



# Take Care

The school experiences of children and young people who have been in care

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This resource was developed by EPIC in partnership with Kids' Own and with financial support from Tusla Education Support Service (TESS).





GRADING  
GROWING

SCHOOL

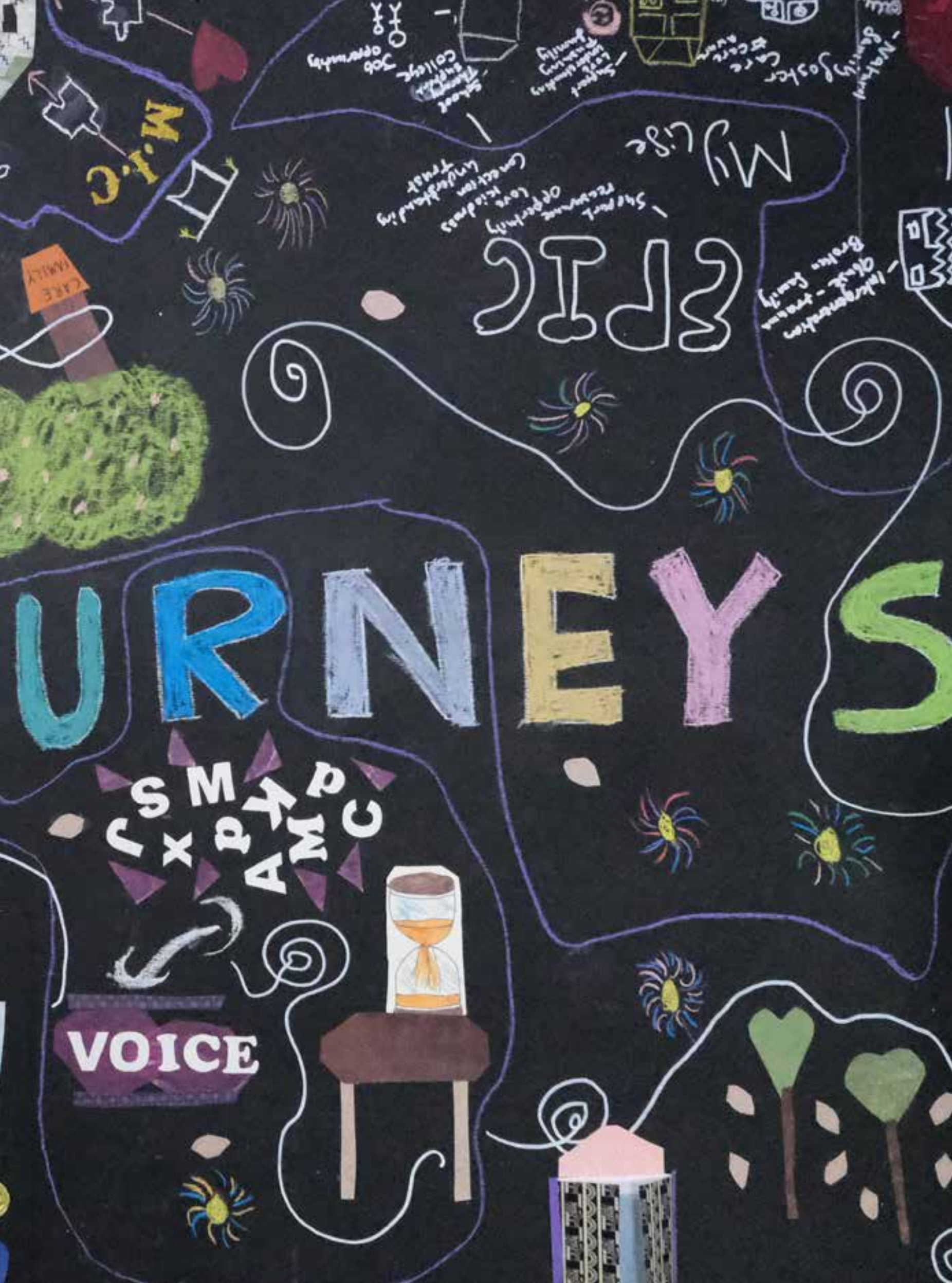
FRIENDS

OUR

JO

CARE

#CAREALIVE



M.T.C.

EPIC

My Use

CARE FAMILY

See part resource opportunity Love to address Connection Lynda/standing Trust

Intergenerational Abuse - trauma Broken family

TURNKEYS

C S M x P H P A M C

VOICE





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# How we made this book

## Who we are

We are a group of children and young people aged 14 to 26 from different parts of Ireland who are currently in State care, in aftercare services, or who have been in State care. EPIC invited us to share our experiences of primary and secondary school.

This topic is very important to so many children and young people in care because we feel our journeys through education could have been better if there was more awareness among teachers of the care system and the impact being in care has on a child. We believe school is a great place for children to be themselves, and that sometimes, they might need a little helping hand for this to happen.

## How we made this book

We came together as an over 18s group and an under 18s group with a writer and an artist from Kids' Own to talk about what it was like for us at school. We shared our stories and personal experiences of what school was like for us. We got creative and made self-portraits using shells, pebbles and matchsticks and we made a collage representing key themes of our care and education journeys on a large chalkboard. We also talked about what changes we'd like to see for children in care at school. What we learned was that even though we had different upbringings our stories were similar – from things our schools could have done differently to that one teacher who made school a safe space for us.

## Our hopes for the book

We hope this book will help teachers, students, and so many others.

