



the
Fostering
Foundation

Laying Foundations for the Future

16th January 2024

TFF NEWS

Fostering Foundation Update

Celebrating Our Carers: A Year of Triumphs and Gratitude



Dear Fostering Foundation Family,

As we bid farewell to the remarkable year that was 2023, we find ourselves reflecting on the countless moments of joy, growth, and resilience that have defined our fostering community. It is with great warmth and gratitude that I extend my heartfelt appreciation to each and every one of you who have played a vital role in the lives of the children under our care.

A Year of Triumphs:

In 2023, our fostering family continued to be a beacon of hope and stability for vulnerable children. Your unwavering commitment, compassion, and dedication have created a nurturing environment that empowers these young souls to flourish and reach their fullest potential. From the smallest victories to the most significant milestones, you have been the driving force behind countless success stories.

We too, have been diligently working to make a meaningful impact within the care system, striving to contribute our part. Our social media awareness campaigns yielded remarkable results, rallying the support of generous individuals and companies who graciously donated exquisite blankets for our young people – thank you project Linus! Additionally, Madlug stepped forward with their support, providing rucksacks to ensure the dignified transportation of belongings for young people in need. In a splendid show of generosity, Lush Cosmetics in Exeter has adorned our amazing carers with their exceptional products, enhancing the well-being of those who give so much to others.

Throughout 2023, as we set up our stalls across the South West Peninsula, a pivotal moment unfolded when Blue Elephant Childcare LTD, a children's residential care home company, extended a welcoming hand, expressing their interest in collaborating with The Fostering Foundation. Together, we are forging a partnership aimed at creating a pathway for young individuals in residential care homes to be introduced to our exceptional carer community.





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This innovative approach involves a carefully planned transitional process, offering these young individuals the invaluable opportunity to find solace and stability within the embrace of loving home environments. Our proposal found a receptive audience in Somerset Council, who have emerged as staunch advocates for this pioneering initiative. We take immense pride in spearheading an effort that once again places the well-being and fulfilment of young people at the very core of our mission.

A Heartfelt Thank You:

As I express my deepest gratitude, I want to acknowledge the tireless efforts and sacrifices made by you - our extraordinary carers. Your kindness, patience, and love have transformed the lives of children in need, offering them a chance to experience the warmth and security of a loving home. Your commitment to fostering not only shapes their present but also lays the foundation for a brighter, more promising future.

Looking Ahead to 2024:

As we step into the new year with optimism and enthusiasm, let us carry forward the spirit of community and support that defines the Fostering Foundation. The challenges of the past year have only strengthened our collective resolve to create positive change. In 2024, we anticipate more moments of growth, collaboration, and shared achievements as we continue to build a nurturing and supportive environment for both carers and children alike.

Together, We Thrive:

Our fostering community is a testament to the power of unity and compassion. Your selfless contributions have created a network of care that extends far beyond the confines of our individual homes. Together, we thrive, creating a ripple effect of positivity that reaches the hearts of every child in our care.

As we embark on this new chapter, let us carry forward the lessons learned, the bonds formed, and the hope that fuels our collective journey. Thank you for being the backbone of the Fostering Foundation. Here's to another year of growth, resilience, and making a lasting impact on the lives of those who need it most.

Wishing you all a joyous and prosperous 2024!

With heartfelt gratitude,

Sakina Khan

CEO, The Fostering Foundation





Your digital footprint: Tips for safe social media use for foster carers and children in care

Social media and the internet have changed the way we communicate. They also offer children and young people positive opportunities and benefits, such as developing friendships and maintaining social ties, education and developing a sense of identity and belonging. For foster carers, too, you may turn to social media (Facebook groups, blogs etc) for learning opportunities and to share information and support with other foster carers.

Whilst social media has changed the way the world communicates, it also creates privacy and safety concerns, especially for children in care. First and foremost, as a foster carer you need to be vigilant about what you post on social media, and, aware of your own digital footprint.

When you begin your journey and go through the assessment process to become a foster carer, part of your background checks by the Fostering Foundation and your local authority will include looking at how safe your online practices are and how much about you can be discovered in a search.

