

Barnet Virtual School Carer Newsletter Autumn 2023

Welcome to the Autumn 2023 edition of the Barnet Virtual School Carer Newsletter. We hope you had a good Summer break and the return to school has gone smoothly. Please do contact your young person's caseworker if you have any questions or queries—contact details are further on. Sarah Deale Headteacher

FOSTER CARER TRAINING THIS TERM

Barnet Virtual School are offering a range of virtual workshops over the Autumn Term. These are an opportunity to learn more about a particular topic, meet other foster carers and ask questions.



Workshop 1: Emotions, Behaviour and Communication: what we see and what we understand

Monday 2nd October 2023 10.30– 12.00am

This workshop will focus on the teenage age range and how behaviour can mask communication difficulties; thinking about what signs to look out for and what to do when responding to unwanted behaviours.

N.B. This is a repeat of the course held last term.

Workshop 2: Understanding Post 16 Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

Wednesday 11th October 2023 10.00-11.15am

This workshop will help you gain an understanding of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) at Post 16, how they support the education and wellbeing of young people in care as well as the importance of your role in supporting the PEP process and the transition into post 16.

Workshop 3: An introduction to the Education Health Care Needs Assessment process (EHCNA)

Thursday 30th November 2023 10.00- 11.15am

An Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) is an assessment of the education, health care and social care needs of the child or young person. This is an opportunity to gain an understanding of this process, the timeline for an assessment of need and your role within this.

If you would like to do any of these, please email: barnet.virtualschool@barnet.gov.uk stating which course you would like to do and we will set up access for you.

You will be given a certificate of attendance for each workshop that you attend.

Back to school

Starting back at school can be a stressful time for young people, especially if they are moving schools. Things can seem unfamiliar and there are lots of new things which can be anxiety provoking. It is often what we do not know that is most scary so you can help your child by making sure they know what to expect as much as you can.



- Go through their timetable with them
- Remind them of who the key adults are

Transitions Vulnerable children will be feeling deeply frightened by the end and the start of the school year. The change of routine and the inevitable losses and separations bring back old feelings of abandonment and threat. It's a challenging time for everyone – children and adults alike!

Here are some of our favourite transition top tips for parents/carers and for teachers:

Adults - be prepared

- It's useful for adults to emotionally prepare themselves for the 'transition storm' that is about to begin. Put your seatbelt on and hold tight! The child needs you to be grounded.
- Remind yourself that the child's behaviour is a sign of their inside pain, and they need you to see through the behaviour to help them feel safe, secure and loved.
- Digging down past behaviours to the inside pain, can be hard and tiring work. Take good care of yourself and reach out to your support network for extra help.
- Remind yourself that punishments, withdrawal, consequences and shaming will make the transition harder for everyone.

Name it to tame it

- Help the child to see the storm coming too. Say "the end of the school year can be a tricky, I'm here to help you through it"
- Help the child name the feelings that they have no words for. Try "I wonder if your 'moving up day' feels pretty scary right now?" or "When things are different like this, I wonder if it makes you worry about being left behind?"
- Help make connections between their behaviour and their feelings, try "When you run away like that it makes me wonder if you don't know where to be to feel safe? You are safe right here".

Be crystal clear

Tell the child the things they need to hear, don't wait for them to ask you because they don't know what they need! **Tell them:**

- How much you care
- That you are not going anywhere
- That they are in your mind even when not in your class/not at home
- That they are safe and protected
- That they will not be taken away
- Tell them what is going to happen that day if the routine is different – use pictures and 'steps' to prepare them.
- Remind them throughout the day what is going to happen and when
- Keep to as much of the usual routine as you can

Help their body

Children feel fear in their body. Help the child's body to calm by:

- Doing short bursts of physical activity (star jumps, wall push ups, walking, running) frequently
- Playfully ask them to breathe deeply in the mornings and evenings – e.g. blow bubbles, blow away the feelings
- Do body calming activities with them
- Use sensitive touch to let them know you are there. Touch can be a great calmer.

Stay connected

Use 'transitional objects' to let them know that you are connected, even when apart. How about:

- As a parent, draw a little heart on your hand and the same heart on your child's hand as they go off to school.
- Give your child a special stone, or photo to hold on to at school that reminds them of you
- Teachers – give the child a 'transition card' – a piece of paper with a special message that they look after until you see them again.
- Let the child use their special teddies whenever they need to

Transitions are temporary

Remind the child (and yourself) that the Transition Storm will come, and it will go. You will stick it out together, and soon it will be over.