We want teachers to get a better understanding of how important their roles are within the lives of children in care. Also, we want to give teachers and others an insight into what being a child in care means through the lens of that child.

We would like teachers to know that there is an opportunity to make a positive difference in a young person's life. Teachers provide consistency in the day-to-day life of a child in care due to the routine and structure that school brings. We all can think of that one teacher who helped us grow and who influenced our opinion of the world.

It's important for us to bring home just how important the school community is to a child in care. To students going through the care system and in school, we hope this book will bring some comfort and guidance. We hope you feel like school is a safe space for you to talk about your care experience. We hope the school understands your situation and they facilitate you to be as active as you want. It will also help other students understand about care.

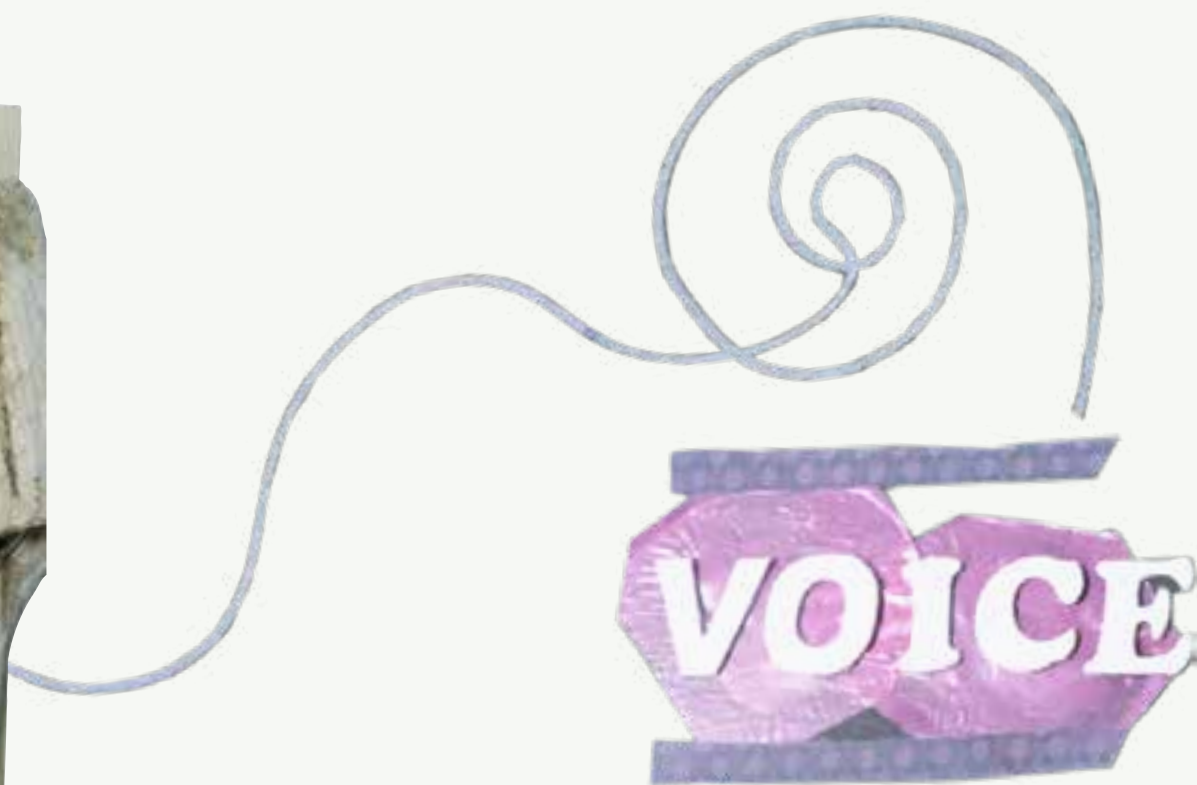
So, we invite you to read our book and hope it helps in making our schools more care-aware.



# Children and young people who have been in State care ask schools and teachers to consider the following recommendations:

## Schools:

- Principals should make information available for their teachers about the care system and work to make their schools care-aware.
- Foster a supportive school environment that empowers teachers to meet the needs of children in care. Allow for flexibility and be open to teachers' suggestions about how to best support a child.
- Encourage all staff to see their potential to be "that one good adult". Children in care often talk about an adult who had a positive impact or influence in their life – all school staff have the potential to be that adult.
- Provide training and support on trauma to all members of staff.
- Principals should have an open-door policy to reinforce that the school community is a safe and welcoming space.
- Make schools places of recreation as well as schoolwork. School can provide a distraction from the complexity of a child's home life. Make an extra effort to involve children in care in the school and in lunchtime, co-curricular and after-school activities.
- Children in care have to be so grown up in so many ways. It's a lot on a child. Make supports available for wellbeing and mental health.
- Make additional support available for all students who need it.