TIPS FOR FOSTER CARERS USING SOCIAL MEDIA

- **Talk with your social worker about agency policies:** Ask about guidelines for social media contact between foster parents and birth families and with community agencies, other foster parents and agency staff. Find out whether there are specific considerations for the young person in your care – what role have digital/internet technologies had in the child's life? Is there history of online harm or risk, such as bullying, grooming, self-harm? If so, this should be incorporated into the child/young person's risk management plan.
- **Protect privacy and confidentiality:** Do not identify a child or young person as a child in care or post their full name or address on a social network. Never discuss anything that could identify a child in care living in your home.
- **Uphold your reputation as a professional:** Foster carers should consider the consequences before posting anything on social networking sites and the impression it may give of you to those who can access the information. Remember that anything posted online could end up in the public domain to be potentially read by the birth family, the young person in care, or your social worker. To maintain appropriate professional boundaries, you should not have family members of children in care as 'friends' on social media sites, nor should you be 'friends' with employees of the IFA or LA.
- **Your immediate family and friends:** Those who are aware of your fostering role should also be reminded of expectations around social media and the dangers of identifying a child in care online.
- **Never post family pictures that include a child or young person in care without discussing it with their social worker first:** It's important to ensure that photos do not create privacy or safety risks. Be aware that photos may reveal the young person's location – some smartphones embed tags that can provide geographic information. Other photos can provide clues, such as schools or city names.
- **Online safety first:** Where devices in the home are shared, make sure you log out of websites or apps after using them.





TIPS FOR HELPING CHILDREN IN CARE STAY SAFE ONLINE

- **Learn about social media apps:** New social media tools are released frequently, and children are often quick to adopt them. As a foster carer you should keep abreast of current technology and best practices for the most popular social media apps.
- **Set maximum privacy settings:** Understand settings and reporting features for each network used, so children in your care can limit who can find them, what they can see and how they can communicate.
- **Be aware of online gaming risks:** Online games can be unsafe, as players can interact with strangers. Be aware of the kind of games your child plays and discuss the risks. Let them know that they should avoid posting pictures of themselves or giving personal information while playing online games, and that they can come to you if they are being bullied or spoken to inappropriately.
- **Discuss social media with children in your care:** Ask your young person how they use social media and why it's important to them. Involve your young person with the development of their safer caring plan so they feel part of the process.
- **Set house rules early on:** Rules will vary depending on age and any exposure to risk in their past.
- **Teach your young person to keep personal information private:** Advise your young person not to post a full name, address, school name, phone number, photo, or other identifying information.
- **Monitor use:** Keep computers in a common family space (not a bedroom) and keep track of mobile device use. Know what type of social media your young person uses. Every so often, search up your young person's name and address and see what information or tagged photos are publicly available. Consider asking them for their passwords and permission to let a trusted adult 'friend' keep an eye out online. However, be sensitive to their needs and try to balance monitoring with privacy.
- **Understand their language:** Children and young people may use slang, hashtags and emoji in their online communications. Understand that young people communicate in a language different from yours. (See Smart Social's Teen Slang, Emojis, & Hashtags Parents Need to Know [The Ultimate List] to learn more.)
- **Discuss cyberbullying:** Warn young people not to send, forward, or respond to mean or embarrassing messages or pictures. Help your young person document, block, and report cyberbullying if needed.
- **Keep lines of communication open:** Encourage children in your care to let you know if an exchange makes them uncomfortable or if someone asks to meet them in person.
- **Be alert to unwanted contact from birth family:** The internet can facilitate contact from birth family where this is not appropriate. Explain why unmanaged online contact is not appropriate, consult your social workers and be aware of blocking tools.
- **Be prepared to deal with mistakes:** When young people slip up and don't follow guidelines, approach the situation as a "learning opportunity" and calmly work together with your young person on what to do next. Most social media platforms have facilities for reporting abuse and inappropriate material. Save any available evidence if necessary – for example, by taking screen grabs. Speak to your supervising social worker and know where to report the incident (such as Children's Services, school or the police) in order to log any incidents.



