



Supporting your foster child at secondary school.


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We know that children in care do less well than their peers when it comes to school attainment, but with the right support you can help to close that gap and allow your foster children to achieve their full potential.


Top tips for successful learners

 **Communication with school:** This is more difficult at secondary than it will have been through primary school, though it's just as important.


- Find out the name of the Designated Teacher for LAC as soon as your foster child moves to live with you, or starts a new school.
- Make contact with your foster child's tutor and key members of staff early on to establish the best way to communicate with them. This might be email, phone calls or texts – the school will advise you.
- Find out how to log in to the parent portal which will give you access to all the information you need about school, including homework tasks.

 **Their attendance:** Missed days of education have a significant effect on achievement. The Rees Centre research tells us "For every 5% of possible school sessions missed due to unauthorised school absences, young people in care scored over two grades less at GCSE".

- Book medical and dental appointments outside the school day or during holidays whenever possible.
- Don't book holidays during the school term even if it is almost the end of the term - this can be a time of key events.

 **Your attendance:** By attending open days, information evenings, parents' evenings, concerts, plays and sporting events, social activities and award ceremonies, you are sending a positive message to your foster child about school and the importance of education in all our lives. You will be better informed about the way the school runs, get to know teachers and learn how to create a supportive educational environment.


- Consultation evenings are not just for when things are going wrong. They are a great opportunity to hear good news too.
- Go to the school prize giving, even if your child hasn't won anything this time; it creates aspirations and shows how you value education.

 **Support:** Living in an environment where education is valued and promoted will have a positive impact on a child's attitude to learning. A child who views themselves as a learner will make more rapid progress in school.

- Sharing negative experiences of your own education is not a productive way of empathising with your child, how ever tempting this may be. It is more likely to undermine their confidence than to persuade them to work harder.
- Find ways of building on strengths, effort or progress, however small, and always encourage them to recognise and acknowledge their triumphs.
- Support them when they make mistakes – this is the best way to learn – and encourage them to ask for help.
- Talk about future possibilities in further and higher education. Discuss University and what it might offer them, as well as apprenticeships and


other forms of training to develop their personal aspirations.

- Talk about the world of work and the wide range of jobs that are out there. Your foster child may be unaware of the wider benefits of working, other than earning money, and aspirations towards a career will support current learning.
- Be available to listen and talk things through; this could be concerns, difficulties or just the chance to revise out loud – teenagers are generally more receptive when you aren't making eye-contact so use car journeys/dog walking opportunities/washing up!


 **Homework:** Helping a secondary school student with homework can take many forms and will depend on the young person. Developing an independent learner takes time, patience and encouragement;

- Creating a quiet and appropriate place to get homework done is important, even if they still insist on doing homework at the kitchen table.
- Be familiar with their timetable, especially if their school works a two-week timetable.
- Be prepared to log in to “Show my Homework” or similar sites on the parent portal. If the school uses a planner/diary make sure you check and sign weekly.
- Persuade them to hand over their phone for short periods of time while getting homework done so distractions are limited.
- Ask open questions like: “what are you learning in (e.g.) History?”, “what has been interesting today?” This will take their mind back to lessons in preparation for tackling homework tasks.
- Know how to create a revision timetable that is realistic and effective, and get to know the best revision web-sites and guides.

- Don't be afraid to admit you don't know all the answers, but be prepared to find out. Researching together and showing that you can ask for help is good role modelling and can be interesting.
- Study together – if you're involved in any kind of learning, talk about what you're doing; share the experience.

 **Organising:** Few teenagers are naturally organised – it is a skill that needs to be taught, revised and modelled. Your foster child will need lots of encouragement to find the way that suits them best and your way may not be their way. Show them lots of strategies and let them discover their own methods:

- Make lists and prioritise
- Use post-it notes to create reminders and stick them somewhere they will be seen
- Mark the timetable/calendar with a reminder
- Use the alarm on their phone

 **When things go wrong:** No child goes through school without some periods of difficulty, and children in care are likely to find school more challenging than most. When children report an issue:

Listen to their case and take it seriously. Be prepared to advocate for the child, reporting their problem to the appropriate person so the child knows you are trying to help.

- Be discreet so that the child doesn't feel that their problems have become public knowledge.
- Support without undermining the child's faith in the school and staff –it will be an important learning opportunity for the child to rebuild any relationship that has been damaged.

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