



The
Fostering
Network



Exit Interview Toolkit Part Two

Exit interview discussion guide

Exit interview discussion guide

Our research has demonstrated that foster carers would like to be offered two different exit interview opportunities on leaving their fostering service. One very shortly after leaving so that their initial thoughts, emotions and experiences can be captured and also one opportunity at a later date so that they can share their reflections and considered thoughts. We would suggest that the first interview is face-to-face as foster carers may appreciate the time, respect and commitment that a planned meeting will offer. The second part, after a period of reflection, could be a phone call, email or online survey. Both the fostering service and foster carer should agree the method and timing at the close of the first interview.

First exit interview

Prior to the first exit interview opportunity that a service offers to a foster carer, the interviewer should collect information such as (but not limited to):

- the letter of resignation
- the length of time the person/family has been fostering
- the family composition (to ensure that everyone is considered)
- types of placement that the carer is approved for (and how this compares to the children and young people placed with them)
- what actions have been taken to keep the foster carer (if applicable)
- anything the foster carer has already said about why they are leaving their fostering service

It would also be beneficial for interviewers to:

- know whether the foster carer is transferring service or stopping fostering altogether. This could alter how a conversation is phrased and which discussion points are given more weight.
- find out about any significant events or communications (including any complaints), that the service knows about already, which could have led to the foster carer considering leaving their fostering service. This information may help to prepare for the exit interview and could have a bearing on who is asked to conduct the interview.

Services are encouraged to collect this information from each foster carer leaving their service and use it alongside information obtained from the exit interview to identify any trends or themes and inform future improvement plans. An example of how this could be important may be if a service identifies a trend of their foster carers with biological children living at home leaving because of specific challenges. The service might look to introduce support packages for birth children to address issues and prevent others from leaving for the same reasons.



The exit interview should include a number of areas for discussion. Every foster carer is different and will have a range of experiences and opinions to share. During our research we discovered that it would be counterproductive to limit exit interviews by using a form, so we have purposely designed a tool that is more dynamic, interactive and adaptable.

- Do plan the interview in accordance with the foster carer's wishes. Their home, or the service's office, might not be the best place for it to be held.
- Do encourage carers to talk openly about their experiences.
- Do encourage conversation by using as little in the way of paperwork as possible.
- Do, however, ensure you take adequate notes to remember the conversation (explaining why you are taking notes to the foster carer).
- Do consider using a notebook because a laptop or clipboard can create a physical barrier to conversation.
- Do use open questions.
- Do treat the foster carer like a fellow professional.

Prior to the first exit interview

Offer to discuss the guide (part three of the toolkit) with the foster carer. This will ensure they are familiar with the process and can ask any questions beforehand. This allows more time to be spent during the exit interview discussing the reasons for leaving and any other points the foster carer would like to raise.

Foster carers may wish to go through the guide with someone or alone but the majority of foster carers who leave should be offered it, preferably prior to the exit interview, so that they can ask questions if they would like to. There may be rare occasions when foster carers might not benefit from receiving the information. Services should use discretion to decide if it is appropriate for each foster carer.

Exit interview discussion points

Taking into account all of your experiences as a foster carer, can you explain the reasons why you have decided to leave the fostering service?

This question specifically avoids asking 'why are you leaving?' because, as the research has demonstrated, foster carers may find one thing to concentrate on and talk about that when, in reality, there may be deeper reasons as to why they are leaving. For example, a foster carer might state that a lack of respite is making fostering too challenging, however the reasons behind this may be more relevant – a lack of effective matching, training or support for a traumatised child or the impact on birth children may be the driving forces that make a lack of respite more important.

Did fostering match your expectations?

This is a question for everyone, but particular attention should be paid to the answers from newer foster carers. Their answers may highlight a mismatch between the information provided during the training and assessment phase and the reality of the fostering task, which needs to be addressed. It may also extract information about gaps in placements and therefore feed into recruitment strategies, or more generally the experience of being a part of the fostering service.

What could the service have done differently to enable you to continue fostering?

This could be a negative, or emotional, conversation for foster carers to consider. The service may have been told that the carer had challenges and the carer may perceive that the service chose to do nothing to support them.

This question may result in a 'nothing' answer. It therefore requires the skill of the exit interviewer to review previous responses and see if there are any links between the reasons given and opportunities to suggest ways that might have enabled them to continue fostering.

It is important here to show empathy, while being careful not to diminish any concerns, or concur with the carer about any particular situation.

Your service would like to improve practice for future foster carers, their families and fostered children. How can they do this? What has the fostering service done particularly well?

Draw on the foster carer's experiences and opinions to gather information that could help the service improve. This could be difficult for foster carers to talk about positively. Interviewers should be careful to ensure that foster carers are supported and encouraged to remain positive while speaking about improvements that the fostering service could make.

It is important for foster carers to be told that the information they share during the exit interview could provide an improvement opportunity for the service, which could make the challenges they have faced less likely to occur for other foster carers. Foster carers could benefit emotionally from the ending that an exit interview provides.



Second interview discussion focus

We recommend that the second exit interview is planned in consultation with the foster carer, ideally with the initial interviewer unless both the foster carer and the fostering service agree that an alternative would be more appropriate.

The content of the first interview should be reviewed together, with the foster carer supported and encouraged to explore their responses reflectively.

Foster carers could be asked if they would like to add anything or if they would like to review any responses having had an opportunity to reflect. The second interview is an opportunity for services to confirm their understanding of the deeper themes and reasons why foster carers left their fostering service, which may not have been shared at the first interview. This exercise will provide clarity and a solid foundation on which to analyse the responses and feed into practice.



About The Fostering Network

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity. We are the essential network for fostering, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of fostered children. We support foster carers to transform children's lives and we work with fostering services and the wider sector to develop and share best practice.

We work to ensure all fostered children and young people experience stable family life and we are passionate about the difference foster care makes. We champion fostering and seek to create vital change so that foster care is the very best it can be.

Contact

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