

Loss and change for Care Experienced children and young people

Loss and change are an inevitable part of life. However, this fact doesn't make it any easier to deal with. Loss and change could be anything from a bereavement, a friend moving away, parental separation, a new sibling being born, moving house, or starting a new school. Loss can also include mental loss such as a loss of feeling secure.

These things are tricky for all of us to adapt to but particularly children as they may not be able to articulate their feelings or may not fully understand what is happening. Loss and change often come together, such as the transition from primary to high school when children will experience loss of friends who may attend different schools or be in a different class alongside a massive change in environment and daily structure.

Care Experienced children and young people will have already experienced a massive change from being with their birth family to their current placement - whatever form that may be. Many children will have experienced multiple moves and going from one placement to another will come with a feeling of loss of relationships with caregivers, siblings, friends, neighbours, hobbies, and routine.

Care Experienced children and young people may also experience loss and change differently due to their early experiences. We know that different forms of insecure attachment affect children's internal model (how they think about themselves, other people and the world) and so this view is more negative than that of securely attached children. This means that often their default position may be one of self-blame, a wariness of

others, and to expect the worst of the world.

What can help?

- Giving children support and understanding.
- Acknowledging their feelings - ask them if they would like to talk about it.
- Encouraging them to be kind to themselves and discouraging any self-blame.
- Encouraging use of support networks such as meeting up with friends or informing the school.

- Involving children as much as possible in changes can help so that they feel they are part of it - that changes are happening with them instead of to them.

Children's Health Scotland offers a workshop on Loss and Change to Kinship or Foster carers where we explore this topic in greater detail. We often find that peer support is one of the most useful tools because carers are experts through experience. Here are some of the things that carers themselves have found to help:



- **Transitional objects:** a transitional object is an item given to the child by their caregiver that is used to keep a mental bond between the caregiver and the child when they can't be together. Some examples from carers include: a small resin heart that the child can keep in their pocket, drawing a matching heart on both the child's and caregiver's hand, giving the child a picture of the family or a pet to take with them.
- **Memory boxes:** storing sentimental items and reminders of good times. For care experienced children it can be a good idea to include a picture of them wearing their first shoes etc. so that they have a sense of belonging of the items in it. When children get older, they can choose which items to keep in it or decorate the box.
- **Writing down worries:** this can be done as an activity for younger kids - they write their worries on a piece of paper then place it in a 'worry bag', post it in a 'worry box' or give it to a soft toy 'worry monster' who eats it. This helps to get the worry out of the children's head, and it can be shared with their caregiver. Older children can be encouraged to journal or keep a diary.

