



Safer Caring: A New Approach supplementary resources (2017)

Chapter 4: A closer look at foster care

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Head, Heart, Hands – social pedagogy

Safer Caring: A New Approach introduced the concept of social pedagogy and how the use of the head (learning and reflection), heart (emotional availability) and hands (practical engagement) in fostering can help to address imbalances of power within the care system which can be so damaging to the creation of positive relationships between all those involved. The Fostering Network's four-year programme, Head, Heart, Hands, explored the impact of social pedagogy within fostering in the UK, and involved piloting and developing social pedagogic approaches with our partners between 2012 and 2016.

Head, Heart, Hands has resulted in a greater understanding of the positive impact a social pedagogic approach can have on foster carers and children they care for. It is recognised that not every fostering service can adopt a fully social pedagogic approach, nor can every foster carer be trained as a social pedagogic, despite the value placed on the training provided by those who took part.

Head, Heart Hands does, however, leave a legacy of materials and tools that are available to foster carers and others to use in their work. An independent evaluation report is available as well as The Fostering Network's programme impact report and resources for foster carers and others to use. Those interested in exploring social pedagogy in foster care can access additional information on our website [here](#).

The status of foster carers

Safer Caring: A New Approach recognised that the role and status of foster carers (that is, how foster carers are perceived) has implications for how children and young people feel about being in foster care, and the stability of placements. It is therefore an important component of safer caring that foster carers are respected and supported.

In 2012, the authors were positive about the changes that were taking place in this regard. However, five years on, The Fostering Network has conducted more than one survey of its foster carer members and found that the situation could still be better. In its latest survey, the [State of the Nation's Foster Care 2016](#), one third of foster carers reported feeling that children's social workers do not treat them as an equal, and only 55% of foster carers would definitely recommend fostering to others. In addition, 31% of foster carers reported that they were rarely or never given all of the information about

a fostered child prior to placement. Improved communication and support from the fostering service, being treated more as a professional and better financial support were reported as the top three things that would help foster carers to improve the lives of children they care for.

Social pedagogy and the Mockingbird Family Model are two examples of innovative practice within foster care that address these issues in positive ways that forge constructive and empowering relationships for foster carers and children alike.