

What is the impact of high-quality relationships on the development and outcomes of a child who has experienced adversity and/or trauma?

Evidence Summary

The Evidence Summaries have not been conducted or written as rapid reviews, systematic reviews or comprehensive literature reviews. Instead they were designed and written as brief notes intended to give the Independent Review of Children's Social Care a quick overview of some of the evidence on a particular topic or question. They are only being published for transparency and given their limited scope, are not intended as a resource for wider purpose.

Introduction

This evidence summary will discuss the role and importance of relationships, in multiple forms, for children in care, and present the evidence on 'what works' in promoting safe and healthy relationships for these young people.

Why are long-term relationships important?

Arguably the essential factor in supporting resilience in children is social support and relationships. A seminal paper¹ on decades of research on resilience describes how it is enabled by secure stable affectional relationships and other positive experiences. Luthar defined resilience as "a phenomenon or process reflecting relatively positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma"; summarising what they called the three sets of factors "implicated in the development of resilience: attributes of the children themselves, aspects of their families, and characteristics of their wider social environments."² Research has demonstrated that social support is a key protective factor for long term good outcomes, including for children in care.

There is clear evidence that suggests attachment issues or disorders in children and young people can negatively affect both internalising and externalising behaviours.³⁴ There is also a large evidence base around the role that strong social support and relationships play in helping children overcome

¹ Rutter, M. (1985). Resilience in the face of adversity. Protective factors and resistance to psychiatric disorder. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 147(6), 598-611. doi: 10.1192/bjp.147.6.598

² Luthar, S.S. (2015). Resilience in Development: A Synthesis of Research across Five Decades. In *Developmental Psychopathology* (eds D. Cicchetti and D.J. Cohen). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470939406.ch20>

³ Fearon, R.P., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M.J., van IJzendoorn, M.H., Lapsley, A.-M. and Roisman, G.I. (2010). The Significance of Insecure Attachment and Disorganization in the Development of Children's Externalizing Behavior: A Meta-Analytic Study. *Child Development*, [online] 81(2), pp.435-456. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2009.01405.x> [Accessed 16 Oct. 2019].

⁴ Groh, A. M., Roisman, G. I., van IJzendoorn, M. H., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., & Fearon, R. P. (2012). The significance of insecure and disorganized attachment for children's internalizing symptoms: A meta-analytic study. *Child development*, 83(2), 591-610.



their experiences of adversity. With this comes evidence to suggest that young children who have had many periods in care often have inadequate attachment relationships.⁵ However, research suggests that if children have at least one 'good' attachment relationship, even if it is with only one caregiver, they are able to take on more care from others, experience fewer behavioural problems, a lower risk of depression, higher self-esteem and develop healthier relationships later in life.⁶ In other words this relationship has protective potential. Strong attachment relationships with siblings or extended family such as Grandparents can also be a protective factor for children and young people at risk of maltreatment.⁷ For young people who may not have the good fortune of at least one early positive relationship all is not lost. There is evidence that attachment patterns and resilience can shift through positive experiences with caregivers through the later childhood and adolescent years.⁸

Hiles et al (2013) describe how for care leavers "social support can be thought of as a multi-dimensional concept", encompassing emotional and practical support, as well as advice and information or guidance.⁹ In a systematic review of resilience and protective factors for people with a history of child maltreatment, they found protective factors associated with resilience at individual, familial, and societal levels reduced the likelihood of negative consequences of childhood maltreatment.¹⁰ These protective factors included, maternal care, close mother-child relationship, friendship, social support, and school environment. However, the conceptualisation of resilience differed in the studies and the authors point to the low quality of available evidence. In their systematic review of resilience in residential care, Lou et al (2018), found that among the protective factors associated with resilience, those promoting interpersonal relationships were "particularly noticeable".¹¹ The authors reach the conclusion that given the association between resilience and better outcomes for young people in residential care, a focus on building resilience should be a priority for these placements.¹²

Luthar also highlights the important qualifier of resilience, that especially when thinking about children and young people who have experienced trauma or adversity, they can show extraordinary strength, or resilience, in some areas of life or situations, while struggling deeply in others.¹³

The role of relationships for children in care

There is little robust evidence on the role of social support and strong relationships for children in care. However, much of the evidence above is relevant for understanding the experiences and

⁵ Rees, C. A. (2006). The care of looked-after children. *Current Paediatrics*, 16(2), 83–90.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cupe.2005.12.005>.

