

no  
typical

care

story

Responding to the experiences of foster carers and care-experienced young people of fostering relationships

activity  
zine

# What is No Typical Care Story about?

There are many young people living in foster care in the UK in the care of foster carers. Foster carers, young people who have experience of foster care, researchers and professionals connected to foster care all agree that **relationships** in foster care are very important. But what are the relationships between young people in foster care and their foster carers **actually like**?

In this project we listened to foster carers and young people with experience of foster care to learn from their experiences of relationships in foster care.

In No Typical Care Story we share some of what these people shared with us along with some illustrations created by care-experienced artist **David Grimm (@DavetheCareBear)** inspired by what was said.

Please consider your own wellbeing while learning with us

This project was funded by:  
UCL Culture Train & Engage  
UCL Grand Challenges Small Grants



# Prompts & responses

Dr. Delyth Edwards and Rosie Canning have developed questions inspired by the data from this study, to direct informal educators in museums, heritage, and science communication

Throughout this zine there are **prompts** to help you think about how you engage and support care-experienced people and their families in public settings and your professional work.

At the end of the zine are a series of pages with activities for you to work through having read these experiences, and reflected on your own work and life experiences.

We used this zine as part of an activity workshop on the 27th November 2020, you can learn more about this workshop on our website.

[www.zinevoices.com](http://www.zinevoices.com)

**You can learn more about our contributors here:**

Dr. Delyth Edwards: @delythsedwards

Rosie Canning: @Rosie\_Canning

# "Am I separate or am I the same?"

Young people and foster carers spoke about a spectrum of fostering relationships - some people spoke relationships that were like parent or family relationships, others explained their fostering relationships were very different. Lots of people has experiences that were in between these two extremes - but what things affected people's experiences?

it was quite clear from the beginning that I was different

I weren't treated like i was any different



"From the moment I meet the child, my role is to give that child a Safe, Secure, Loving foundation and a Safe place. A Safe Place to make them feel protected, cared for and, if needs be and the child requires it, to make them feel loved and safe."

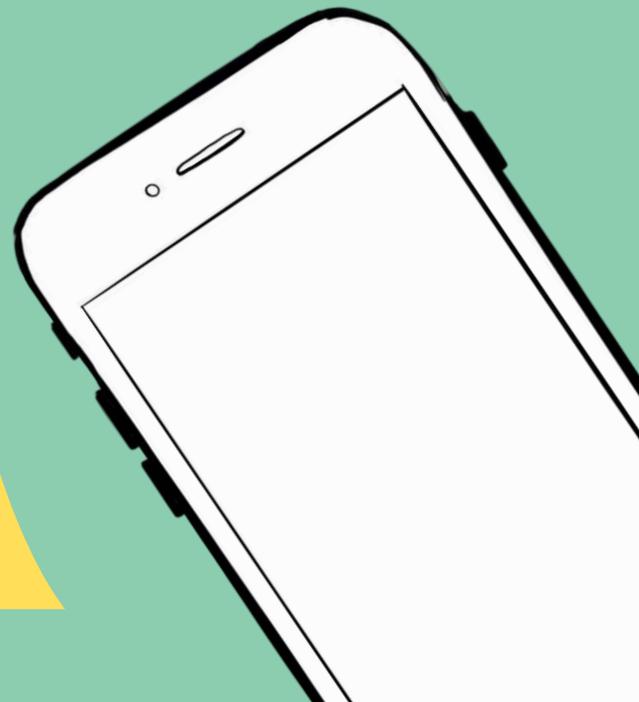


# Love and care

What makes you feel loved and safe? The reality is that instability can be common for some children that have experience of being 'in care'. Young people moving around may not be feeling loved and safe.

How do you express care and give attention to young people in your professional work?

