

EXTRACT FROM “SAFE AND WELL” (2005)

A – Z of Practice Issues: Looked After Children

Some children are ‘Looked After’ because they have experienced neglect or abuse. The safety and wellbeing of Looked After children must still be of concern to school staff. Research shows that they are at risk of physical, sexual or racial abuse, are at risk of misusing alcohol or drugs, poor mental health, self-harming behaviour or prostitution. Education authorities and establishments should be alert to this range of possible child protection issues relating to looked after/accommodated children and young people, and consider within the child’s Care Plan what steps can be taken to support the child, prevent further risk, encourage positive and safe behaviour, and focus on educational achievement.

Schools may also:

- ensure effective liaison between the designated member of staff for Looked After children and the school’s CP Co-ordinator
- ensure school staff are aware of which parents and carers have legitimate access to information and to the child
- liaise effectively with parents, foster carers or staff in residential units to ensure two-way communication on the pupil’s personal and social development, progress in learning, goals and aspirations
- act swiftly when there are problems with attendance and collaborate when there are problems with behaviour (and exclusion from school).

Building positive relationships is a vital aspect of gaining the trust of Looked After children and young people and is a protective factor:

- provide opportunities for positive peer contact, through buddying or mentoring (and ensuring Looked After children have opportunities to become buddies and mentors)

- providing mentoring or befriending opportunities by adults outwith the school, or developing programmes for small group or one-to-one activities within the school, to support and encourage learning
- provide Looked After pupils with opportunities to explore their talents and interests through out-of-school or extra-curricular activities – ensuring these are supported by access to any necessary equipment
- take steps to develop Looked After Children’s sense of self and self esteem
- ensure staff handle information sensitively so as to avoid mistakes and unnecessary loss of trust
- enable relevant staff and key workers to attend any meetings concerning the child
- support the child to prepare for meetings and try to empower them as much as possible in the difficult processes that govern their lives
- schools need also to be aware that some Looked After Children, for example those who have been in stable placements since they were young children, will wish no additional support or any attention drawn to their situation.

To access the full text of Safe and Well, please click on the link below, or copy it into your internet browser: http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/SafeAndWell_tcm4-619492.pdf