⁶ Luthar, S.S. (2015). Resilience in Development: A Synthesis of Research across Five Decades. In *Developmental Psychopathology* (eds D. Cicchetti and D.J. Cohen). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470939406.ch20>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Hiles, D., Moss, D., Wright, J., & Dallos, R. (2013). Young people's experience of social support during the process of leaving care: A review of the literature. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35(12), 2059-2071.

¹⁰ Meng, X., Fleury, M. J., Xiang, Y. T., Li, M., & D'arcy, C. (2018). Resilience and protective factors among people with a history of child maltreatment: A systematic review. *Social psychiatry and psychiatric epidemiology*, 53(5), 453-475.

¹¹ Lou, Y., Taylor, E. P., & Di Folco, S. (2018). Resilience and resilience factors in children in residential care: A systematic review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 89, 83-92.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Luthar, S.S. (2015). Resilience in Development: A Synthesis of Research across Five Decades. In *Developmental Psychopathology* (eds D. Cicchetti and D.J. Cohen). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470939406.ch20>



outcomes for children with experience of care. Below we look in more detail at relationships for looked after children with different professionals or people in their support network, and then a brief discussion of barriers and facilitators to building safe/healthy relationships.

The bulk of the evidence we identified for this Evidence Summary is qualitative. Insights from this research highlight the importance of relationships for young people and their perceived impact.

Different types of relationships

Sen and Broadhurst (2011), found that high quality contact between looked after children and family and friends can promote more positive outcomes, particularly in relation to placement stability or reunification. The authors highlight the importance of good facilitation or organisation of contact by social workers, as well as making the point that there cannot be a blanket prescription for contact “given that poorly planned, poor quality and unsupported contact may be harmful”.¹⁴

Friendship has been shown to be a positive factor in improving health and wellbeing, however, there is a lack of evidence on the role of friendships for young people with care experience.¹⁵ For these young people there are challenges to making and maintaining friendships. For example, multiple placement moves and past experiences leading to difficulty in trusting other people.¹⁶ Indeed, with regards to placement moves, Hiles et al. (2013) highlight the challenges of lost relationships, with the young person first losing existing relationships and social networks with the move and secondly becoming less likely to establish or develop supportive relationships in the future.¹⁷ Again, trust was seen as a crucial factor, it is “difficult for the young people concerned, since it requires them, once again, to make themselves vulnerable to being hurt.”¹⁸ On a more positive note the authors discuss how those young people who had a history of stable placements, and were able to make a later and more gradual transition out of care, were better able to navigate the transition.

Research suggests that a peer-mentor relationship itself can be recognised as positive, which has what the authors call “promotive transformative potential”.¹⁹ The authors indicate the protective potential of the relationship. However, this study was a small girls-only sample.²⁰

Barriers and facilitators to building safe/healthy relationships

Research suggests that for young people in care, having the support of a trusted adult was vital to managing daily stress and interpersonal difficulties.²¹ For these young people it was most common to

¹⁴ Sen, R. and Broadhurst, K. (2011). Contact between children in out-of-home placements and their family and friends networks: a research review. *Child & Family Social Work*, [online] 16(3), pp.298–309. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2010.00741.x> [Accessed 29 Nov. 2021].

¹⁵ Roesch-Marsh, A. and Emond, R. (2020). Care Experience and Friendship: Theory and International Evidence to Improve Practice and Future Research. *The British Journal of Social Work*, [online] 51(1), pp.132–149. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/bjsw/article-abstract/51/1/132/5942744> [Accessed 29 Nov. 2021].