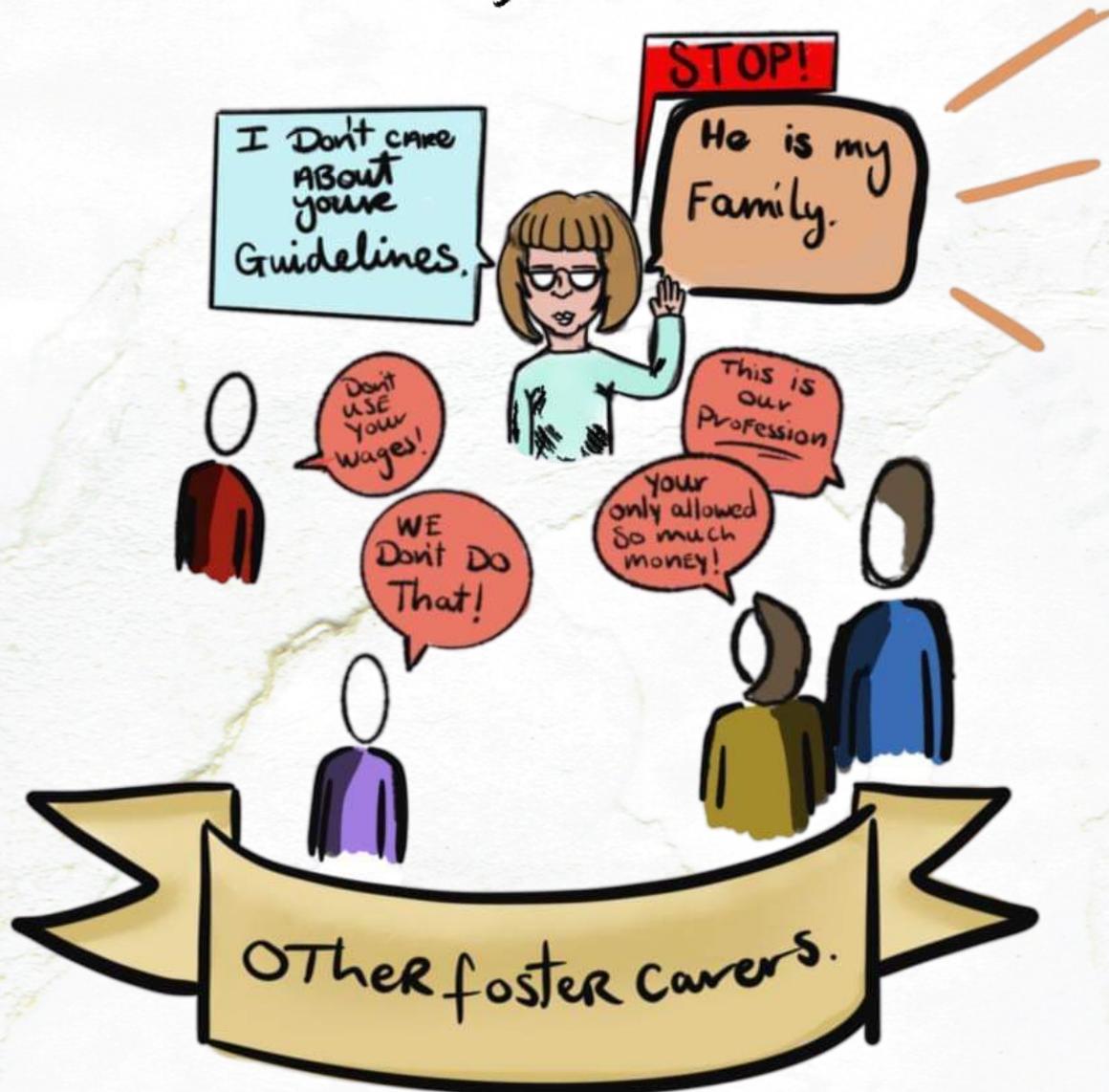
What/who is celebrated or represented as safe in conversations that you have with care experienced families? Beyond words, how might these attitudes come through in language, body language and actions?



# "You can't do that!"

There are a lot of rules and regulations that foster carers have to follow and things which are very different in foster care some different relationships - like needing to make notes and attend meetings. These social care structures can change what fostering relationships feel like.

"I mean we get given guidelines, you should only spend £50 on christmas etcetera. I have actually been criticised in the past because other foster carers have said to me 'you're actually using your wages as a teacher to support the child you're with, we don't do this and we don't do that' but mine get the same opportunities as my own children would get... I understand we are professionals but I see it as more inclusive that he's now part of the family and I will treat him the same as I will treat my own children and he doesn't see any difference."



