

Briefing Paper: Enduring Relationships for Care-Experienced Children

Newcastle Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSCP)

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Audience: Statutory and relevant safeguarding partners across education, local authority services, health, police, voluntary and community sector

Purpose of this briefing

This briefing summarises the key messages from the [Department for Education policy paper *Enduring relationships*](#). The paper sets out a national ambition that every child who experiences care should be supported to develop and maintain trusted, lasting relationships that provide stability, belonging and support into adulthood.

The briefing is intended to support safeguarding partners to consider how this national direction should inform local partnership thinking, particularly where children are in care, on the edge of care, leaving care, or at risk of losing important relationships during periods of instability or transition.

Context and Rationale

The central message of *Enduring relationships* is that relationships should not be seen as an additional benefit of good care, but as a core purpose of the care and leaving care system. The policy paper describes enduring relationships as important, consistent and lasting relationships that provide emotional security, warmth, responsiveness, dependability and positive shared experiences. These relationships may include family members, brothers and sisters, friends, neighbours, youth workers, teachers, former carers or other trusted adults identified by the child.

The policy recognises that too many children in care and care-experienced young people do not have the quality of relationships they need because the system has not consistently treated relationships as central to safety, identity and long-term wellbeing. It highlights that care can sometimes disrupt, rather than protect, a child's existing connections with family, school, community and trusted adults.

The rationale is both relational and safeguarding-focused. The paper states that children are safer when they have trusted adults who know them, care about them and look out for them. It also links enduring relationships to better health, education, resilience, wellbeing and reduced loneliness..

What This Means in Practice

For partners, the key practice message is that decisions about children should actively consider who matters to the child, which relationships are safe and important, and how those relationships can be protected or strengthened. This includes relationships that existed before care, as well as new relationships developed during care.

This does not mean maintaining every relationship regardless of risk. The policy is clear that decisions must be based on the child's view of who matters to them, alongside professional judgement about what is safe and appropriate in individual circumstances. The practical shift is to ask not only "how do we manage risk?" but also "how do we safely preserve the relationships that help this child feel known, loved and connected?"

The policy links enduring relationships with wider children's social care reforms, including family networks, kinship care, family group decision-making, homes that meet children's needs, and support into adulthood. It asks services to work differently by making relationships a consistent thread through assessment, planning, placement decisions, reunification planning, contact arrangements, transition planning and support for care leavers.

Key Messages for Partners

Partners should view trusted, lasting relationships as a protective factor for children and young people, not simply as a wellbeing issue. The Department for Education states that enduring relationships reinforce safety and help care-experienced children to achieve and thrive.

The child's own view of who matters to them should be central. Important relationships may sit outside formal professional networks and may include siblings, wider family, friends, carers, teachers, youth workers or other trusted adults.

Safeguarding decisions should consider the impact of disruption. Changes in home, school, community, contact or support arrangements can strengthen or damage relationships, and this should be part of professional judgement and partnership discussion.

Support into adulthood should not be understood as a move towards complete independence, but as a transition supported by meaningful relationships and community connection. The policy emphasises the importance of young people being supported towards interdependent living, held by important relationships.

Partners are encouraged to act now by considering the evidence, identifying what more their services can do, and engaging in the national conversation about what works to embed enduring relationships across the system.

Safeguarding / Quality Impact

The safeguarding impact of this policy is significant because it places trusted relationships alongside professional systems as part of how children are helped to be safe and well. A child who has consistent, safe and valued relationships is more likely to have adults who notice changes, provide emotional security, support identity and belonging, and help them navigate risk.

For quality assurance, this means partners may need to look beyond whether statutory processes have been completed and consider whether children's relationships are being understood, protected and strengthened. Good-quality practice should be able to show that the child's relational world has been explored, that safe family and community connections have been considered, and that decisions have taken account of the potential impact on stability, belonging and long-term support.

This approach also supports a more child-centred understanding of permanence. The policy references permanence as being about security, stability, love, identity and belonging, rather than only about legal or placement status.

Engagement and Next Steps

Safeguarding partners should consider how the principles in Enduring relationships can be reflected in local partnership discussions, quality assurance activity and multi-agency learning. This may include reviewing how children's relationships are considered in assessments, plans, audits, strategic discussions and transition arrangements for children in care and care leavers.

Partners may also wish to identify examples of current good practice where services are already helping children to maintain or rebuild trusted relationships. The Department for Education states that it will work with the sector to understand and share best practice, with further activity planned to support learning about service design that promotes enduring relationships.

The immediate partnership opportunity is to use this policy as a prompt for reflection: whether local systems consistently ask who matters to the child, how those relationships can be supported safely, and whether decisions strengthen or unintentionally weaken the child's sense of connection, identity and belonging.