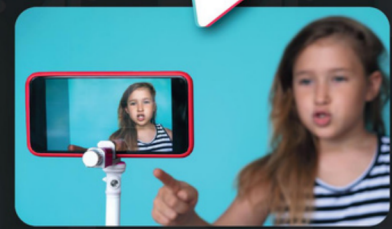


TikTok is a video-sharing social media app available on iOS and Android which lets users create, share, and view user created videos much in a similar manner to Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat. It's main draw, however, is that users can record and upload bite-sized looping videos of themselves lip-syncing and dancing to popular music or soundbites, often for comedic effect, which can then be further enhanced with filters, emojis and stickers. TikTok has been designed with the young user in mind and has a very addictive appeal. At the beginning of 2019 it skyrocketed in popularity to become the iOS store's most downloaded app with over 33 million downloads. Estimates suggest that it now has anything between 500 million and over 1 billion monthly active users worldwide.



What parents need to know about

TIKTOK



MATURE CONTENT

On the iOS store, TikTok is listed as 12+. On the Google Play Store it is rated as 'Parental guidance recommended'. When signing up for the app, it's possible to lie about your age without any form of verification. As children scroll through their feed, most of the videos they're likely to come across are lighthearted or funny takes on dance routines which are designed to make people laugh. However there has been a slew of videos which have been reported for featuring drug and alcohol abuse, self-harm and sexual content, including young teens dressing overtly sexually and behaving suggestively. Given the deluge of material uploaded to TikTok every day, it's impossible to moderate everything and it can be quite common to come across explicit content on the 'for you' feed when logging into the platform.



INAPPROPRIATE MUSIC

TikTok revolves around creating music videos through lip-syncing and dancing. Inevitably, some of the music featured by users will contain explicit or suggestive lyrics. Given the undeniably young user base, there is a risk that children may look to imitate the explicit language they hear or the suggestive actions they see when viewing other user's videos on the app.



TIKTOK FAME

TikTok is very image focused and there is a notable preoccupation with appearing cool and attractive. Many teenagers now attempt to go viral and become what's known in-app as 'TikTok famous'. TikTok (and its predecessor musical.ly) has spawned its own celebrities - social media stars Loren Gray and Jacob Sartorius have been catapulted to fame through their initial exposure on the app. Obviously, most budding influencers looking to become the next big thing will be disappointed, but this may have the knock-on effect of making them go to more and more drastic lengths to get noticed.



ONLINE PREDATORS

As a social network, TikTok makes it easy to connect with other users. This includes the ability to comment on and react to other user's videos, follow their profile and download their content. Be aware that by default, any user can comment on your child's video if their account is set to public. Most interactions are harmless enough but as an app, TikTok is prone to predators because of the abundance of younger users.



ADDICTIVE NATURE

Social media is designed to be addictive and TikTok is no different. It can be fun and hugely entertaining. However, it is also because of this that it can be hard to put down. In addition to the short, punchy nature of the looping video format, the app's ability to keep you guessing what will come on screen next makes it easy to turn a five-minute visit into 45-minute visit.

IN-APP PURCHASES

Aside from the content, there's also the option to purchase in-app extras called 'TikTok coins'. Prices range from £0.99 for 100 coins to an eye-watering £93.99 for 10,000 coins. TikTok coins are used to purchase different emojis to reward content creators that a user finds funny or entertaining. In the iOS version of the app you can disable the option to buy TikTok coins but this sadly doesn't seem to be a feature in the Android version.



Safety Tips For Parents

TALK ABOUT ONLINE DANGERS

Assuming your child is above the age limit to use the app, make sure you also take the time to talk to them about what they are seeing on the app. Have a dialogue, get them to give you their opinion on what is appropriate and model the correct behaviour for them. Go over why they shouldn't give out private information or identifiable photos and be positive and understanding of them. In the long run, getting them to think critically about what they're seeing goes a long way to keeping them social media savvy.