For children in care to attend activities that are beyond their established routine (e.g. parties, events), there may be forms and background checks to be completed. It might not be as easy to participate in activities as it is for other children. How do you think this might make these young people feel?

# Rules and regulations

Do you know if your museum/heritage sites has similar processes? Do you know how these regulations/guidelines are implemented?

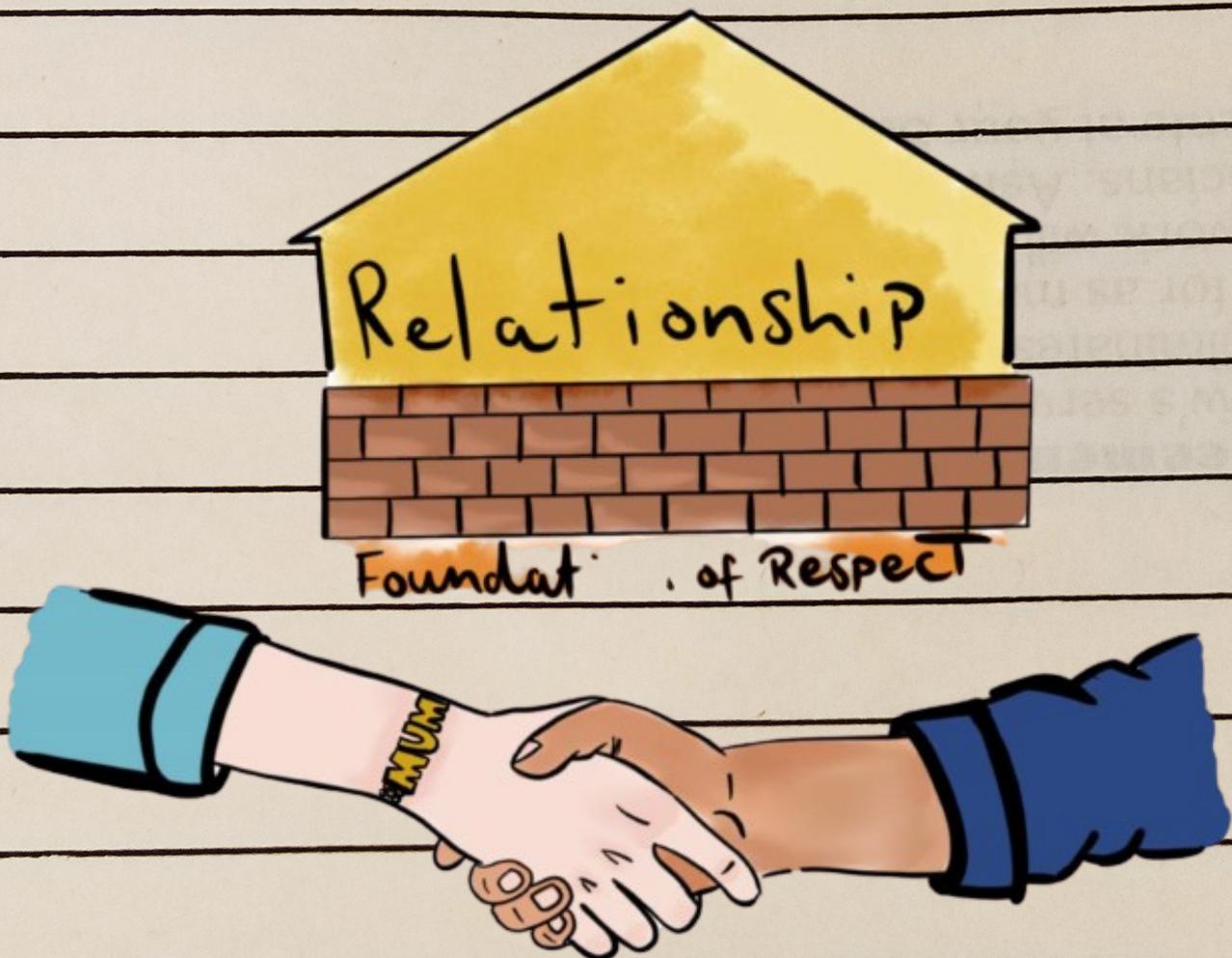
If you don't know about the processes, where could you find out? How could you share this with others that you work with?