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Hiles, D., Moss, D., Wright, J., & Dallos, R. (2013). Young people's experience of social support during the process of leaving care: A review of the literature. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35(12), 2059–2071.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Mantovani, N., Gillard, S., Mezey, G. and Clare, F. (2019). Children and Young People “In Care” Participating in a Peer-Mentoring Relationship: An Exploration of Resilience. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, [online] 30(S2), pp.380–390. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/jora.12483> [Accessed 30 Nov. 2021].

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Hiller, R.M., Halligan, S.L., Meiser-Stedman, R., Elliott, E., Rutter-Eley, E. and Hutt, T. (2021). Coping and support-seeking in out-of-home care: a qualitative study of the views of young people in care in England. *BMJ Open*, [online] 11(2), p.e038461. Available at: <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/11/2/e038461.abstract> [Accessed 30 Nov. 2021].



view their carer (or key worker in residential care) as the principal person to provide this support. The authors concluded that while many of the young participants had felt supported by their carer, a key improvement that could be made was improving continuity of carers and social workers to allow these trusted relationships to develop.²² Highlighting a potentially major barrier to children and young people in care developing safe and healthy relationships.

Research highlights that there is minimal research on the subject of young people in residential care building healthy dating relationships.²³ Hurley et al. (2013), emphasised issues of boundaries, trust, building healthy relationships, difficulties around sexual relationships and their potential consequences.²⁴ However this research was conducted with a small sample of young people in residential care in the USA so less generalizable to the English context. There is evidence to suggest that women with care experience are less likely to get married than their non care experienced peers.²⁵

Interventions to support relationships

LifeLong Links

Lifelong links is a service, implemented by Local Authorities, that brings the chosen support network of young people in care together. These support networks are first coordinated by a trained independent Lifelong Links worker who works with the child, searching for their contacts and bringing the network together in a 'Lifelong Links family group conference' where a plan is made for supporting the child which is then embedded in the care plan. It aims to ensure that children and young people in care have a positive social support network around them, which includes the people most important to them, and will stay with them throughout their time in care and into adulthood.

The recent evaluation of the Lifelong Links programme found that 81% of children reporting having their objectives met and of the roughly one to 25 people identified by children with whom they wanted to connect, 96% were 'connections' at a later point in time.²⁶ The evaluation indicated a positive impact on placement stability, in the year following their involvement with Lifelong Links, 74% of young people remained in their placement compared with 41% in the comparison group. A potential point of interest could be the influence of the foster carers themselves, the evaluation report describes how their receptiveness to the Lifelong Links process appears contingent on their level of experience.

There are limitations to the evaluation, including the method used for causal inference which limit the reliability of the findings. However, the evaluation did show evidence of promise.

²² Ibid.

²³ Hurley Duppong, K., Trout, A., Wheaton, N., Buddenberg, L., Howard, B. & Weigel, W. (2013) The Voices of Youth in Out-of-Home Care Regarding Developing Healthy Dating Relationships, *Child & Youth Services*, 34:1, 23-36, DOI: 10.1080/0145935X.2013.766057

²⁴ Hurley Duppong, K., Trout, A., Wheaton, N., Buddenberg, L., Howard, B. & Weigel, W. (2013) The Voices of Youth in Out-of-Home Care Regarding Developing Healthy Dating Relationships, *Child & Youth Services*, 34:1, 23-36, DOI: 10.1080/0145935X.2013.766057

²⁵ Viner, R. M., & Taylor, B. (2005). Adult health and social outcomes of children who have been in public care: population-based study. *Pediatrics*, 115(4), 894-899.

²⁶ Holmes, L., Neagu, M. and Harrison, N. (2020). Lifelong Links Evaluation report. [online] Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/955953/Lifelong_Links_evaluation_report.pdf [Accessed 16 Nov. 2021].