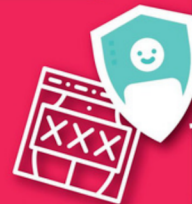
USE PRIVACY SETTINGS

Undoubtedly, the easiest way to safeguard your child on TikTok is to make sure their account is set to private. This means only those users your child approves can view, like, and follow their content. Setting the account to private may clash with your child's goal of social media superstardom, but it will keep their account secure from strangers. This setting can be enabled under the privacy and safety menu by pressing the ellipsis in the 'me' tab of the app. To be extra safe, there are additional controls available to toggle such as who can send comments and messages, among other options.



ENABLE RESTRICTED MODE

In the digital wellbeing section there's the ability to turn on restricted mode using a PIN. Restricted mode filters out content that is not age appropriate although it should be noted that this isn't always 100% fool proof. When enabling restricted mode, parents should still be vigilant to what their child is watching and take note that the algorithm moderating content is not infallible.



EXPLORE AND LEARN YOURSELF

Understanding and learning the app yourself is a great way to get to grips with TikTok. You could then even use the app with your child and watch some videos with them. If you are the parent of a teen, even if it does not make you popular, keep a close eye on what they're viewing and sharing. That said, it's a brilliant chance to turn it into a bonding opportunity with your child also. You could even unleash your inner performer and make videos with them while (more importantly) keeping them safe online.



LEARN HOW TO REPORT AND BLOCK INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

With the proper privacy settings in place, TikTok can be a safe space for your child to express themselves. However, just in case something does manage to slip through, make sure your child knows how to recognise and report content that isn't appropriate and get them to come to you about what they have seen. TikTok allows users to report offenders and comments within the app. You can also block individual users by going on their profile.



MODERATE SCREEN TIME

As entertaining as TikTok is, you can help your child moderate their time on the app by making use of the digital wellbeing section. Under the screen time management option, you can limit the daily allotted time allowed on the app in increments ranging from 40 to 120 minutes. You can also lock this preference behind a PIN number which has to be inputted in order to then exceed the daily time limit. This way your child can get their daily dose of memes without wasting away the day.



Meet our expert

Pete Badh is a writer with over 10+ years in research and analysis. Working within a specialist area for West Yorkshire Police, Pete has contributed work which has been pivotal in successfully winning high profile cases in court as well as writing as a subject matter expert for industry handbooks.



SOURCES:

Latest News By Region

Exeter Region

It has been a busy few months to say the least (as well as carers taking young people abroad on amazing trips and to sunny places for Christmas!) It was sad to say goodbye to Victoria at the end of the year, who was such a big part of the Exeter region and we wish her well for the future. We do welcome two, experienced supervising social workers in Becki and Jo to the team, which is a massive positive. You are all starting to form relationships and we really want your views on shaping the region moving forwards. Your ideas will be sought in the coming month! It will be good to get together again soon! There have been a lot of events going on throughout December with the carer meal and Panto in Exeter which were great. You all do so much in supporting your young people, which we thank you for and look forward to everything that 2024 brings!

Bristol Region

Bristol – There has been a lot going on in the Bristol region with our carers doing exceptional things in the care of your children (including supporting children with complex health conditions). It is really is such a massive difference you all make in your young peoples' lives. You are phenomenal! We too had some staffing changes with Gemma leaving after a long time with the organisation. Lindsay has started as senior social worker in the team and Ben has also joined which is great. It was a brilliant turn out for the Great Baldini Magic Show (did anyone find themselves over Christmas thinking about how he did some of the tricks?! It was amazing!) The carers and staff all enjoyed a meal out together before the schools broke up which was really enjoyable. We look forward to 2024 and continuing to make positive changes in our young peoples' lives!

Tavistock Region

I would like to start by wishing you all a very Happy New Year! Over the past few months, we have had much to celebrate from many outstanding outcomes for so many of our children, your encouraging feedback of the children events, and carers events over the Christmas period, to successfully expanding our skilled team of foster carers and staff. I know that through our shared determination to make a difference for our most vulnerable children, and the commitment and passion you continually demonstrate 2023 has been a year we can look back on with pride!

