**Identity** (Taken from the Skills to Foster 2014 Fostering Network)

**Session 7.1**

The term heritage is a useful ‘umbrella’ idea which refers to everything that comes to a person from their family background from language, culture and religion to qualities that other people recognise, like appearance, talents and abilities (eg ‘he’s just like his father’ or ‘everyone in my family is musical’).

Our heritage provides the building blocks of identity. As time goes on, most of us are able to make our own choices about our direction in life. These, together with our heritage, add up to our identity. It’s extremely hurtful if others try to take away or devalue parts of our identity. Separation and painful events disrupt the long process of forming an identity a young person can feel positive about. Their health, including their mental health, may suffer and they may also do poorly at school. Consequently, they will have fewer of the choices in education and employment that might help make up for earlier difficulties.

Just one committed foster carer can develop a young person’s confidence and help them grow up to be proud of who they are – sometimes a foster family makes all the difference to a child.

**Identity** is made up from several different aspects of our lives and our personal histories. Most of us have a personal identity, ‘Who **I** am’ (a collection of beliefs about ourselves) and a social or group identity ‘Who **we** are’ (based on a collection of shared beliefs which bring or hold people together). Sometimes these two can be at odds and a person may struggle to decide where they stand.

We develop a sense of identity through our experiences and interactions with significant people in our lives; parents and family are particularly influential of course. Adolescence is a crucial period during which young people explore and develop their identities. They experiment and question themselves and others in a quest to discover who they are and who they want to be. A positive sense of identity helps us develop good self-esteem and gives us the confidence to form positive relationships and to achieve. Our identity may shift at different times in our lives, for example a 16-year old ‘goth’ may not hang on to this identity when they’re 40!

**Heritage** is a useful ‘umbrella’ term that refers to everything a person brings from their family background and is a big part of our identity. It includes inherited characteristics like appearance, skin and hair colour but also strong ‘family messages’ like talents and abilities (eg ‘he’s just like his father’, ‘everyone in our family is musical’, ‘we don’t do depression in our family’ etc).

Today, there is a broad range of familial cultures in the Uk including a wealth of different kinds of families and lifestyles, such as lesbian and gay families, step families, adoptive families and those who live together and who aren’t married. Each individual family will pass on their own traditions, practices, customs and beliefs that form part of their shared heritage. Members of each new generation have to decide which traditions, practices, customs and beliefs they adopt and which they don’t.



As we live our lives, most of us are able to make decisions about many things. These, together with our heritage contribute to our identity as partner, single person, mother, worker, and so on. It’s

extremely hurtful if others try to take away or devalue parts of our identity. Not everyone will have the opportunity to make their own decisions about the factors that build identity. Disability, special needs and inherited conditions can impose issues that impact on a person’s identity.

**Helping Children & Young People in care to develop a positive identity**

For children and young people, a knowledge of, and pride in, their heritage contributes to a secure sense of identity as they develop through childhood and adolescence.

An important part of the work of foster carers is to help young people learn to be proud of who they are – or as one young man put it: *’believe you are somebody’*. This may include helping them to come to terms with the story of why they are in foster care and combating both their own and/or other’s negative perceptions resulting from this. Foster carers play an important part in helping children to value their heritage. They have to help to provide what young people need in order to be confident and proud of their heritage, regardless of whether or not they share a young person’s background.

Children and young people in foster care may feel that they have had little control over their own life and have not had the option to make choices for themselves, particularly about being in care.

In the past, looked after children and young people have also been made to feel different from their peers by delays in decision making that could occur around simple opportunities such as going to a friend’s hours for a sleepover or policy decisions such as blanket bans on using laptops, Face book. Now the Team around the Child, of which foster carers are a key part, have a duty to be clear who can make these sorts of decisions, so that children don’t miss out. (We will be discussing delegated authority and safer caring in more detail as the course progresses).

Separation and painful events can also disrupt the long process of forming an identity a young person can feel positive about. Their health, including their mental health, may suffer and they may

also do poorly at school. Consequently they will have fewer of the choices in education and employment that might help make up for earlier difficulties. This may affect their decision to stay with foster families after the age of 16 or 18 with some young people preferring to move to independent living.