Staying Put

Staying Put requires all Local Authorities in England to facilitate, monitor and support young people remaining in their foster placements, until they reach the age of 21, where this is appropriate and desired by the young person and the family. The Staying Put programme was introduced by change of law nationally in 2014. The programme has a number of intended outcomes including, continuation of emotionally supportive positive relationships and housing stability. The goal is to allow young people to make a more gradual transition to adulthood, more in the manner of their peers not in out of home care, and gives more of a chance to engage in education, employment or training.

The evaluation of the pilot of the Staying Put programme found indicative evidence that young people who remained in their foster placement were more than twice as likely to be in full time education at 19 compared to those that did not, 55% and 22% respectively.²⁷

Since the evaluation of the pilot scheme, there has been no further formal impact evaluation. Some of this analysis has highlighted concerns about the varied implementation of the Staying Put offer, and the pressure some young people feel under to contribute financially to the household as the foster carers due to the reduction in allowance offered²⁸. There is no causal evidence of the impact of Staying Put on outcomes, therefore the findings should be interpreted with caution.

Staying Close

The Staying Close initiative is similar to the 'Staying Put' programme. Staying Close is designed to allow looked after children transitioning from residential care to live independently, nearby to the Children's Home they lived in before, and with ongoing support from staff in the Home. Eight Staying Close projects were or are still being funded by the DfE Innovation Fund, specifically for Care Leavers leaving Residential Care.

Staying Close was evaluated with a mixed-method, theory based approach comprising 3 strands: implementation strand, an outcomes strand, and economic strand. The support on offer through the Staying Close projects differed between the eight different sites. For example, the service delivered by The Break charity in Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, young people were allocated semi-independent accommodation in 'Staying Close' house-shares and access to off-site support via a project transition worker and housing support worker. The Staying Close pilot in North Tyneside comprised of Elm House, a six bedroom, fully staffed house owned by children's services nearby two Children's Homes, a two bedroom local authority flat (with options to engage several other local authority flats for Staying Close), and a range of 'floating' or 'outreach' services. Evaluation of The Break's project found that 74% of young people who were followed up experienced accommodation stability, in fact one of the workers on the project noted that for some young people this period of stability was longer than any of their previous placements while in care.²⁹

²⁷ Munro, E. R., Lushey, C., National Care Advisory Service (NCAS), MaskellGraham, D., Ward, H. and Holmes, L. (2012) Final Report of the Staying Put: 18 plus Family Placement Programme, London, Department of Education

²⁸ Mendes, P. and Rogers, J. (2020). Young People Transitioning from Out-of-Home Care: What are the Lessons from Extended Care Programmes in the USA and England for Australia? *The British Journal of Social Work*, [online] 50(5), pp.1513–1530. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/bjsw/article/50/5/1513/5820581> [Accessed 16 Mar. 2021].

²⁹ Dixon, J., Cresswell, C. and Ward, J. (2020). *The Break Staying Close, Staying Connected Project Evaluation report*. [online]. Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/931987/Staying_Close_Break.pdf.



However, the quality of the impact evaluation is very low, and there is no causal evidence to support Staying Close.

[Pure Insight initiatives](#)

Pure Insight is a charity founded in 2013. The Pure Insight initiatives are a programme of services for care leavers in Stockport, Salford, Warrington, Cheshire East and Trafford. They offer a range of services including mentoring, psychological well-being workers, support to care experienced parents and peer group and participation activities.

There has been no impact evaluation, but a very low quality review of the programme, using a small sample of interviews, which can not report any causal findings.

[House Project](#)

The National House Project is a charity established in August 2018 as part of phase two of the Department for Education (DfE) Innovation Programme. The House Projects help young people leaving care to move to shared flats with other care leavers as well as offer forms of practical and emotional support to assist with the movement into independent living and preparation for employment, education and training. There are 13 House projects in total, 10 in England and three in Scotland. The main elements of the project are described as helping the young people to move into their own rented accommodation, “intensive, individualised pre and post-move support”³⁰ as well as a skills development programme to improve their life skills. The project is underpinned by an in-house developed framework, ORCHIDS, which uses the psychological theories of self-determination, and building a psychologically informed environment. Self-determination theory suggests that people are able to become ‘self-determined’, or able to manage their lives independently and confidently, when their needs for competence, connection, and autonomy are met.

