

Healthy relationships *Thrive*

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A big up to...
The Fostering Network in Wales Young People's Forum. Without your contributions, we just couldn't create this mag. Thank you!
By the way, if you'd like to influence what we do here at The Fostering Network – and what goes into Thrive, you could join the forum too. Email charlotte.wooders@fostering.net



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Hello!

So the last year has been a time of mega-mayhem. The pandemic turned things upside down and meant that we all had to do things differently, like studying online instead of in class and remembering to wear a mask when you get the bus.

Your relationships with your friends, family and foster carers might have felt a bit different too.

Now things are starting to get back to normal (or at least as normal as they can be!), it's a good time to think about your relationships and whether they make you happy.

Our friends at Brook have joined us for this special edition of Thrive to help you explore how you can take control, be true to yourself, and have good, healthy relationships with everyone around you.

Thanks for reading – until next time!

Thrive xxx

PS: We've published lots of issues of Thrive with super advice about all sorts of things. Click through to bit.ly/TFNThrive to explore them all.

 Established for over 55 years, Brook is the UK's leading sexual health, relationships and wellbeing charity for young people, providing counselling and wellbeing services, relationships and sexuality education for young people, and training for professionals brook.org.uk

Healthy or harmful?



Whether relationships are with your family, friends, foster carers or a BF or GF, they should make you feel good!



Our Thrive panel of young people gave us some ideas about what makes a relationship healthy or harmful.

✓ Good signs

- ✓ You spend quality time together but are also happy to be apart
- ✓ They listen to you when you're upset
- ✓ You feel like you can be yourself
- ✓ You understand each other
- ✓ You respect each other
- ✓ You have fun together

✗ Warning signs

- ✗ They buy you lots of presents – especially after you've argued
- ✗ They sometimes make you feel guilty
- ✗ They're violent towards you
- ✗ They're jealous of you
- ✗ They call you names
- ✗ They lie

REMEMBER! Everyone deserves to be respected, feel safe and be cared for.

Your relationships healthcheck

Having positive relationships with your family, foster carers and friends is really important – they will help you feel good about yourself and give you the support that you need, when you need it.

But if you've got problems in any of these relationships, you might feel sad or anxious.

Check out these pointers to think about whether any of your relationships need some TLC.

Foster carers

Your foster carer or foster carers will have a huge influence in your life. Living with them gives you a safe space where you can develop your own values, ideals and coping strategies.

It's important that the relationship between you is steady and stable.

Stress with foster carers can be because of:

- **School struggles:** You've got to deal with the expectations of loads of different people – your foster carers as well as your social worker, teachers and others. This might cause friction between you and your foster carers.
- **Opinion clashes:** You might argue if you've got different viewpoints and you could feel that your voice isn't being heard.
- **Wanting more independence:** You may feel that the adults around you are uncompromising or treating you like a child.
- **Family changes:** Being separated from your family can be difficult to adjust to, and you might feel angry, confused or upset.

+ Top tip

Talk about everyday stuff to your foster carer – AND DO IT EVERY DAY!

Chatting regularly can build a bond that can make the difficult times pass more smoothly. When your foster carers feel connected to your daily life, they can be there for you when something really important or awkward comes up.

Talk about something you watched on Netflix. Share something one of your teachers said. Even small talk about what's for dinner can keep your relationship strong and comfortable.

By the way, if you feel that you need help expressing your opinion to your foster carers, the Wales Advocacy Service could help.

Advocacy is about having someone to listen to you. It can help you to tell the people who make decisions about your life what you think and how you feel. They are not part of Social Services, but they do work with children and young people in many different situations. For more information go to bit.ly/tgpAdvocacy and nyas.net

Friends

Making and keeping friends can be difficult, especially if you have moved around or changed schools a lot.

Stress with friends can be because of:

- **Peer pressure:** The fear of feeling left out can mean you're encouraged to try out harmful activities such as binge drinking, smoking, or taking drugs.
- **Falling out:** You might argue with friends about something silly or something serious.
- **Being fostered:** You could feel as though you've lost friends if you've just moved into foster care and they don't understand your life any more.



+ Top tip

Your friends might feel left out of all the things that have been going on in your life. They might even want to help but they're scared of being nosy.

Share some things about what's been going on for you – but only tell them what you feel comfortable with. They might not know what foster care is. You can explain that you're still the same friend, but you just live with another family, and your social worker might have a leaflet you can give to them. Make sure they know you appreciate their support, and how much their friendship means to you.

Have you thought of chatting to your foster carer? Ask them if you could invite your mates for a sleepover so they can see for themselves that where you live is no different from where your friends live.

Romantic relationships

Having a boyfriend or girlfriend can be brilliant and tricky at the same time.

Stress with boyfriends and girlfriends can be because of:

- **Sex:** Deciding if or when to have sex for the first time can be a major worry. Make sure that you've got all the facts and don't feel pressured to do something that doesn't feel right.
- **Balancing other commitments:** Getting into a serious relationship can sometimes feel overwhelming. It can be difficult learning to manage school and give time to your romantic life too.
- **Breaking up:** Breaking up will always be hard and upsetting, but it's important that you feel able to get out of difficult relationships.

