

Finally...

If you are uncertain about anything seek support for yourself; particularly if you find yourself supporting someone with a high level of need and you think you have significant emotional and learning needs as a result of the contact you are having. In these circumstances, find yourself an appropriately skilled external source of support and advice.

Remember - a friendly or casual commitment could last years, or even a lifetime. When someone that you cared for when their life was very turbulent returns to visit as a 30 something with children and a really sorted life, you are reminded why you do the work you do, and what a privilege it is to be able to do it. You may be giving a commitment to future partners and 'grandchildren' too, so do be prepared to rethink what you can manage at any stage in the relationship, and be open and honest about limits you might need to set.

This goes without saying, but, for the avoidance of doubt...

Psychologically, your relationship will always be a parental one. The dynamics may change and become much more akin to an adult to adult friendship with the passage of time – in the same way as your relationships with your own adult children change over the years. Under no circumstances may such a relationship become sexualised in any way whatsoever.

Good Practice to Keeping in Touch Check List

Whether you are just meeting someone who you worked with several years ago for a one off coffee or you are in regular touch with someone who you have recently been professionally involved with, complete the following checklist to help you think through the issues involved.

- ☐ What are my expectations of the contact?
- ☐ What might the young person's expectations of the relationship be?
- ☐ Have I been clear in laying down my expectations and boundaries?
- ☐ Do I conflict with any role, task or legal responsibility of other professionals?
- ☐ Am I sure where the boundaries lie for me/my employer between personal/professional involvement?
- ☐ Have I let somebody know I am in touch, and have I planned to make a note of any meetings?
- ☐ Do I clearly understand that I am still bound by professional codes of conduct in so far as my responsibility to report any Safeguarding concerns to appropriate authorities?
- ☐ Do I, and my young friend, have a clear understanding about the boundaries of confidentiality that will apply within this contact?

The Bryn Melyn Group Foundation is a grantmaking charity established to provide small but essential grants to care leavers aged up to 26 years who have no other source of financial support and may need assistance to meet basic everyday needs or to achieve their educational or personal development goals.

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The Charterhouse Group of Therapeutic Communities is an umbrella charity representing members providing specialist therapeutic care and education to severely emotionally deprived and damaged children, young people and their carers. Charterhouse highlights the needs of this often poorly understood group through promoting, supporting and informing the development of specialist residential provision.

The Charterhouse Group
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The National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care (NCERCC) is a major collaborative initiative and a principal point of reference which facilitates collaboration and dialogue across the residential child care sector of England with the aim of improving standards of practice and outcomes for children and young people.

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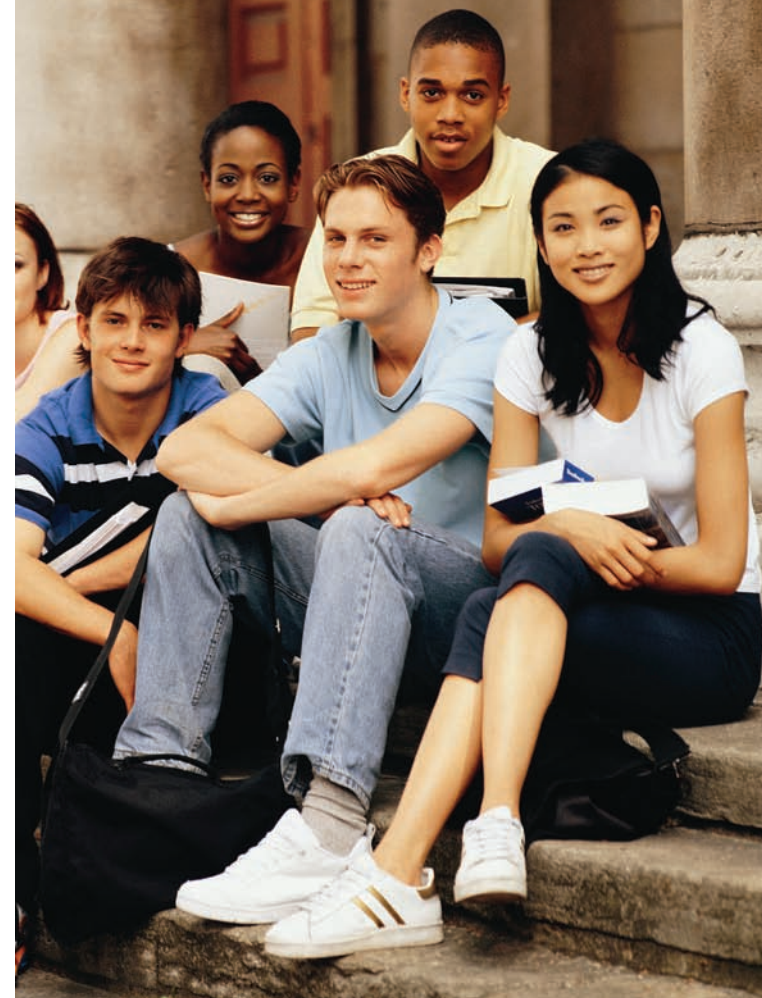


Voice is a national charity committed to empowering children and young people in public care and campaigning for change to improve their lives. Voice promotes the rights of children and young people and supports their active participation in the development of law, policy, practice and service delivery. Freephone advocacy 0808 800 5792.

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GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE



A joint publication produced by:
The Charterhouse Group, The Bryn Melyn Group Foundation,
The National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care,
Fostering Net and Voice.



GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE TO KEEPING IN TOUCH

Jointly produced by The Bryn Melyn Group Foundation, The Charterhouse Group, The National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care and Voice, This guide offers a framework for considering a range of professional and personal perspectives to enable staff and carers to feel confident about keeping in touch with a young person they have got to know through their work. It aims to provide reassurance that what they are doing is for the benefit of the child and young person and that there are appropriate safeguards.

Everything we know about children in care and care leavers tells us that relationships with trusted adults are important to them and maintaining these relationships can contribute to their resilience and future wellbeing.

Residential workers and foster carers can get very mixed messages about keeping in touch once professional relationships end. In reality, many of those relationships do persist and become essential lifelines. Some young people tell us that when adults who have been important to them avoid any ongoing contact with them they can feel snubbed, rejected and worthless. They do not feel the continuity of care necessary for continued growth through stable relationships and may re-experience earlier pain associated with abandonment and loss.

Providing support for children in care is a professional task and you should always follow the guidelines and policies of your employing agency concerning any contact you have with a young person. Professional boundaries are important and play a vital role in protecting children as well as adults. Organisations should provide appropriate preparation for young people to end key relationships as they prepare to move on; dealing with separation and loss is likely to have been a recurrent theme in their life, and often the end of a placement or the process of leaving care is the first time that an important relationship can be ended in a planned and supportive way.

However professional boundaries, planned endings and organisational protocols need not mean young people can never see their carers or workers again, and many continue to do so. Sadly such relationships are too often conducted as 'guilty secrets' because agencies and authorities are so reluctant to endorse or acknowledge ongoing contact.

Ideally, any ongoing contact would be acknowledged and supported by the relevant authority. However there are many situations where this is not encouraged/permitted. In these cases a young person should not be denied the opportunity of maintaining an important relationship where the former carer is also willing for this to continue.

Here are ten simple points to consider if a young person asks you to keep in touch.

THE GOLDEN RULES

1. Never make a promise you can't keep

Easily said, often broken. Far better to be clear and draw a line than promise to keep in touch if you do not want to or may not be able to. Unless you are absolutely sure of what you are offering – just say no and part with best wishes.

2. Make sure somebody knows you are in contact with a former client

Protect yourself by letting someone know that contact is taking place and the nature of that contact – telephone, face to face. If it is your employer that you tell, you are not necessarily asking for their endorsement or support, and they are not responsible for your contact. You are just letting them know.

3. Remember you are acting as an individual – you are not covered by any agency's insurance policy for actions that you choose to take

For young people who have left care, ongoing contact is a personal choice between two adults, one of whom – you – will always be in a position of power relative to the younger adult, and will always be looked up to as a parental/role model figure. Unless you are clear that this is about you acting in a professionally informed but ultimately personal capacity, and not as an extension of your work, don't take it on. Will you feel the same about the contact if you fall out with your existing employer, or change careers?

4. Always be aware of whose needs are being met

In any relationship – even in your professional role – your needs are being met by the work that you do as well as those of the young person. It is not healthy to maintain relationships with young people if your needs are overwhelmingly to the fore and you are benefiting more from being 'needed' 'kind' and 'helpful' than the young client.

5. Don't interfere!

The person you are having contact with may well be involved with other professional supports – Leaving Care Teams, Criminal Justice, Community Mental Health etc. etc. Don't be drawn into things that are best left to statutory teams. You can encourage and support the development of these connections without interfering with them. You may need to adjust to the fact that these things are not your responsibility any more. Of course if you feel they are really getting a bad deal from a service you might support them to make a complaint, help them to get an appropriate advocacy service etc. but tread carefully – you do not have superpowers!

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

6. Can I give out my phone number?

It's your phone number, so it's your choice! A mobile might be safer than a landline if you are concerned about your address being located. Think it through – if you know persistent phone calls will be a problem, be honest and say so. 'Look, I know what you're like..... I'm not going to give you my number but I will ring you...'. Honesty is always the best way to preserve trust and respect. It is preferable to do this and set an appropriate boundary at the start than to hurt the young adult later if you find you need to stop contact because it has got out of hand.

7. Is it okay to meet up?

Are there any safety issues? Do you believe you might be hurt, or have false accusations made against you? If you have thought these things through objectively and feel comfortable, it is likely to be okay. Meet somewhere sensible and let someone know.

8. What about buying presents and treats?

People still have birthdays, festivals and needs after they have left care, and probably have a very small network of family and friends who will buy for them. Be sensible and realistic about what you buy, and if you can find time, take someone out to lunch on their birthday if you know they have nobody else. You will have made a big difference to what can be one of the most miserable days of the year. Don't feel you have to, don't worry if you can't afford more than a token, and don't be extravagant; be clear about the messages you are giving and what your limits are. Maybe essential clothes now and again – a surprise parcel occasionally. If "present giving" becomes more than occasional, perhaps think about whether you might be 'rescuing', rather than supporting someone to be independent.

9. Is it acceptable to invite an ex client to my home?

Set your own boundaries in your mind, make sure you have discussed the implications fully with your family, and if you do, be absolutely clear what is on offer. Is it just a "one-off", for example Christmas Dinner, or saying yes when someone turns up soaking wet and desperate on your doorstep after the last bus has long gone? Or are you offering an open door policy? Whatever is appropriate to the circumstances, make sure you set boundaries and maintain them. You are not, and cannot be, a twenty-four hour surrogate parent. Giving clear messages about looking after yourself, having your own life and protecting your own space are positive messages to model and are non-rejecting.

10. Should I take my young friend on a holiday?

Probably not, but occasionally.....well, maybe there will be circumstances when this is an okay thing to do. Think it through. Let someone know. Ask yourself if there are any risks.