The recent mixed-methods evaluation of The National House Project showed early signs that the programme offered improved wellbeing, autonomy and integration outcomes for young people.³¹ A key aim of the project is to prepare and support young people to move into their own accommodation, however, many of the young people were still living in their care placements or semi-independent placements at follow up. Just over half, 53%, of the cohort followed up had moved into the HP Home, this equates to 21 young people. Of those, 67% or 14 young people had moved less than 6 months before the data endpoint.³² There is evidence to suggest that in comparison to ‘business as usual’ the project offered greater placement or housing stability, with 60% experiencing one move and 5% had two moves between baseline and follow-up, an average of 13.6 months later. The literature suggests that care leavers experience a high likelihood of housing instability and homelessness.³³

³⁰ Dixon, J., Cresswell, C. and Ward, J. (2020). The House Project for young people leaving care Evaluation report. [online] Available at: https://www.york.ac.uk/media/spru/projectfiles/House_Project_Final_evaluation_report.pdf [Accessed 22 Nov. 2021].

³¹ Dixon, J., Cresswell, C. and Ward, J. (2020). The House Project for young people leaving care Evaluation report. [online] Available at: https://www.york.ac.uk/media/spru/projectfiles/House_Project_Final_evaluation_report.pdf [Accessed 22 Nov. 2021].

³² Dixon, J., Cresswell, C. and Ward, J. (2020). The House Project for young people leaving care Evaluation report. [online] Available at: https://www.york.ac.uk/media/spru/projectfiles/House_Project_Final_evaluation_report.pdf [Accessed 22 Nov. 2021].

³³ Sanders, M., Jones, L. and Whelan, E. (2021.). Homelessness and Children’s Social Care in England. [online] Available at: https://www.feantsaresearch.org/public/user/Observatory/2021/EJH_15-3/EJH_15-3_A10_v01.pdf [Accessed 22 Nov. 2021].



Both the project itself and the evaluation report highlight the importance of positive and strong relationships for young people, particularly when transitioning from care to adulthood, or specifically placement to their own tenancy. Indeed, a critical review of qualitative evidence shows the benefits and importance of having at least one positive and reliable relationship to support young people through those transitions.³⁴ A participation consultant said “The HP is not simply providing a home for young people leaving care...it is founded on a community-based model [giving] workers the freedom to build relationships with young people...and that gives young people a great sense of belonging and stability.”³⁵ The evaluation found that the supportive and cooperative nature of the programme could be seen in the young people’s self-reported satisfaction with friends, which increased from 7.7 to 8.5 on the Good Childhood Index.

However, the evaluation was of low quality. The small numbers of young people in the HP homes limited the evaluation. The evaluation does not compromise a full comparative impact analysis, as there was no appropriate comparator group available due to recruitment issues. Therefore it does not demonstrate causal impact.

Innovation Programmes

For the purposes of this document, three further innovation programme models have been identified and are discussed below. These are not exhaustive lists or descriptions of the models. More information can be found about the Innovation Programmes and their respective evaluations in the WWCS publication [Learning from Innovation](#). The booklet includes short summaries of the programmes as well as cost evaluation and guidance about the quality of the impact evaluation.

The Mockingbird model

The *Mockingbird* model aims to recreate the support you could receive from an extended family network but in foster care settings (where otherwise this might be unavailable) by creating a network satellite foster families. It is suggested that the creation of the ‘extended family network’ was thought to bring a sense of normality for the children and their carers, there were also opportunities offered for activities or experiences that otherwise would not have been possible or available, as well as facilitating contact between sibling groups.