+ Top tip

Remember to keep communicating with your partner – this doesn't just have to be talking, but doing nice things for each other, laughing together or even chatting online.



Did your relationships pass the healthcheck?

If you're worried about something in any of your relationships, it's important to get help. Talk to your foster carer or another trusted adult straight away. If that's difficult for you, call Meic on 080880 23456 or text 84001 or call or text Childline on 0800 1111.



Kelly's wisdom



Kelly Harris is a relationships expert and she works with the young people's charity, Brook. We had a chat about the best kind of friendships, and what you can do if things feel wrong.

Hi Kelly, it's great to meet you. Can you tell us about your job?

I work with young people under the age of 25 and the professionals who work with them to provide education and advice about sexual health, relationships and wellbeing.

Why is this so important?

It's really important that young people have access to this sort of information so they are educated about the decisions they are making for themselves and so they know how to keep themselves safe.

At Brook we think it's really important for young people to grow up to be healthy, secure and confident and to have a good understanding of what a healthy relationship looks like and what harmful behaviour looks like. They should also know where to get support and advice.

When you talk to young people about relationships, what are most of them worried about?

We often talk about how different people treat them. It's really useful to reflect on relationships in general and talk through some of the harmful things to look out for, for example, someone being controlling, gaslighting someone else or physically harming them.

How can we tell if we have good relationships in our lives?

It's really useful to think about what's important to you in a relationship. What qualities do you look for - whether in a romantic relationship or a friendship? You might like someone who is kind or someone who makes you laugh. In a healthy relationship you feel respected and safe, and comfortable to be who you are as a person.

What warning signs should we look out for?

Are you happy? Do you feel anxious when you think about a certain friendship? That shows something isn't right.

So what can you do about that?

Everyone has negative experiences in their relationships - remember you're not alone in that. Speak to someone, get help from a trusted adult. There are also lots of websites and helplines too.

Need relationship help or info?

Brook brook.org.uk

Childline childline.org.uk
0800 1111

Meic meiccymru.org
080880 23456 or text 84001



Respect, trust and communication



Mia, 16, is a member of The Fostering Network in Wales Young People's Forum and she took part in a workshop about healthy relationships with Kelly from Brook.

She tells us what qualities she looks for in a good friend, and why it's good to share your life story with someone you trust.



What sort of things did you talk about at the healthy relationships workshop?

We were thinking about what we would like in a friend. I've never thought about that in that way before.

So what qualities do you think are important?

Trust is a really big one. I have really bad trust problems, but I trust my friends with my life. I got to know one of my closest friends when she was in the middle of a breakdown and I was there for her. We got to know each other really quickly.

Also respect - if there's no respect it's not an equal relationship. Communication is an important thing. I've got two friends in a huge argument at the moment and it's because they haven't spoken to each other properly in weeks.

Social media sometimes doesn't help with communication, does it?

You need to communicate how you feel and then you can talk about it. It's much more difficult with text - you can't see facial expressions and that's how we know each other's emotions.

What else did you learn at the workshop?

We talked about consent. I wasn't aware of the details of the law about the age of sexual consent. That should be taught at school. And so should good relationships in general. Many young people don't know what a good relationship is and I feel like this is something all kids should know.

Do you think fostered young people should talk to their friends about being fostered?

Don't be ashamed of it. But there's no pressure to talk about it. If you want to talk about it you can, but you shouldn't feel you have to. Telling at least one friend is nice and then you have someone to talk to about it.

What's one piece of advice you'd give to other young people about relationships?

Don't let anyone belittle you. Stick up for yourself and remember who you are.



Q I can't live with my family any more and I've changed schools, but I made a new friend. I got her to do some bad stuff. She got caught and it felt really good to see her cry, and it made everyone laugh. But then I found out that she hurt herself just to get out of coming to school. I feel really bad, it wasn't supposed to go that far.

Matt says: For some people, when they're feeling stressed, angry or frustrated, picking on someone else can be an easy escape – it takes the attention away from them and their problems. Some kids learn from first-hand experience. Perhaps name-calling or violence are what they have been used to. But this is bullying and there is no excuse.

If you find it hard to resist the temptation to bully, talk with someone you look up to such as your foster carer, a school counsellor, or your social worker.

Try to think about how others feel when you tease or hurt them. Bullying always backfires and makes everyone feel miserable – even the bullies. People might feel scared of bullies, but they don't respect them. Take care of yourself and get some help rather than taking your feelings out on your friends.

Bullying shame

YOU ASKED, WE ANSWERED

Matt's back to help with your problems



Respect yourself!

Q I'm 15 and my new boyfriend is 17. He started to pressure me to do things I didn't want to do and now he's sharing the photos of me on WhatsApp. Why did he do this to me? He told me he loved me. My friends say drop him now and that what he's doing is illegal. Please help.