# "They can love two families"

Fostering relationships can be complicated because most young people in foster care also have birth relatives. Some foster carers and young people thought a lot about these other relationships and how they impacted upon making new trusting bonds with foster carers.

The reason that the relationship started to build was that we have the meetings with mum and they would, he would see clearly from the onset my respect I have for his mother. ~~regardless of what mum had done or how mum had treated him~~ I had such a respect for his mother. Then when we were around the table in a meeting room he would see that I would never say anything negative about his mum."



# What is 'family'?

Lots of displays and activities are based around families, who you are, and where you're from. Activities like creating a family tree may be feel very different for a child who lives away from their birth family, or in residential care.

What assumption are implicit in "family" events or discussions of "family" in your activities or displays?

In the heritage site you work at, are there any examples of non-traditional families, particularly with children who were adopted or fostered into the family? What language and description is used to discuss them?



# "I can't stand that word"

There are lots of specific words that are used to talk about fostering relationships that we don't use when talking about other relationships between caregivers and children. For example, 'foster carer', 'placement' and 'stability'. The young people and foster carers did not all agree on what terms they preferred to use but they felt very strongly about their individual choices about language.

"I'd never be able to call them... even though I've been with them longer than I've been with my mum... I could never do it... call them mum and dad!"



"I don't really like that words to be fair, I keep telling the kids don't call me a foster carer. Just call me P, I don't really like... I think it's derogatory towards the kids."



# Addressing groups

Some children do call their foster carers mum and dad and others do not for a variety of reasons. Not everyone has what they consider to be a mother and father or lives with them so it's important to be 'family' aware.

What language do you use to describe the groups who come to your site/activity? Write down some terms you use, and ideas that you could use to be more inclusive:



Are the words you use the same as the ones in printed/digital material, and the terms that your colleagues use? If not how you could start making changes beyond yourself?



# "I didn't want to accept it"

There are lots of things which can make it challenging to create new, trusting, close fostering relationships. Lots of young people spoke about 'waiting for it to go wrong' as a result of difficult previous relationships they might have had with adults. Foster carers also spoke about feeling 'vulnerable' to opening themselves up to new fostering relationships as they were worried these might end and they might be left hurt.

"I actually feel more comfortable being called chloe because I feel like it will break my heart even more when... if she does walk out of our life one day if she'd always called me mum."

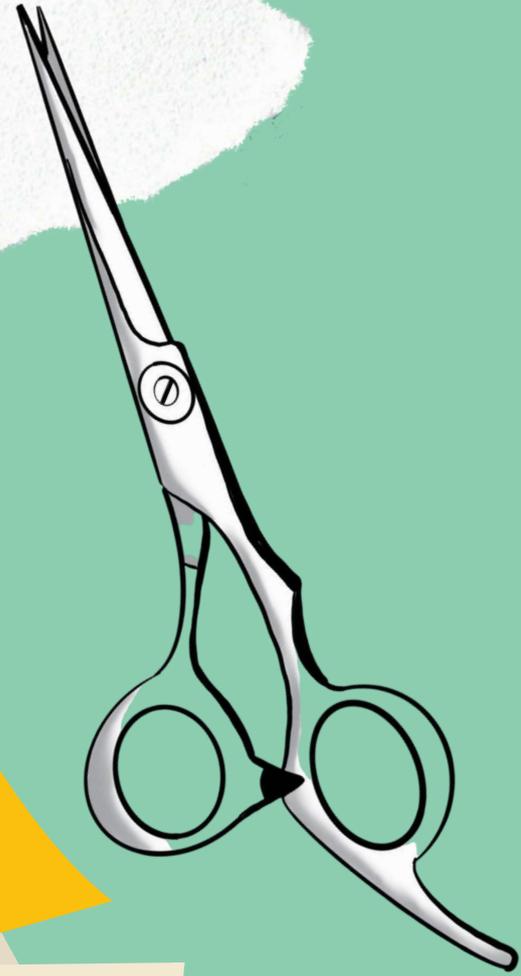


Events that are put on in the cultural sector could be about topics that relate to care-experience and may come tied in with issues around trust or the subject matter. Being forced to engage with a project might just not work for some young people.

*Trust*

How do you react to young people not participating in your activities?