Analysis suggests that the foster carers taking part in Mockingbird were less likely to de-register than non-participants. Using standardised online tools the evidence indicates that Mockingbird foster carers had higher levels of wellbeing. Further there was evidence to suggest improvements in friendships for children and young people and relationships between siblings. Particularly for siblings where positive contact was able to be facilitated through events and sleepovers at the hub home.³⁶

The impact evaluation was of medium quality, with some limitations for example, with the baseline and follow up timeframes, as well as recruitment and a lack of randomisation.

³⁴ Parry, S. and Weatherhead, S. (2014). A critical review of qualitative research into the experiences of young adults leaving foster care services. *Journal of Children's Services*. 9. 263-279. 10.1108/JCS-04-2014-0022.

³⁵ Dixon, J., Cresswell, C. and Ward, J. (2020). The House Project for young people leaving care Evaluation report. [online] Available at: https://www.york.ac.uk/media/spru/projectfiles/House_Project_Final_evaluation_report.pdf [Accessed 22 Nov. 2021].

³⁶ Ott, E., Mc Grath-Lone, L., Pinto, V. and Trivedi, H. (2020). Mockingbird programme Evaluation report. [online] Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/933119/Fostering_Network_Mockingbird.pdf [Accessed 1 Dec. 2021].



Motivational Practice

The second programme identified is *Motivational Practice* which aims to improve stability in families and placements through training programmes to improve social workers' practice. There were two phases one working with the children who have a child in need plan and the other with looked after children in foster care.

The impact evaluation demonstrated fluctuating stability outcomes for both phases in relation to the same outcomes for the Local Authorities used as comparison. The process and implementation evaluation demonstrated that across the children in need and looked after phases, consistency in training and embedding practice was associated with proximal outcomes of stability for families, although this did not consistently translate into impact on outcomes in the quantitative evaluation. However, the authors did relate this finding to the development of families' trust in their social worker, and more generally that relationships between social workers and families underpin positive outcomes.³⁷

The impact evaluation conducted was of high quality, but the evidence presented was largely inconclusive. Limitations of the evaluation include, uncertainty around the comparability of outcome trends, issues with recruitment and time limitations on the follow up period.

Inside Out

Finally, *Inside Out* which offers intensive, relationship-based support with a coach to young people in care aged 14.5 to 18 years who have had multiple placements in the preceding 12 months to joining the programme.

One of the key findings from the evaluation reports was the reduction in missing episodes as a result of being involved in the programme, when young people joined the programme, they had an average of around 34 missing episodes over the last 12 months – one year later this had dropped to around 6 missing episodes over the same time period.³⁸ From the interviews, once again it emerged that for young people in care forming trusting relationships with adults is challenging, due to multiple factors such as past trauma and experiences, as well as issues around attachment. These interviews reflected on the persistence, resilience and patience needed from the coaches and professionals to form those relationships with young people.³⁹

However, the quality of the impact evaluation was low. The sample was small with no randomisation and a complex matching process with a flawed comparison group.

Systematic Reviews conducted by The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) have published a guideline which they state “covers how organisations, practitioners and carers should work together to deliver high-quality

³⁷ Holt, M., Crouch, L., Milward, J., Tankelevitch, L. and Vinnitchok, A. (2020). *Motivational Practice Evaluation report*.

[online] Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/955925/Motivational_Practice_evaluation_report.pdf [Accessed 1 Dec. 2021].

³⁸ Spielhofer, T., Stradling, H., Hahne, A.-S., Gieve, M., Hastings-Caplan, R. and Reeder, N. (2020). *Inside Out Evaluation report*. [online] Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/932752/Essex_Inside_Out_-_Tavistock.pdf [Accessed 1 Dec. 2021].

³⁹ Ibid.



care, stable placements and nurturing relationships for looked-after children and young people. It aims to help these children and young people reach their full potential and have the same opportunities as their peers.”⁴⁰ The guidance includes evidence based recommendations on supporting positive relationships for young people in care, which can be found [here](#). Below is our short summary of their systematic reviews to complement their guidance *and the knowledge sharing ‘Lunch and Learn’ held in December 2021 for the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care*.