## Teachers:

- **Be care-aware.** Have an understanding of the care system and the impact that care can have on a child. A care-aware teacher should be child-centred, trauma-informed, and understand the importance of trust-building:
  - Have a **child-centred approach.** Listen to the child, give them time, use child-centred language.
  - Have a **trauma-informed approach.** Look at the bigger picture, observe the young person and see what is triggering them, work with them one on one.
  - **Build trust.** Building trust for children in care is important because the child in care might be used to adults letting them down. Those core connections may be broken, and they may find it hard to trust new people and situations.
- **Have sensitivity in the classroom when exploring topics that may be awkward, upsetting or triggering for children in care. For example, 'tell us about your family'.** A child in foster care may need to include both their foster care and their birth family to be loyal to both, some children may not live in a family environment.
- **Be flexible and observant.** Allow for breaks. External issues for a child in care can have a huge impact in school and affect their ability to concentrate.
- **Treat children in care the same as other children.** Provide extra supports in a discreet way. It is important for teachers to treat any child or young person in care the same as all students. Don't single them out or make them feel different.
- **Check and connect.** A teacher checking in can make such a difference, just seeing how you are. Be a caring adult.
- **Encourage children in care.** A lot of care-experienced children overthink because they don't know what the future holds. You might not know where you'll be next week so you can be hypervigilant. These experiences can undermine your confidence, self-esteem, and self-respect.
- **Prioritise relationship-building with peers and teachers.** Care-experienced children have a lot of transitions in their lives. Making time for and creating spaces to build up relationships can be invaluable to a child in care.
- **Promote understanding of care** in the classroom. Learning about care should be incorporated into the teaching curriculum and the nuances explored from a young age so that care is normalised as a reality for some children, reducing stigma.

# Foreword

Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) welcomes the development and publication of this important resource. *Take Care* will raise awareness of the children and young people, who are in the care of the state, and who sit in our classrooms across the country.

Ensuring every student's needs are met is central to the work of TESS and we are very mindful of the many challenges that children and young people in care face on a daily basis as they present for school. *Take Care* sheds light on an almost invisible cohort of students in our schools who may experience educational disadvantage.

*Take Care* gives us an opportunity to hear the voices of children and young people in care in relation to their education. It gives us valuable insights into the experiences of these children and young people, as learners, and how their personal circumstances impact on their educational experience. It enables us to strengthen our understanding of their experiences in care and to identify ways in which the Irish education system can best support their attendance, participation and retention in education.

This book enables us to understand what school feels like for children and young people in care and how schools can really support them in their educational journey. By helping us to understand the nuances of care experience and to reflect on what might be the situation for children and young people in care at school, it informs us as to what we need to do to remove educational barriers and create an informed, welcoming and supportive environment.

What is evident in this book is the value these children and young people place on their education. It reminds us that their education is an extremely important aspect of their lives. It also highlights the considerable resilience required by them to progress and succeed in life.

Education is a central pillar in the welfare and wellbeing of children and young people. It is incumbent upon all of us in the education system to support all children and young people to achieve the best possible outcomes in their educational and care journeys and achieve their potential. This is an essential resource for schools to assist children and young people in care with their education.

**Áine O'Keeffe**  
Director, Tusla Education Support Service

# Introduction

This book holds within the voices and insights of an incredibly determined group of children and young people with experience of being in care. They want to make schools a better place for current and future generations of children in care. It was developed as part of EPIC's Education Project, which was established in response to feedback from EPIC's Youth Council. Council members noted the important role that schools have in care and educational journeys and on practices in school which can support or inhibit their learning, wellbeing, and sense of inclusion. These care-experienced children and young people strongly believed that making schools care-aware was vital to both their participation and educational outcomes. While they identified the positive role supportive teachers can play, they also highlighted a lack of capacity and knowledge on the care system in their schools as a barrier in their educational journeys. This was echoed by principals and teachers interviewed in a consultation conducted by EPIC as we designed the Education Project.

EPIC would like to say a huge congratulations to the children and young people who gave their time to the development of the book, coming together to talk about what had made a difference to them in school, sharing their feelings and hopes. Having accompanied them in the process of making the book, I know how much it means to them to see it going out into the world.

Throughout the project, the children and young people stressed the huge influence teachers had on them. They are aware that a lot of expectation is placed on teachers and with that in mind, their main ask is to be

understood. They want their teachers to have an understanding of the potential complexity of their lives outside of school, and to be there for them if they need someone to talk to or to give them some slack. They want their peers to understand them, accept them, and embrace them as friends and allies. Importantly they want to be treated just like everyone else.

At EPIC, our wish is for children and young people with experience of care to be facilitated to enjoy school and to have trusting and supportive relationships with their teachers and their peers. Let's make schools a space to build their self-belief and to believe in their futures, a space where they do not feel like they have to hide their care experience. If schools can foster a sense of inclusion and belonging for children in care, they will have changed their lives for the better.

We want to thank all the teachers who read this book. The work that you do every day, welcoming students with a range of different personalities, interests and needs into your classrooms and ensuring that they feel included and supported to participate in learning, cannot be underestimated. Know that every kindness and gesture of support and understanding you give to a child or young person in care makes a difference.

**Tara Madden**  
EPIC Education Project Manager



M.I.C



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# Positive Experiences of School



# Positive Experiences of School

## Relationships and belonging

When I first went into foster care, for a two-year period I was going between two schools, going in and being taken out and spending a couple of weeks with my Mam before going into care again. One school was better at dealing with the disruptiveness than the other. They were able to help us integrate back into the class every time.

There was a Reception, a couple of people who would be friendly to you.

Looking back, it must have been the Special Needs Teacher, or the Home School Liaison Teacher who took this on. We were brought out playing basketball with a small group to focus on the social side in the first week. It was really good practice. It was January when we first joined this school, so most of the children knew each other by this time, so it was not ideal for us or the school.

Neither were they expecting a huge academic load from us either, it was to get you used to the surroundings, the teachers. And while I got to meet students that way, it would have been even better to meet the teacher first on a one to one.