 By helping children and young people to develop a positive sense of identity and to feel fully accepted and supported, foster carers can build relationships which may sustain young people through these transitions, including into young adulthood. They can do this by building up children’s resilience and boosting their sense of self-worth; assisting them to develop their own unique characteristics, talents and hobbies, beliefs, moral code and outlook on life.

Just one committed foster carer can develop a young person’s confidence and help them grow up to be proud of who they are – sometimes a foster family makes all the difference to a child.

Children brought up in an environment which nurtures a positive sense of self - of personal identity (who I am) and shared identity (who we are) – are likely to have a sense of pride in themselves, self-confidence and good self-esteem. Although these things are no guarantee of success in life they do provide a platform for positive growth, positive aspirations, achievements and self-reliance. Foster carers have an important role to play here and may need to help a rejected, mistrustful child build themselves up and overcome traumatic events which may otherwise be overwhelming.

 Promoting Positive Identity

**Session 7.2**

Self-Efficacy: YOU CAN

Self Esteem: YOU ARE

Secure Base: YOU HAVE

**Rewards and Reinforcement**

**Handout 7.3**

Reinforcement is the reward that follows a desired action. If behaviour is rewarded, it is more likely to occur again in a similar situation. If behaviour is ignored (not rewarded), it is less likely to recur.

**For example:**

● *If a birth parent is very appreciative of the time you take to talk with them about their adolescent, you may be more likely to talk with them again when you next meet. However, if they show no interest in talking with you, you may be less inclined to try and talk so much.*

● If a mother fails to notice her son when he is helpful to the baby, but notices and scolds him when he is clumsy, his undesirable behaviour is likely to increase and the appropriate behaviour is likely to diminish.

***Rewards are an important part of life. Money, recognition and promotion can all be rewarding, as can the experience of seeing a foster child settle in your home and begin to grow in confidence and self-esteem*.** In behaviour management, rewards are used in systematic ways – to maximise their effect.

Some terms from **social learning theory:**

**Continuous reinforcement:** This involves rewarding the young person each time they behave appropriately until the behaviour is well established. This is necessary when you are helping a young person to learn new ways of behaving.

**Intermittent reinforcement:** This involves rewarding every now and then, just to keep the behaviour in place. Once your young person is changing out of his school uniform every day, there is no need to praise him every time.

**When … then** **… rule:**

There needs to be a reliable relationship between the behaviour and the consequence: *‘****when*** *you have emptied the dishwasher,* ***then*** *you can go on the x-box.’*

The reward always comes **after** the desired behaviour.

**Rewards** **need to be:**

**Clear and specific**: Some young people find it difficult to hold on to the connections between behaviour and its consequences.

Young people need to be in no doubt that they are being rewarded, and they need to know what they are being rewarded for. ‘If you take the dog out you can use my I-pad this evening for half an hour’.

**Immediate:** Rewards work best if they are given as soon as possible after the desirable behaviour. The longer the gap between the behaviour and its reward, the weaker the learning will be. Young young people respond best to frequent and immediate rewards. Tokens, points and praise are all rewards that can be given straight away.

**Consistent:** Young people will learn best if rewards are given consistently and reliably. If Max knows that he can have 40 minutes on the computer when he has finished his homework, his behaviour is more likely to be influenced by this arrangement.

**Contingent:** The reward should only be given in response to the desired behaviour. If Max knows that his carer will probably let him use the computer whether or not he does his homework, he will have little incentive to do it. The reward should be contingent upon him doing his homework. If the agreement is for 40 minutes and he does his homework for 30 minutes, he does not get the reward.

Each of us responds to particular kinds of rewards and not others. To find out what kinds of rewards your young person likes – just ask them, or observe what they like doing.