The evidence review titled “Evidence reviews for barriers and facilitators for supporting positive relationships among looked-after children and young people” contains a review of the qualitative evidence on this topic. The themes the reviewers found can be seen in the figure below. This qualitative evidence is intended to inform how or why an intervention could be delivered.

⁴⁰ Nice.org.uk. (2021). Overview | Looked-after children and young people | Guidance | NICE. [online] Available at: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng205> [Accessed 23 Nov. 2021].

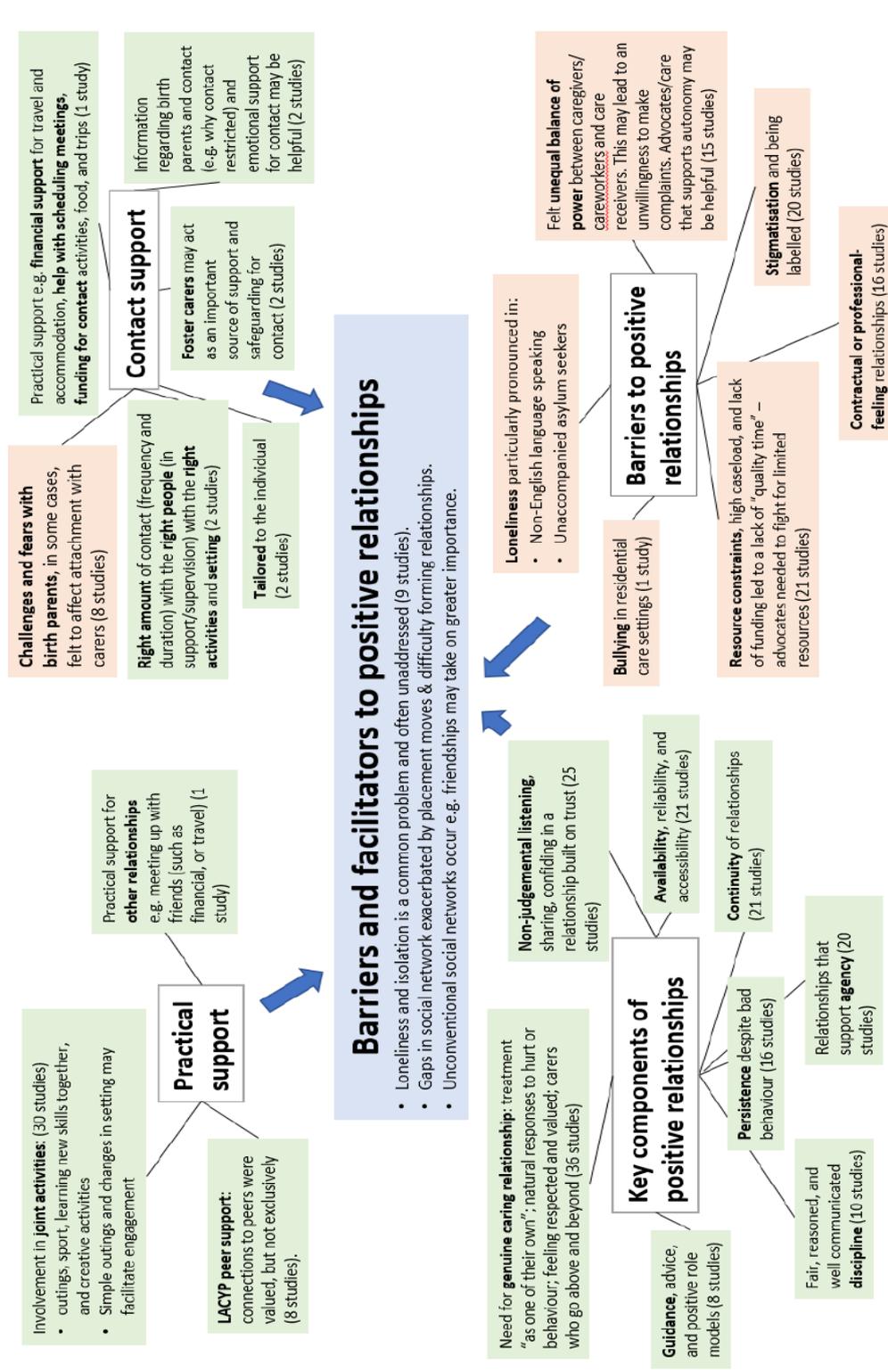


Figure 1: Summary of qualitative themes observed in the review⁴¹

⁴¹ NICE. (2021). Looked-After Children and Young People [D] Barriers and facilitators for supporting positive relationships among looked-after children and young people NICE guideline NG205 Evidence reviews underpinning recommendations 1. [online] Available at: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng205/evidence/d-barriers-and-facilitators-for-supporting-positive-relationships-among-lookedafter-children-and-young-people-pdf-333471052700> [Accessed 24 Nov. 2021].



Another evidence review conducted by NICE for the same guideline was titled “Interventions to support positive relationships for looked-after children, young people and care leavers”.⁴²

- For MTFC the review found that the evidence of effectiveness was such that it would recommend it for use with adolescents who had a history of persistent offending, but not a universal rollout.
- KEEP for Foster Parents was associated with an improvement in the number of child behaviour problems, as well as parental stress associated with their child.
- Parent Management Training Oregon (PMTO) was associated with improved social-emotional functioning, problem behaviour, and social skills scores. However, the findings for Incredible Years showed no meaningful difference between comparison groups for mean externalising score at post intervention, and teacher-reported mean disruptive classroom behaviour score.
- Brief Parent-Child Interaction Therapy the review stated it was “associated with improved parent-child dysfunctional interaction and child behaviour scores. However, no meaningful difference between comparison groups was observed for caregiver reported parental distress in the parent-child relationship.”