Maybe the support teacher could take the class for a period, to give the child in care a chance to develop a relationship with the teacher. **LIAM**



**When we first arrived, they were very good at taking the time to meet different kids so you were able to build up small relationships before heading into the mainstream class.**

## Supports and strategies

**One teacher gave me some mental health strategies: like, 'draw a p on the wall and put it in a box', and she said 'there's your problem but look at how big the wall is'. This really helped me keep things in context.**

Another one was: 'find a big long wall, draw a little line at the door, but look along the length of the wall and look at how much of your life is left to sort these problems'. **KATE**

When you are a teenager and your hormones are going crazy and you're in a care home by yourself, and you think you are the only one, it's the end of the world, and your mental health is poor. There was a kind teacher who went above and beyond the call. She got us doing loads of charity stuff after school, like the shoebox appeal, packing boxes for Uganda, because she knew we were going home to difficult situations, so she got us involved in after-school activities and that helped us. She'd bring us down the town for a treat and tried to show us another way. **KATE**

There's a good bit of support in my school, I've met the counsellor several times and all the teachers in my school are really good. I feel free to go to anyone. I don't have any behaviour

problems or anything like that, so I know I can go to any of them and speak. If I was having a bad day I could go to a teacher and tell them and then they might set a time to talk to me or come and get me out of class. **MICHELLE**

Third year to LCA, I had been out of school for a year, I wasn't getting the support I needed. I was in emergency residential care, 15 years old. I went to my Junior Cert exams and the

LCA Coordinator made a great plan with my social worker, to give me extra break times, memory help, but this plan was implemented discreetly.

**During class times, my Head of Year would ask to see me and we'd walk around the school together and I could tell her how I was doing.**

She understood how hard my life was; it was an open line of communication. There were times I didn't always accept her help but she was always there. She did this weekly, we'd have tea together or I could go to her office.

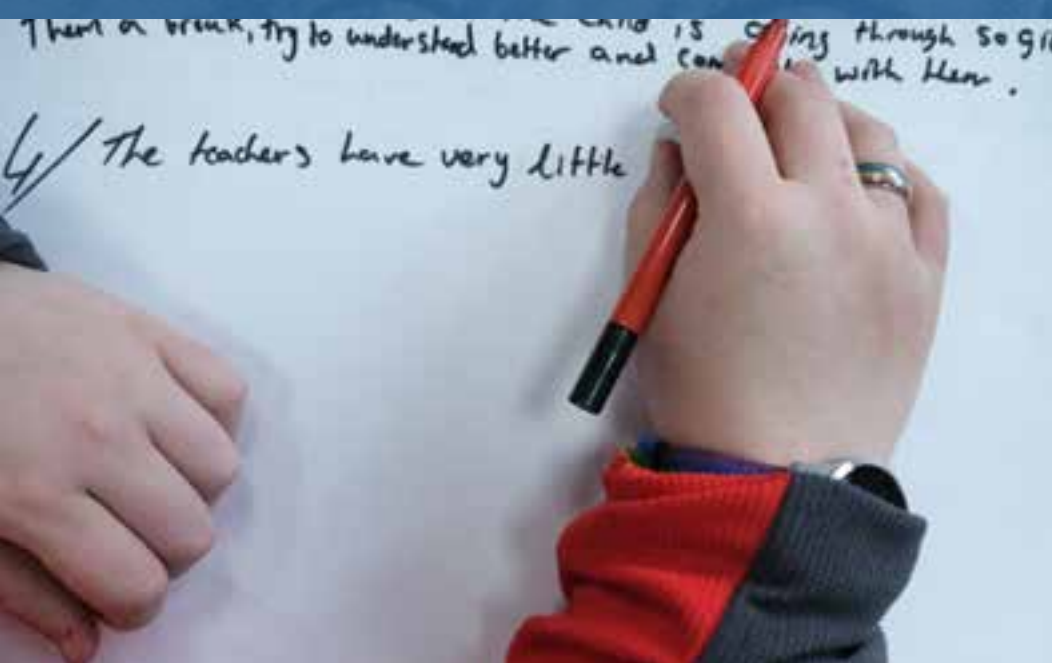
**My class director understood mental health; she had an open-door policy for me.**

She was aware of where I was at. I eventually got a great social worker. He was class and came into the school for meetings with the Guidance Counsellor, the Class Coordinator, Head of Year. I was there with them too. **KATE**





I found it easier to explain to teachers but not my peers. So, I told them when I got a little bit older. A lot of them were surprised and supportive at the same time. JACK



What are the challenges in schools and steps in knowledge of teachers of care experienced young people

- When a young person goes into a classroom they might not want to share their experience. As time goes on they might get more comfortable. Young people in care might feel stigmatised.
- Every kid is different not everyone got the family love, might not know some things or might be a bit behind to other people so...



We were brought out playing basketball with a small group to focus on the social side in the first week. It was really good practice. LIAM

## Good communication

Some teachers spoke to my foster mother about how to support me and took the time to meet the foster parent at collection or drop off time. That was really good.

She [teacher] never crossed the boundaries; she used child-centred language, she said “How was it seeing your family?” Not the social worker language of family access, or sibling access. Sometimes the social worker doesn’t want to hear you when you say you’re not ok.

