of fostering.** Providing information and talking to all members of the foster family is important. Children of foster carers may have feelings of grief and loss which need to be recognised.