The balance of the evidence commended the review to say that “parent-training interventions were beneficial in tackling child behaviour problems, and in improving the child-caregiver relationship.”⁴³ They did caution that depending on the needs of the young person the carer may need different levels of training and the training itself comes at quite a cost.

Although, as is made evident by the paragraph above and was noted in the review that the outcomes most frequently reported on were problem behaviour scores, in discussion the review spoke of there being a difference between improving behaviour(s) and improving relationships.

“Undoubtedly, the existence of problem behaviours has an impact on the quality of relationships in the life of a looked-after person. However, the committee wanted to be mindful that behaviour is a narrower outcome which doesn’t reflect whether the child in care or care leaver is experiencing positive relationships more broadly.”⁴⁴

In this review some issues were identified with the quality of the evidence, for example, with studies not using validated scales or reporting associations rather than mean differences or risk ratios. A significant problem identified was that the large majority of the studies included are based outside of the UK, this impacts on the quality or usefulness of the evidence in a number of ways, the issues faced by looked after children and young people are often extraordinarily complex, and complexities cannot be mitigated out of their context. Context includes things like the care that a young person is receiving, and even if they would be looked after in the first place in a different geographical context.

Conclusion

All evidence points to the importance of relationships in the lives of children. For children who experience adversity, including children with a social worker, relationships and social support may be

⁴² NICE. (2021). Looked-After Children and Young People [C] Interventions to support positive relationships for looked-after children, young people and care leavers NICE guideline NG205. [online] Available at: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng205/evidence/c-interventions-to-support-positive-relationships-for-lookedafter-children-young-people-and-care-leavers-pdf-333471052699> [Accessed 24 Nov. 2021].

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.



all the more important. Evidence suggests that being in care is not conducive to building and maintaining more relationships. However, the existing evidence base on interventions which might mitigate this and support children to develop sustainable relationships is lacking.