**KATE**

## Care-aware schools

What I have noticed is that teachers who are “care-aware” have a much more thought-out response to the child in care. For example, most teachers are very tuned in now to LGBTQI+ issues and would be able to support a child who came to them. But if teachers are not aware of the care system, you can’t leave it to the child in care to start educating the teachers. **LIMERICK GROUP**

**It made a difference that the teachers were aware of good practice, what the care system was and what the reality was for children in care.**

My experience of education and being in the foster care system was quite positive, especially primary school. A lot of that was down to the fact I was in a school that dealt with a lot of foster children. There were two [foster] homes in the local area and a relatively small school of five or six teachers and they were used to the kids coming into the class. My foster mother fostered 30 or more children in her time. The other home had 15 or 20, so lots of children going through the school. **LIAM**



School was a positive for me. I was in a special needs school for primary where they met my needs physically but not educationally so I wanted to go to a mainstream secondary school. I felt I was capable of progressing to a different secondary school. I put in a lot of effort to get there.

I said my mum and dad are sick and couldn’t take care of me because of addiction. I found it easier to explain to teachers but not my peers. Eventually I had to tell them the situation, rather than going round and round. So, I told them when I got a little bit older. A lot of them were surprised and supportive at the same time. There were questions asked, like ‘why are you in this situation?’ But I worked around it. If I didn’t tell them they might find out anyway. I’ve no shame to hide anymore. It was like a sigh of relief to stop hiding. The quicker I told them it was a relief and then they stopped asking me the questions. **JACK**





Production

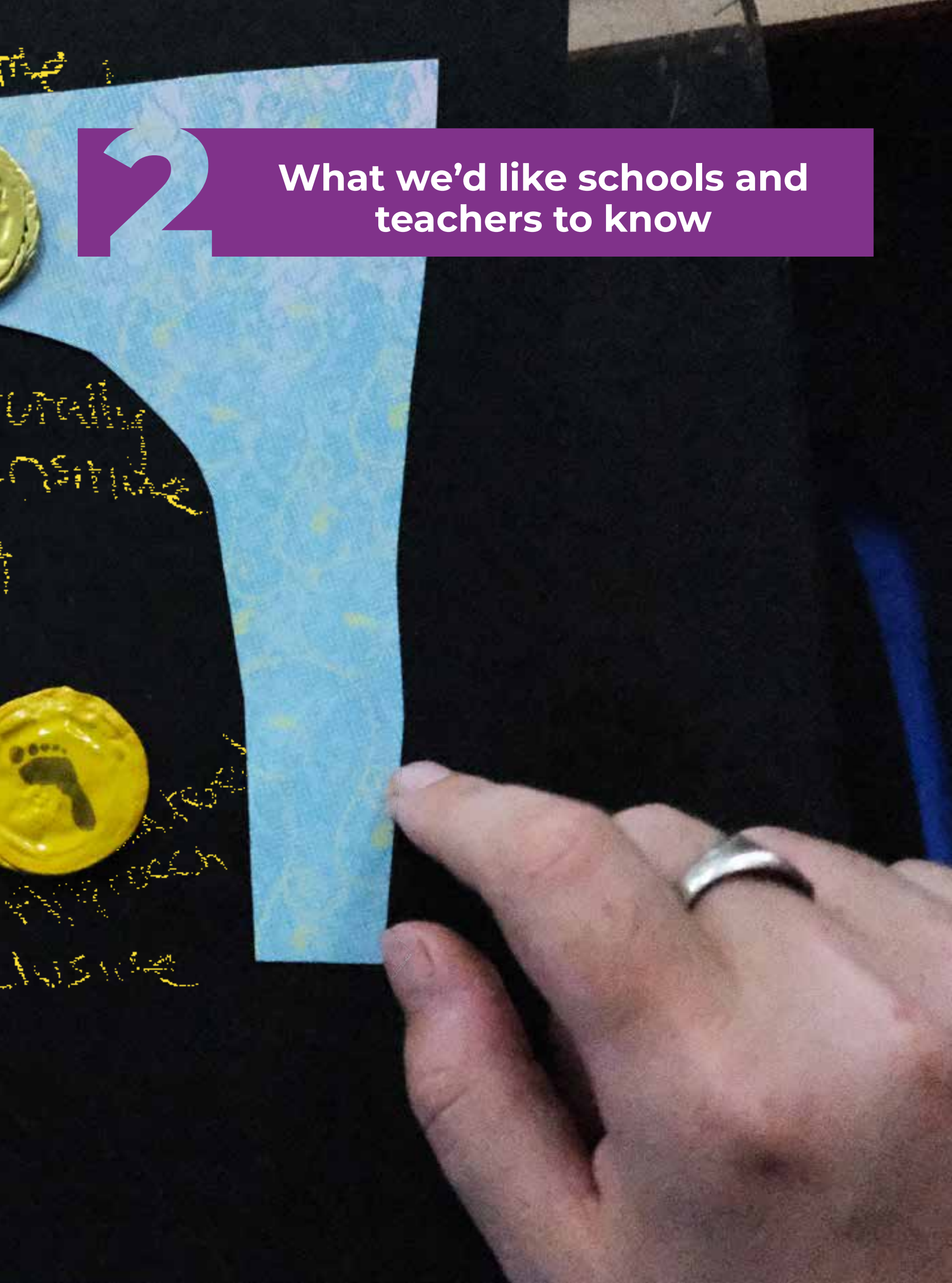
Collection

Collection

Collection

Communication

Collection



## What we'd like schools and teachers to know

# What we'd like schools and teachers to know

## Understandings of family

In primary school they have a part of the curriculum called "All About Me". I drew a family tree to include my foster family and my natural family, but I was told that it wasn't the right answer. That teacher didn't realise I was care-experienced, so my stories had loads of people in them and I could never leave anyone out.