This year we were delighted to be able to offer pantomime tickets to our foster carers and children to the showing of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, at Plymouth Theatre Royal, on 13th January 2024. Thank you to everyone who attended, and the feedback has been amazing!

We wish to extend a very warm welcome to the carers who have joined us since our last newsletter. We have gained households from various areas over the last few months and we know that some of you have had the chance to meet each other or indeed already know each other.

We would like to take this opportunity to say an official hello to K and M L, and to offer congratulations on being approved as new foster carers.

I am delighted to announce that Maria Wolveridge, Supervising Social Worker joined the South West region on 3rd January 2024. Some of you will have met Maria already. We are delighted that Maria has chosen to join us at The Fostering Foundation, and I am sure you will join us in extending a very warm welcome to Maria.

A huge well done to our children on their celebrations and achievements. Congratulations to B who is now walking. Congratulations to L for great attitude and helping others in class. Congratulations to C on a successful interview, and being offered an apprenticeship. Congratulations to W who is trying really hard at school. Congratulations to L commended for contributions to school council meetings. And congratulations to K who is getting weekly praise for progression. Well done to you all!

As you will be aware we transitioned to a new training provider, Fostering Training on 4th December 2023, reflecting our unwavering commitment to delivering excellent training opportunities to our Staff and our foster carers.

Fostering Training offers a comprehensive array of courses—currently numbering 119 and continuously expanding. This new provider caters to diverse learning preferences, allowing you to choose between reading course content or having it delivered through audio. A user-friendly online chat support is available from 09:00am to 21:00pm for any assistance you may require. Additionally, Fostering Training accommodates your flexibility by enabling course completion on various devices—phone, tablet, and computer.

Beyond expanding your learning and knowledge base, Fostering Training empowers you to complete courses at your own pace. Whether it's an intensive evening session or a more extended timeframe, you can pause and resume courses at your convenience. We are excited about the limitless learning opportunities this change brings, and we trust you share in our enthusiasm. Our Training Lead, Iona McDowall will continue to track all your training and will guide your Social Worker's on mandatory courses with this new provider.

For any enquiries relating to training, please contact Iona at imcdowall@fosteringfoundation.co.uk

Next Face to Face Support Groups:

Plymouth Foster Carer Support Group – 22nd February 2024, 09:15am

Tavistock Support Group – 28th February 2024, 10:00am – 12:00am

Bodmin Support Group – 12th March 2024, 10:00am – 12:00am

Support Groups will also continue to be held virtually, including our Therapeutic Support Group. You should have all received details of our Foster Carer Support Groups for the next 12 months. If for any reason you are not in receipt of our Support Group's schedule then please make contact with our Business Support Team.

For information relating to support groups, please email jobinding@fosteringfoundation.co.uk

We would really like to see an increase in the number of foster carers who attend support groups, and look forward to seeing you there!

If you feel there is a way we can improve our Support Groups, then please give your feedback to the Business Support Team. Support Groups are important to get feedback from Foster Carers on how the foundation can further support you all, but also for Foster Carers to seek advice and support from one another.

We would like to show our appreciation to you for your dedication in welcoming children into your homes, and into your families. Your dedication is seen and so very appreciated by all at The Fostering Foundation.
Thank – you!

When To Use Out-of-hours Support

The Fostering Foundation offers an out-of-office-hours service to be used for support and advice during difficult situations and for the **reporting of emergency incidents or accidents relating to the young person in your care.** **Any non-emergency business should be dealt with during normal working hours.**

Your first priority in any situation is to safeguard the child and others in your care, and yourself.

Out-of-hours: TFF - Dial any TFF office number and you will be put through to the duty social worker

0117 967 3744 01822 618 068



The following checklist may help you decide whether your situation warrants a call to the out-of-hours duty worker.