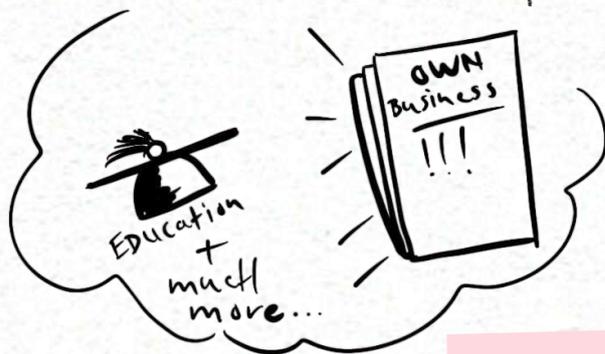
What assumptions do you make about their non-participation?



# "I didn't expect to be who I am today"

Even though lots of young people and foster carers described the barriers to developing trusting relationships - once these hurdles were overcome many people spoke about the life-changing impacts of these new fostering relationships.

"They had high aspirations for me. They didn't want me to do what I'd class as what society expects of Looked After children. For me it is what they would want for their own children to achieve."



"it's changed me to how I am today because they were able to build my trust [...] I really think they helped to heal me and to accept that help and care"

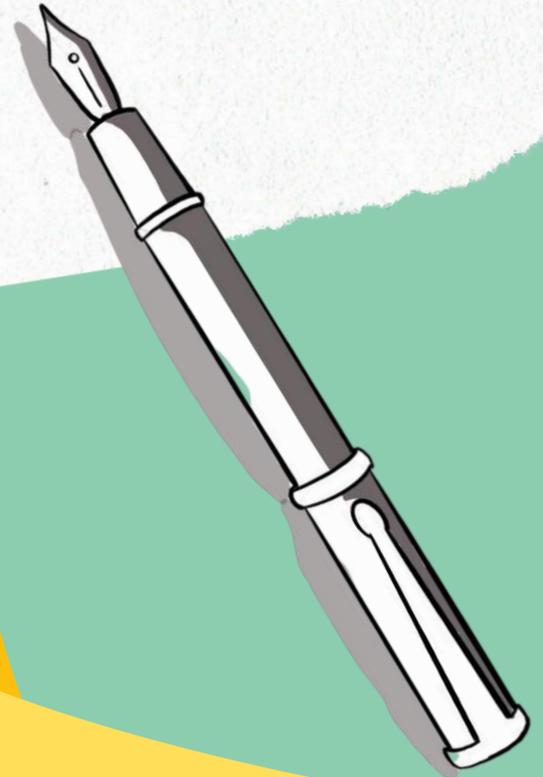
# Aspirations

People often talk about young people passively, with imperatives to raise the "aspirations of disadvantage youth!!!"

However, young people have their own aspirations and often take alternative life courses - like going to university later in life.

How can you speak with young people to find out what interests them and/or what is important to them?

What do young people think society expects of children growing up in care?



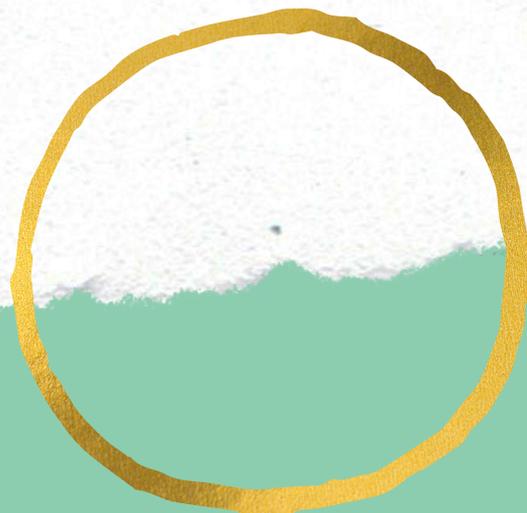
It's important to remember that language is dynamic: "looked after" is a contested term. What language do you and your organisation use?

# Who are 'looked after' children?

What are your assumptions and understandings of what/who 'looked after' children are? How much do you think about the range and diversity of care experience in the activities you develop?

Reflect on your work and fill in these circles with examples of the assumptions you have made/are making

In what ways are activities you/your place of work create geared towards certain types of care?