**SOCIAL REWARDS** include praise, positive attention, encouragement, smiles and hugs.

**TANGIBLE REWARDS** include things like money, sweets, treats, privileges, special time with the carer and activities.

* For most young people, social rewards are the most effective ones for changing behaviour. The regular and systematic use of positive attention and praise also enhances self -esteem, independence and promotes social skills . *A young person can be praised for working really hard on their homework even if the final outcome is not grade A.*  This encourages the young person and helps them to feel good about themselves and their endeavours.
* There are some young people who are less responsive to social rewards, but who can be motivated by the use of immediate and tangible rewards. When tangible rewards are used, social rewards should always be given alongside to encourage the young person to feel good about what they have done and earned.

**Rewards need to be**:

**Meaningful**: Some young people are less likely to be motivated by concepts like a ‘sense of pride’ or ‘achievement’. You may need to find immediate rewards that they find fun and exciting.

**Frequen**t: Praise, smiles and thumbs up can be given as a steady flow of communication and feedback to the young person throughout the day. It is essential that the young person experiences more rewarding interactions with you than negative and critical ones.

**Handout 7.4**

**POINTS CHART**

**Task 1…..**Make my bed before I go to school in the morning.

This involves: Putting duvet and pillow straight; pyjamas on bed.

**This will earn me…..2 POINTS**

**Task 2**……Homework

This involves: Spending 30 minutes each evening doing homework and showing carer my work

**This will earn me….5 POINTS**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **TASK 1: No points** | **TASK: 2 No points** | **DAILY TOTAL** |
| **Wednesday**  |  **2** |  **5** |  **7** |
| **Thursday** |  **2** |  **5** |  **7** |
| **Friday** |  **2** |  **0** |  **2** |
| **Saturday** |  **0** |  **0** |  **0** |
| **Sunday** |  **2** |  **0** |  **2** |
| **Monday** |  **2** |  **5** |  **7** |
| **Tuesday** |  **2** |  **5** |  **7** |
| **WEEKLY POINTS TOTAL** | **12** | **20** | **32** |

**LIST OF POSSIBLE REWARDS:**

1. **Chocolates after dinner; Playing card game = 5 points each**
2. **Having Carly round; watching DVD = 20 points each**
3. **Going swimming; going out to eat! = 30 points each**

**Task 1 ………………………………………………………… Task 2 ………………………………………………………….**

**Points Chart**

***This involves: ……………………………………………… This involves………………………………………………….***

***Task 1 will earn you …… points Task 2 will earn you ……… points***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **LIST OF POSSIBLE REWARDS:****1) ………………………………… = …… points****2) ..……………………………… = …… points****3) ………………………………….= …… points****4) …………………………………= …… points****5) …………………………………= …… points** | **TASK 1: No. points** | **TASK 2: No. points** | **Daily total** |
| Wednesday |  |  |  |
| Thursday |  |  |  |
| Friday |  |  |  |
| Saturday |  |  |  |
| Sunday |  |  |  |
| Monday |  |  |  |
| Tuesday |  |  |  |
| **Weekly total** |  |  |  |

**BEHAVIOUR CONTRACTS**

Young people sometimes need to learn new behaviours so that theycan develop independent skills and also become helpful and responsible members of your family/household. You may want them to learn how to cook or wash their own clothes, or help with the cleaning of the house. Rather than nag, coax or pressurise them, it is more effective to provide extra incentives to encourage these new behaviours. By using a behaviour contract, the young person can earn privileges in response for behaving in a particular kind of way. The contract is used until the young person acquires the desired behaviour and then it can be phased out.

To use a behaviour contract it is best to talk with your young person and involve them in setting it up, even if they are not entirely committed to changing their behaviour. Follow these steps:

1. State clearly the behaviour that you want to see in positive terms: ‘‘I want you to have a shower each evening and to be in your bed by 9.30pm’’
2. Decide together what might be an appropriate reward.
3. Decide exactly how much reward they will get for what.

**Tips for Behaviour Contracts:**

* Reward improvement rather than perfection
* Make sure rewards are practical and affordable
* Give small rewards often rather than infrequent larger rewards
* Provide a choice of rewards, otherwise the young person may become bored
* Make sure that you deliver what you promise

Write down what you agree and keep a chart so that you can monitor together what was done and which rewards were earned.