**A child in foster care, needs to include both their foster family and their birth family to be loyal to both, they are still with you whether you live with them or not. KATE**

It takes a village to raise a child and your village can be big or small, it depends on you. **JACK**

In my situation, me and my brother were Black living with a white family and the assumption was that we were adopted. I went into care when I was seven and my brother was eight. Fostering wasn't a thing, so you had to say 'adopted' but that meant I was confused about what I could say. I couldn't turn my back on my birth family and I wanted to be loyal to my foster family. I felt I was being interrogated so I felt I needed to get my "lies" in order, back to having a secret family. This can cause you anxiety about answering questions. So, if teachers are care-aware, then they can be more sensitive about saying 'tell us about your family'. **ANNA**

Some children have been in care for a very long time, and it's a sensitive topic but also a reality. Children are in school from playschool up to Leaving cert, and care families exist at every stage too. So, schools need to acknowledge that the traditional family is not everyone's situation. **TANYA**

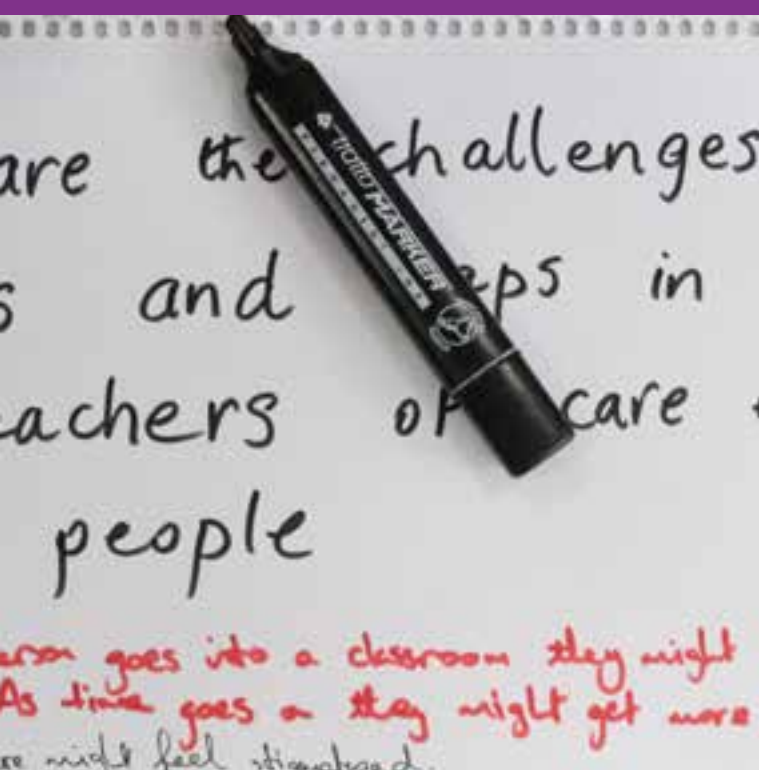
Teachers say, "write about your family and your home", then they might ask questions. And when it comes to home, there's no mom or dad - it's either staff or your foster parents. Even though you want to call them mom or dad to make life easier for you and to feel better. How am I gonna go around school not referring to them as my mom or dad and not get questioned about it? ...it gets tiring. **QUINN**

All a child or young person in care needs is someone to be there for them, on a daily basis. Hearing so many different stories from other children and young people in care, our stories are not the same but we have a lot of similarities. My story is that of a disabled person in care. I live with my grandparents now. I came to them when I was 14. I was kind of lucky that my grandparents stepped in. Me and my sister were taken in. My situation wasn't good. And if my granny didn't take me in, I'd be in residential care. My sister is in an apartment now near me. I speak to her all the time. **JACK**

External issues can have a huge impact in school and affect your ability to concentrate.







## Transitions and uncertainty

Transitions are very important in the school context: the transition between primary and secondary and then after Junior Cert and Transition Year into 5th and 6th year. They are important because it's when kids are more stressed and unsure. And care-experienced children and young people have a lot of transitions in their lives, like foster families, residential homes, social workers. A lot of care-experienced children and young people overthink because they don't know what the future holds. Those core connections are broken and they find it hard to trust new people and situations. This is where behavioural challenges come into play, and teachers might not understand how to cope or where you are coming from. **ELLA**

My first two years in care there was an awful lot of swapping over and back and you never knew how long you were going to be in any place, or whether we were coming or going. **Also, it meant a change in living, school, and adults that were in your life. The only professional adult who was constant in my twelve years in care was the driver who brought us to visits with our mother or grandparents.**

She'd collect us from school every second Wednesday. Her name was Kathleen, the one constant for eight or nine years. Social workers changed, key workers changed, teachers changed but she was there. Kathleen could ask us how we were getting on in school and we'd be able to tell her, because she knew the story and we didn't have to repeat that. She'd know by looking at you if you were in the mood for talking or not. You didn't have to retell the story of care. For a child having to constantly tell the story can be very difficult. **LIAM**

**You might not know where you'll be next week, so you can be hypervigilant.** These experiences undermine your confidence, self-esteem and self-respect. **KATE**