Matt says: Your friends are right, by sharing your photos through WhatsApp, he has broken the law – it's called sexting. It is really important for you to talk to a trusted adult, such as your foster carer and explain what has happened. It isn't easy to have these conversations, but remember that you are not to blame.

An adult can help you get support and stay in control. They can help you to contact CEOP (see ceop.police.uk) who will be able to help get your photos removed because you are under 18. You can also report this to the police by calling 101.

Always remember that in a healthy relationship you should never feel pressured to do anything you don't want to do. Consent is a really important part of any relationship so remember that no means no.

Q I thought I had a best friend, but she has started behaving oddly and being nasty. It started when something funny happened in our history class. I was telling our other friends and then she denied all knowledge of it, making me look stupid. Then she deleted me off WhatsApp and Snapchat and started posting stuff about me being in care. Everyone is laughing at me.

Matt says: That's tough. It's difficult to understand why somebody who is your friend treats you so badly in front of others. It's often because you are friends that she is singling you out. She could be trying to assert her dominance, after all picking on you is easier than picking on someone else as you are less likely to retaliate.

When you are criticised or hurt in public, it can feel devastating, especially when others also join in the mockery. This behaviour is often called 'pack mentality' – everyone just wants to fit in, it's nothing personal against you.

Deep down, your friend and the other kids know what they are doing isn't right or kind. Resist lashing out, and when you are on your own have a quiet word. They will probably feel massively uncomfortable, and that will give you the upper hand in getting a resolution.

There's information about bullying on the Childline website childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/types-bullying/bullying-cyberbullying

**Warning!
Gaslighting Alert!**



Got a problem? Get an answer you can trust, right here

I'm so lonely



Q I have just moved in with my new foster mum. She's great, but I feel so lonely as I don't live near to my friends any more, and I have had to swap classes. I don't feel normal as everyone else seems to have besties. My new classmates are trying to be nice, but it's just not the same. I don't think I can cope being this alone and weird.

Matt says: Feeling lonely really sucks. But lots of people feel lonely – it doesn't mean you're weird. Some research I read said that one in five young people reported feeling lonely 'most of the time' or 'always'. So you've probably got more in common with the kids around you than you realise.

Everyone is new to something at some time in their life, so stay chilled. Start making friends with a smile! Find someone who shares the same interests as you and start talking. Remember other people are shy too and sometimes need you to make the first move.

What about joining a club or team at school? You don't have to be an expert, just show willing. And there are plenty of activities you can join that aren't connected to school, like youth clubs, drama groups or sports clubs. Just turn up and watch first, you never know, you might really like it!

Childline has some top tips for making friends, go to bit.ly/ChildlineFriendsTips

Romance with respect

Being in a new romantic relationship can feel exciting, overwhelming, scary and fun, all rolled into one.

But in all the excitement, don't forget that you and your girlfriend or boyfriend should treat each other with respect. **Remember these things...**

Communication

Even though they're really into you, they're not mind-readers. Don't assume that your boyfriend or girlfriend knows what you're feeling or thinking. Talk openly and often together about your relationship, sex, things that make you laugh and new experiences.



Consent

Anything that happens in a relationship must happen with the agreement of both of you. This includes things like having sex, discussing private matters with others, and major decisions that affect each other.

Respect

Take care to respect each other's feelings and choices. If you truly care about each other, you'll want each other to be happy and you'll support each other to make the right choices.

Dealing with jealousy

Jealousy is a normal emotion that lots of people experience in romantic relationships, but it can get out of control.

Sometimes it can create barriers between people, and cause one partner to be hurtful, abusive or angry towards the other.

If you or your partner are feeling jealous, it could be to do with all sorts of other things, like a fear of feeling left out or not feeling good enough.

Talk to each other, but if things are getting out of hand, get help from someone you trust. You can read more on Brook's website here brook.org.uk/your-life/trust-and-jealousy

Sex and sexual orientation

Not all teenagers have sex, but most teenagers experiment with some sort of sexual behaviour at some stage.

You need to make sure that you've checked out all the info on safe sex, consent, contraception and sexually transmitted infections.

It's important to understand your sexual orientation too - some teenagers begin to feel attracted to members of the same sex or more than one sex. Everyone is different.

Don't be scared to chat to your foster carer about all this stuff - they want to help keep you safe and happy!



Sexual consent

Sexual consent is when you agree to be involved in something sexual like kissing, touching or sex. Nobody has the right to do something sexual with you without your full consent.

Saying yes doesn't always mean that you've given consent, especially if you're worried about what will happen if you don't agree. If you've been drinking or taking drugs it can affect your judgement, which means that you can't give consent either.

The age of consent is 16. This means that it's illegal for anyone to have sex with someone who is under 16.

There's much more info about this on Childline's website childline.org.uk/info-advice/friends-relationships-sex/sex-relationships/sex/#consent