**CONTRACT**

**(Name)………………………. agrees to …………………..**

**………………………………………………………………….**

**…………………………………………………………………..**

**If this is done s/he may…………………………………………**

**…………………………………………………………………..**

**…………………………………………………………………..**

**If this is not done, s/he will ……………………………………**

**………………………………………………………………….**

**…………………………………………………………………..**

**Signed………………………………and ………………………**

**Date………………………**

**Guidelines for using tangible rewards**

**Handout 7.5**

* **Be specific** about the behaviour you want to see. *‘When we’re out visiting my sister, behave yourself’* is too general. Instead, you might say, ‘when we’re out visiting my sister, I want you to speak politely to her, please’
* **Be clear and precise** about the rewards you are going to give. *“We will buy you something if you do this’’* is too vague. The young person needs to know exactly what they are working for. ‘If you take the dog out you can use my I-pad this evening for half an hour’.
* **Proceed with small steps!** Don’t expect big achievements. Young people work better for **smaller achievable goals** and **frequent rewards.** It may be too much to expect your young person to sit for an hour and do homework. Chunk it down. Notice and praise him when he achieves 10/30 minutes (depending on ability). Reward him. You want your young person to have the **experience of success** and reward so that he is motivated to behave appropriately next time.
* **Pace your steps.** If your young person regularly succeeds in spending 10 minutes doing homework, make the task more challenging and extend the time to 20 minutes before a reward is given. Tangible rewards can be spaced out and eventually faded out.
* **Avoid** making your rewards too expensive or the time involved to earn them too long. Most young people will give up if rewards are slow coming. Think ‘low cost no cost’. Remember many young people do enjoy spending time with you so include leisure time like watching a dvd together as a reward.
* **Tackle just two or three behaviours initially**. If you try to tackle too many behaviours it may be overwhelming for your young person and too time consuming and complicated for you.

**REWARD/ POINT CHARTS**

● Set up the programme for rewards with your young person. They are more likely to cooperate and “own” the endeavour if they have some say in working it out. Negotiate suitable rewards with them. They may need your help to set realistic rewards that are small and reasonable.

* Make it as interesting as you can and use whatever medium your young person would engage with. One carer used a virtual shop where she itemized the rewards available in ‘the shop’ and gave each a value in points. Your young person could design her own points chart or use a marble jar if she wanted to watch her rewards adding up.
* ***Be flexible****. As the programme progresses, you or your young person may want to alter the tasks they are working on or the rewards they are working for*.

● **Be positive.** If your young person fails to complete a task, be upbeat:

‘You’re going in the right direction, keep going!’ If you are critical and negative, failure will be demotivating for the young person.

**● Avoid removing rewards for a punishment**. Once your young person has earned points, marbles or other rewards they should not be taken away. If you need to discipline your young person by removing privileges, keep this separate from the reward programme.

● **You are in charge of rewards**. **Avoid** leaving rewards around the house for young people to help themselves to.

* **Follow through** your commitments. It is vital that you notice desired behaviour and reward it promptly.

● **Remember to keep on giving social rewards and praise**. Over time, tangible rewards should be phased out and social rewards should take their place. The aim is to help the young person develop an increasing sense of pleasure and pride in their own achievements and a greater sense of self-efficacy.

POINTS Charts – Brief Notes

* Be clear and specific
* Proceed with small steps
* Pace your steps
* Keep rewards affordable and fun
* Tackle two or three behaviours at a time
* Involve, discuss and agree rewards with your young person
* Be flexible
* Be positive
* Avoid rewards for a punishment
* Make sure you are in charge of rewards
* Follow through on your commitments

KEEP ON GIVING LABELLED PRAISE

What Does My Young Person Enjoy?

**Session 7.6**

**Fill this in by talking with your young person and finding out what they like, as well as watching them and noticing what they enjoy.**

**Name:**

### Food

### \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

### *Chocolate/snacks*

### \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

### Drinks

### \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

### Favourite clothes/music/tangible rewards \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

### *Activities/ Hobbies* \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

### TV Programmes/Computer Games\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

### People\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

***Special occasions e.g. festivals, cinema trip, going to the beach/caravan etc.***

### \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Any other ideas or observations**