**At 16 and 17 the child in care is very aware of the uncertainties that face them when they reach 18.** They may have to leave their foster homes and not know where they will end up living, even in the middle of the school year. External issues can have a huge impact in school and affect your ability to concentrate. **JACK**



## Stigma

By secondary school, I certainly noticed a bit more stigma. As you get older you are more aware, as are other children, of difference. I remember going into first year and our teachers were saying 'Who are you? Have you older siblings in the school? Who are you related to?' **But you might not want to say you have foster siblings in the school, or natural siblings who live with a different family. Some children in care might not mind this, but some do. Some don't want to be outed as being in care. LIAM**

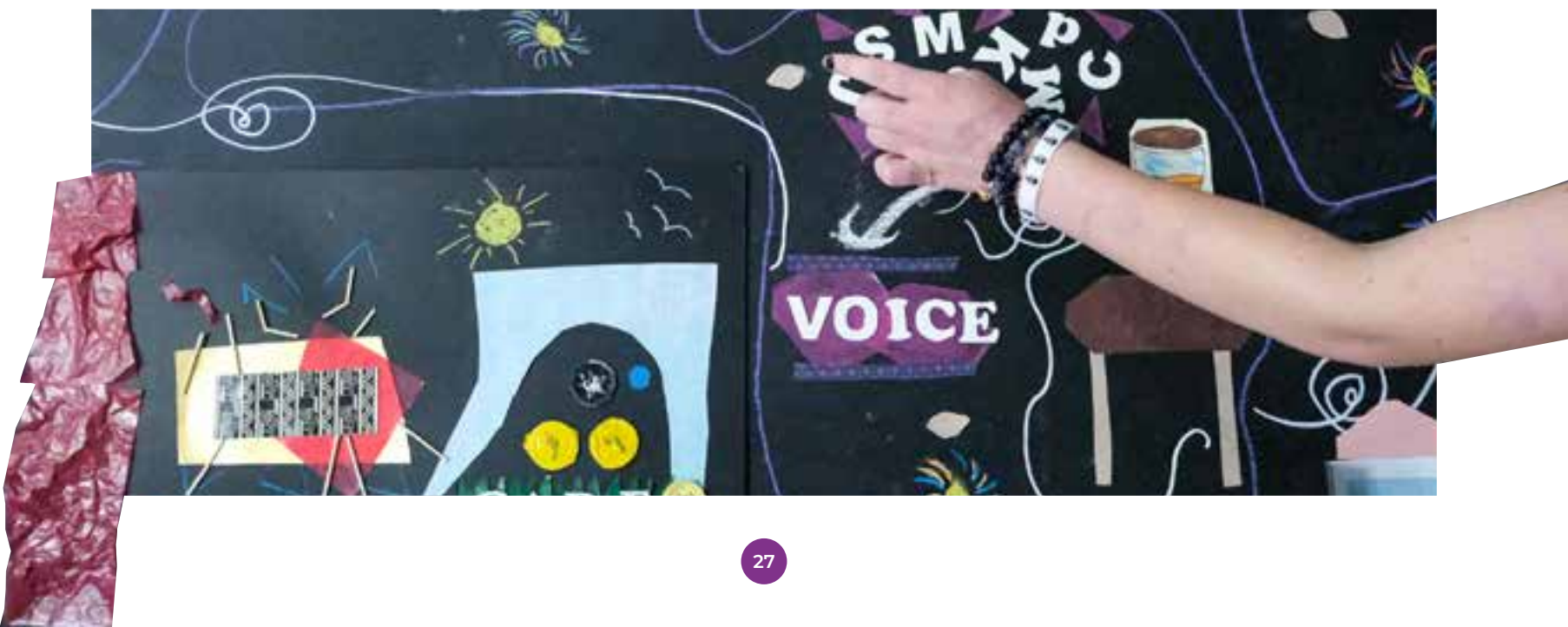
Care is meant to be confidential but in a small town things get out, things are said. People might know who your birth family is and you might not get invited to birthdays because you are "that girl" whose family is known about, so you're trouble. Don't be hanging around with her because she's... Children do get judged about who their parents are. Parents then tell their children 'don't play with her, get a different friend!' It can be impossible to make friends when those kinds of attitudes follow you around. **KATE**

Then there's people thinking you're trouble. You've gone through some crap in your life, and you're told to move on, but when something happens in school you're known as trouble. Everyone knows you for the wrong reasons. **QUINN**



Sometimes a community can band together before you even arrive in it, and I didn't realise that. I got in trouble for disclosing things, it confused me how the information was passed from my teacher to my foster mum so quickly. A lot of people knew more about me than I was comfortable with. Maybe this is the vibe in small communities. Also not just the care situation was difficult, but the racism was targeted at my young brother. A black child in care was not the usual, and the parents of the bullies stuck together as if it was my brother who was the problem.

The community stood with the local people, you could tell the teachers knew and sometimes there was animosity in the classrooms. If teachers could be the outlet in the community that treat the care kids with respect and that at least in school we have a bit of relief. My foster mum paid a price for having us in her family for a while. It was very awkward at the time, and then my brother carried a burden of that for years. It diluted after a while when we moved to secondary school, and we weren't the latest news. **ANNA**



In an ideal world I'd like teachers to know a lot more about what it's like for foster kids.





I would love for you to see me  
from my point of view.  
Why can't you just listen to what  
I have to say?

You can say what you want but  
just know I've been through it all  
behind closed eyes. I never really  
speak up about this, but ever  
since I was young, all I've felt is  
being invisible, having no voice,  
not being good enough, I have to  
work harder for what I want.