Contact the our-of-hours service if:

- ✓ There is immediate threat to the child or young person's health, safety or welfare
- ✓ There is immediate threat to your health, safety or welfare.
- ✓ The nature of the situation give rise for concern that is causing worry and anxiety for you
- ✓ The child or young person requires emergency medical treatment, or has been admitted to hospital
- ✓ The child or young person has removed themselves from your address, or not returned to the foster home at the agreed time, or their whereabouts are unknown, or you have concerns about where they are
- ✓ You have had to contact the police or any other emergency service
- ✓ You need advice or guidance to make a decision which will impact on the care of the child, or you need to talk through a potential situation, before the next working day when the office is open

If in doubt, it is better to call.

The service is operated on a rota basis by the Fostering Foundation team of qualified staff who will have information about your family, background knowledge of the child and any previous or current issues of concern or risk.

The full details of your concerns and actions will be available to your supervising social worker and their manager on the next working day.

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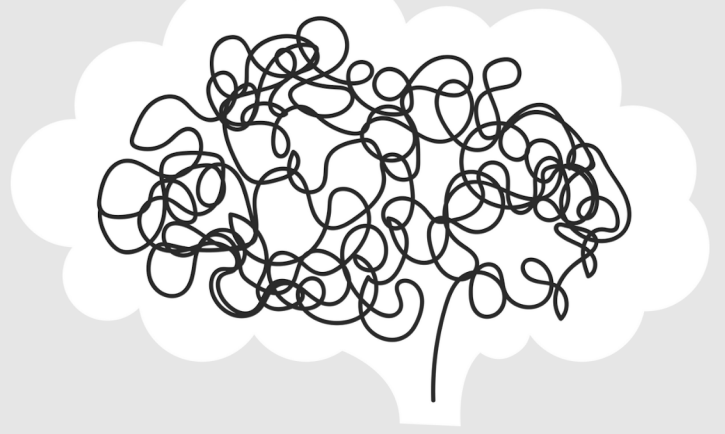


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therapeutic parenting support groups with a day time session and an evening session so those carers who work can also access these sessions.

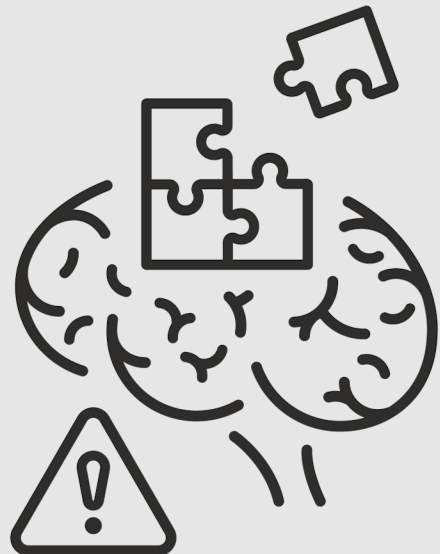
Hi all and Happy 2024 to you all.

This year there has been a change to the timings of the therapeutic parenting support group. We will now be alternating monthly therapeutic parenting support groups with a day time session and an evening session so those carers who work can also access these sessions.

This year, there has been an exciting addition to the Therapeutic parenting Support Group Format. Each month there will be a therapeutic parenting-informed theme. This week we looked at the concept of Sarah Dillon's (CEOCT) 'Trauma Room' and the 'Safe Room' that represent the emotional worlds of children who have experienced trauma. This helps us to consider the triggers that may result in the children's survival behaviours being activated and to think about experiences that underpin the behaviours that we see at the 'tip of the iceberg'.

February's theme will be looking at why children may lie and steal and the links to trauma.

In addition to the alternate monthly evening therapeutic parenting support groups, I will be running evening sessions for the six week's Therapeutic Parenting – Foundations For Attachment Training. This will start on **Wednesday 23rd January for six concurrent weeks from 6pm - 8.30 pm**. It would be great to see as many of you as can make it on this training as therapeutic parenting underpins so much of what our children need. In this training we look at the challenges of parenting children who have experienced trauma and loss and introduce therapeutic approaches, including PACE that help our children to heal from past hurts. Please get in touch with me if you would like to find out more about this training.



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