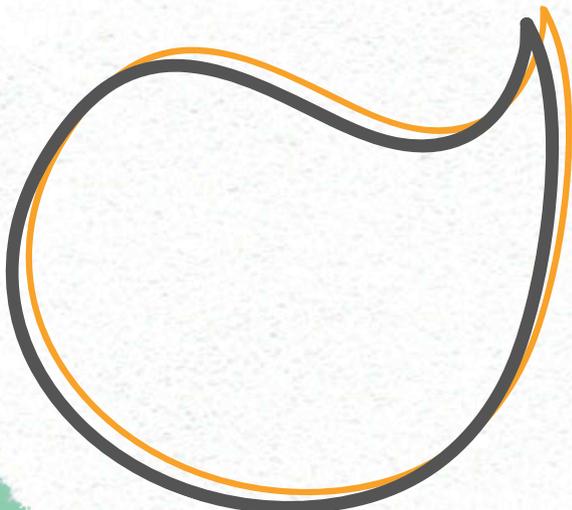
# Who is seen and unseen?

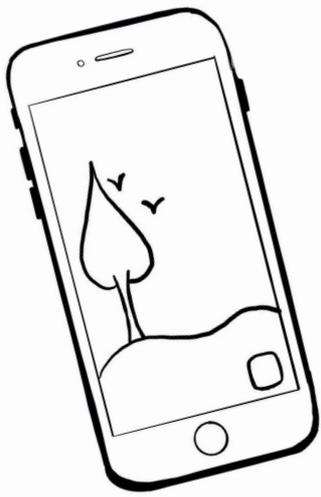
Having care experience doesn't end at 18, or 21, or 25 - care is a lifetime experience, and adults that visit too are care experienced. How do assumptions about care experienced people being only children or young people play out in your place of work?



Give examples about times where "care experience" is only focused on young people and children

Sometimes we use different language for care experience in different places or at different times in the past. How might the language in our place of work shape the visibility of care experienced people in our culture?

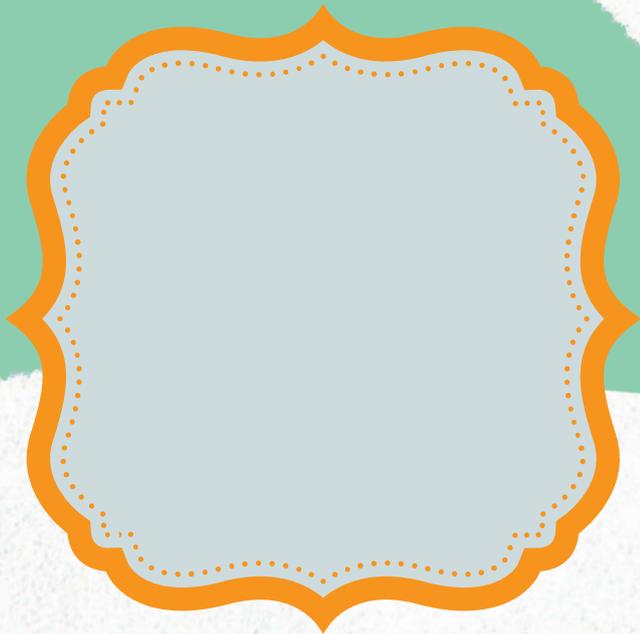
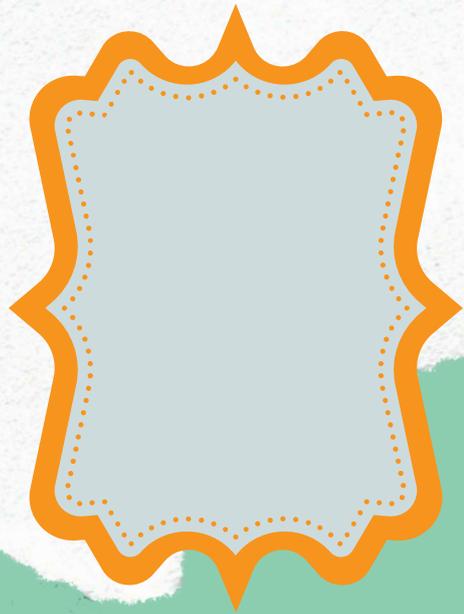




