

News story: Plans to help children in foster care experience loving and stable homes

Foster families are to receive clearer advice on physical affection so that they can feel more confident to hug and comfort the children in their care, as the Government sets out new measures to help children in foster care experience loving and stable homes.

The new plans outlined today (20 July) focus on the experiences and outcomes for children in foster care, helping to support those who may have had a difficult start to lead fulfilling and normal lives.

Foster families will also be empowered to make more day-to-day decisions in the best interests of the children in their care, including simple but important things like being able to take children to get their haircut, allowing them to go on school trips or to be able to go over to friends' houses.

The Department for Education will also explore ways digital technology can enhance the foster care system and consider how it could help tackle challenges such as recruiting more families to become foster parents and have access to training and resources to support these families.

Minister for Children and Families Nadhim Zahawi said:

We want every child in foster care to have a loving, stable home and trusted relationships so they can have the 'normal' life they desperately want and experience the same opportunities as other children.

We also want to support and empower foster parents to make the daily decisions they would for their own children and make sure they receive the recognition they deserve for their incredible work.

The department's [response](#) to the independent [review](#), Foster Care in England by Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers and the Education Select Committee's fostering [report](#), sets out six priority areas for the government's vision for a better care system, driven directly by children's needs and views.

These priority areas include:

- Improving the experience of children in foster care – guidance for foster families on physical affection will be made clearer and social workers will be urged to help children in foster care have contact with loved ones.

- Greater stability for children in care – a new training package will be created for social workers to help more children have long-term foster placements and a new national board will be set up to promote better life chances for children in care.
- Empowering foster families – working with councils to help foster families to make more day-to-day parenting decisions and explore ways digital technology can support foster families' training.
- Driving improvements in fostering practice – working with a group of councils and agencies to develop best practice for foster care and reviewing guidance to make it clearer on practice issues.
- Better ways of matching children with families – funding new approaches to commission foster placements for children.

A Young Person's version of the government response has also been published today to engage children and young people in foster care directly and help them to be more involved in the care system.

Harvey Gallagher, Chief Executive of Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers, said:

A real sustained focus from government on building on the strengths of foster care and improving the lives of children placed in foster care is of course most welcome. The Government's emphasis on genuine collaboration between local authorities and independent fostering providers is a breath of fresh air and I know many of our local authority colleagues will feel the same.

Commissioning of foster care placements can only begin to be effective with this kind of sea change in relationships between commissioners and service providers.

Alan Wood, Managing Director at FosterTalk, said:

FosterTalk welcomes the Departmental response to the independent review and the Education Select Committee's fostering report. We view this as an opportunity to investigate and improve further methods of good practice to ensure that children in the care system are placed at the center of the decision making.

We particularly welcome the recognition for greater placement stability and more emphasis being placed upon the child's wishes with greater control of their own care planning. We owe it to all children within our care system to act on the evidence and recommendations from the two reviews to improve practice and ultimately provide the opportunities that our children deserve. We all need to play our part in realising this potential to make a difference to the child in care.

John Simmonds, Director of Policy Research and Development at CoramBAAF,

said:

The Department's response sets out a strategy that directly reflects those concerns – that at the heart of fostering is the creation of a family life for a child – in the short or the long term – that will directly influence them for the rest of their lives.

Government could not have a greater responsibility or opportunity to ensure that this drives what has been too often a complex, risk adverse and systems focussed model. The objectives set out in the Minister's response directly reflect these concerns. The sector needs to grasp the opportunities being made available to ensure that every child placed in foster care results in them feeling protected, listened to, supported and above all encouraged and valued.