- Make sure they have everything they need for each day
 - Support them to have ways of managing their anxiety e.g.
 - Coping statements - *This feeling will pass, I'm anxious but I can manage*
 - Breathing (breathe in for 5 and out for 7)
 - If...then (*If you are feeling anxious, then count to 10, breathe, re-read the question*)
 - Remind them of positive body language—smiling etc
 - Listen to them and validate their feelings
- And remember the transition storm will pass.

Supporting Sleep

Sleep is crucial for children's health and development, and for your own wellbeing as a foster carer. Sleep helps replenish the brain and body ready for the next day. It helps us to process and form memories, protects our mental and physical health, and helps us to focus and learn.

Some children can struggle to sleep, wake in the night, or have fears or worries about sleeping.

"A good night's sleep is about getting to sleep, staying asleep and getting enough good quality, deep sleep" Anna Freud Centre.

When children experience poor sleep, it impacts on their **emotional wellbeing** e.g. they may become irritable, stressed, overly emotional, or seem low in mood. Poor sleep also impacts **concentration and thinking** skills, making learning more difficult. Sleep also affects children's **physical health** e.g. their immunity.

Recommended hours sleep (National Sleep Foundation, 2014)

Toddlers (1-3 years)	11-14 hours
Pre-schoolers (3-5 years)	10-13 hours
Primary school age (5-10 years)	9-11 hours
Teenagers (10-17 years)	8-10 hours
Young adults (18-25 years)	7-9 hours

Several factors can impact on a child or young person's sleep. This can include:

- Feeling anxious, stressed, depressed.
- Trauma experiences & symptoms.
- Changes in routine & sleep environment e.g. moving to a new foster home.
- Physical and hormonal changes to the body e.g. puberty.

Children with additional needs e.g. autism, are also more likely to struggle with sleep.

Sleep in teenagers: sleep patterns during teenage years often change due to puberty and changing social lives. This leaves young people experiencing a 'jet lag' effect.

Sleep in unaccompanied young people (separated children): sleep can be especially challenging for these young people. During their journey to the UK, it is often safer to sleep during the day. Attempts to travel (forced or by choice) also often take place at night. Subsequently sleep patterns are often reversed. Trauma experienced before, during, or after the journey to the UK also impacts sleep.

Tips on supporting sleep

Create a **sleep environment** that is quiet, has low lighting, and is not too hot/cold. Use dark curtains to block out light or a nightlight if they fear the dark.

Establish a **sleep routine**, going to bed and waking up at roughly the same time.

Create a **'chill out' routine** 45 minutes before bed, to help calm the brain for sleep. This could include having a bath, getting dressed for bed, reading, listening to gentle music.

Minimise **screen time** before bed (screens keep the brain alert).

Plan a **warm bath** or shower before bed (the warmth makes the body sleepy).

Read a story to younger children just before bed.

Encourage the child to talk about, draw or write down any **worries** in the afternoon or early evening (well before bed).



Supporting Sleep continued

Practice **relaxation techniques** together before bed e.g. breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, visualising a happy place [Relaxation Techniques | On My Mind | Anna Freud Centre](#)
Use **sleep apps** such as Moshi: Sleep and Mindfulness (younger children) and Headspace (older children & teenagers).

Minimise caffeine in the afternoon and evening.

Ensure the child receives exercise and **natural light** during the day.

Plan **homework early** in the evening, not too near bedtime.

For teenagers who struggle to sleep, **avoid naps** during the day.

Provide **sleep packs**, including a sleep mask, ear plugs, lavender & a night light [Sleep packs - The Separated Child Foundation](#)

For older children and teenagers, talk about ways they can protect and improve their sleep (referring to the above tips).



Where to go to for further advice or support

- GP
- School nurse
- BICS or school Educational Psychologist
- [Sleep: Mentally Healthy Schools](#)
- [Good sleep guide \(nhs.uk\)](#)
- [Parents/carers of autistic children \(autism.org.uk\)](#)
- [Sleep in children with SEN \(councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk\)](#)

Contacts in the Virtual School

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