# Making memories

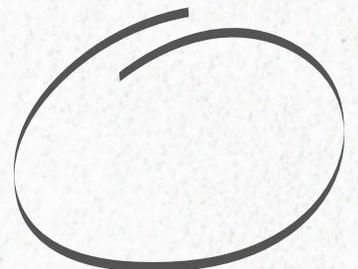
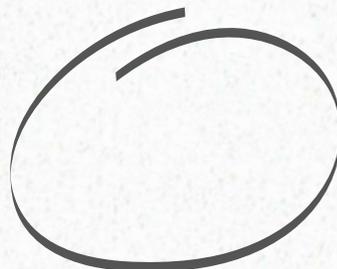
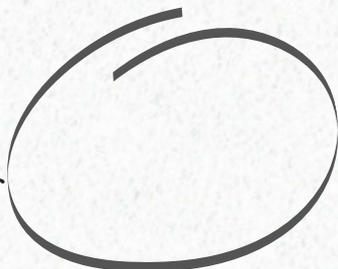
Many care experienced people don't have of things from their childhood or photographs of themselves as children for a variety of reasons, and so don't have objects from important memory making events.

What is the emphasis in your practice/place of work about memory items?

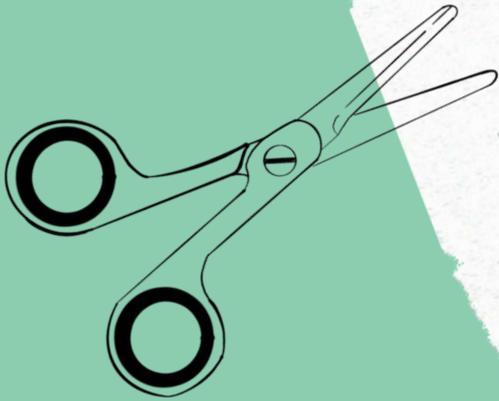


Can you think of alternative ways to support memory making that you could do at your place of work?

E.g have someone come to illustrate activities instead of photography



# Being held when out of sight



Read back through the care experienced voices in this zine, and think about the different bonds care experienced people may have even with people who may no longer be physically present.

How might this help us understand and support the complexity of care relationships in professional practice?

Which quote has prompted you?

Which quote has prompted you?

What has it prompted you to explore?

What has it prompted you to explore?

Further  
resources for  
you to use



### Care Experience Report

Learn more of the outcomes from the conference on the hashtag #CareExpCof or in the reports at

[careexperiencedconference.com/reports](http://careexperiencedconference.com/reports)

### Right To Be Active

Learn more about the experience of participation in sport and physical activity by care experienced young people from research at Loughborough in 2020

<https://hdl.handle.net/2134/11638092.v1>



**Scotland Care Review: "The Promise"**  
A review by the Care Review of Scottish care experienced children and adults, families and the paid and unpaid workforce in 2020.

<https://www.carereview.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/The-Promise.pdf>

You can also listen to more care experienced voices on twitter by following #CareConvos, @Convos4Care, @CareExp\_YPN



# *Pledges in developing care-inclusive practice*

As a result of working through this zine, and reflecting on your work and your place of work; what three commitments can you make to make your public facing work more inclusive of care-experienced people and those close to them?

1.

2.

3.

"Because, no trust is a big thing, if you don't have any trust, then it just doesn't work at all. Because, if I trust someone then I trust them with, like, deep secrets and that. And you don't want you don't want them going around and telling everyone so if you can't trust anyone then it really reflects on you and you feel like you can't tell anyone and it just builds up inside."



This resource was created in collaboration between Eva A Sprecher, Dr Eleanor S Armstrong, Ikesha Tuitt, Debbie Hill, Dr Delyth Edwards, Rosie Canning, and care-experienced artist David Grimm (@DavetheCareBear), and of course the participants in this research work who are:

Young people: Pete, Freddy, Frank, Stefan, Kayla, Alex, Leigh, Jade

Foster carers: Chloe, John, William, George, Aleks, Jo, Nathalie, Bella, Louise\*

The research for this project was approved by the UCL Ethics Committee (14653/002) and supervised by Dr Michelle Slead and Dr Nick Midgley

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\*Please note all participant names are pseudonyms