Stop playing with my head,  
because you don't know what  
I'm going through in my head.  
Why are you trying to get into  
my head, when it has nothing to  
do with you?

Life is life but know that you're  
going to make it through.

Why can't we just live freely,  
leave all the troubles behind.

Be careful how you speak to  
people because you don't know  
what they are going through  
behind closed doors.

TANYA



## Identity

I felt I was hiding my identity, as I was embarrassed and I was afraid of what people might think about me, because of the addiction in my family. This is going to have a negative impact on me and my values as a person and a persona, my image of myself.

As time went on, I said to myself, 'I've nothing to hide'. I came into the situation through no fault of my own so I should talk about it, to relate to others, and it might help them in their lives. **JACK**

I always knew I wanted to get out as soon as I could, so I focused. I was like a robot, I focused on school and I excelled because of that survival mode. After I got out, I went through a really hard time having survived 12 years of hiding. I never cried. **ANNA**

## Being care-aware

Teachers are not always in the know about who is in care and who might need support, as there is data protection in place to safeguard us. At times it's none of their business. But the class teacher, or class tutor or year head have to know what's going on. Some teachers are great at it. Then there's others who might not be as comfortable with emotions. **CONOR**

Sometimes if you are having a bad day, you don't want to talk, or explain, you don't know what to say. Later I was able to speak to teachers, only the ones I learned to trust. The Principal and year heads and maybe your class tutor need to know your situation, and maybe they can make a plan. **ELLA**

## Being there

**In an ideal world I'd like teachers to know a lot more about what it's like for foster kids.**

For example, I haven't gotten along with my birth family. Also being positive and listening to what people have to say would be helpful. It's hard to speak sometimes, and you feel like you've no-one to get along with. **So, if a teacher could say, "I'm here for you, you can talk to me about what's going on for you."**

Sometimes you have to fight the fight for what you want and need and have good communication skills. Young women don't get heard as much either, especially in schools, men and women need to be heard equally. I feel free almost after speaking out. **TANYA**

Even when teachers check in with you a little bit, they might not give you the time you need and rush on to the next person. It can be hard to get some teachers to get what you're saying and to understand. **MICHELLE**

## Resilience

People who have been through a difficult time know how to create change and they have mental capacity to deal with negative behaviour and keep going. Just because you are a foster kid does not mean that the same thing will happen to you and your life will end up repeating the patterns your parents created.

**LIAM**

There's a huge diversity of children and young people in care. If you get the message that you won't succeed, it knocks you down, some people can get up, but sometimes they can't.

**JACK**





For a child, having to constantly tell their story can be very difficult.





### It's important to be listened to

In an ideal world for children and young people in care, the system would listen to them. The State needs to listen. At the end of the day, we are in State care, and we need to be looked after. It's the State's job to be responsible for us and take care of us. We are in care through no fault of our own.

A more general aspect would be for there to be no harm done to young people and children. But that's not the way it is. There's a lot of drugs and anti-social behaviour in my area and young people can get mixed up in that.

More supports are needed for children and young people, I was in the Seanad and the Oireachtas speaking about this. So it's not like they don't know. **CONOR**

I hope the day will come when children's and young people's voices will be listened to, that would be the most important thing, not just people in care, but everyone – people with special needs, Travellers and refugees. **DUBLIN GROUP**

I had to deal with social workers. They felt it was important to build up the relationship with my parents. I would say I don't want to go back to my parents and I had to say that over and over. It wasn't all bad and they were there to do a job, but they weren't actively listening to me. I felt like I was a long-playing record. The social worker's job is hard, but the young person is meant to be at the centre, and they are meant to look out for the young person. **JACK**

## Additional needs

In secondary school, teachers tend to be more focused on the work being done than on the actual child. **But you might still need walks outside, movement breaks, sensory rooms and all the rest.** **CONOR**

I've a lot of anxiety and my SNA knows I'm in foster care and she would check in with me about that, but no-one else mentioned it. If I'm feeling faint, I go to the school office, otherwise I'm holding on to the school wall. I need someone checking on me throughout the day.

**TANYA**

One of the challenges in secondary school from 1st to 3rd year, I was like a lone wolf trying to figure out how to cope. I was the kid that did the bad thing, I was wild. I think you should be allowed to question teachers, but this marks you out as a troublemaker. And I was. In your peer group, you can experience bullying, nasty rumours that affected my wellbeing. We did normal teenage things but got talked about. It was all blown out of proportion. They say when you're in care you're the same as everyone else, but there's a lot more rules, I had a Garda curfew from 11pm. My friend group didn't have the same rules. If I wanted to stay over at my friend's house for example, that was breaking the terms of curfew. But the school didn't understand, the Guidance Counsellor thought I was taking drugs, which I wasn't. My disability - Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD) - wasn't recognised in school. Others wanted to diagnose me with ADHD or ASD because sometimes these present along with FASD but that was not the correct diagnosis. FASD has a lot of different aspects; you can have a lot of brain damage as well as behavioural issues. And it gets worse when you get older. I wasn't given educational supports because FASD isn't recognised by the NCSE as a disability. Let's face it, there is a huge alcohol problem in Ireland and it's reckoned that there may be as

many as 1 in 20 with FASD but this isn't widely known. **KATE**

When you're held back from starting school, you're told you are stupid, but it turns out you were non-verbal and had a disability, and people treated you differently because of it.

**QUINN**

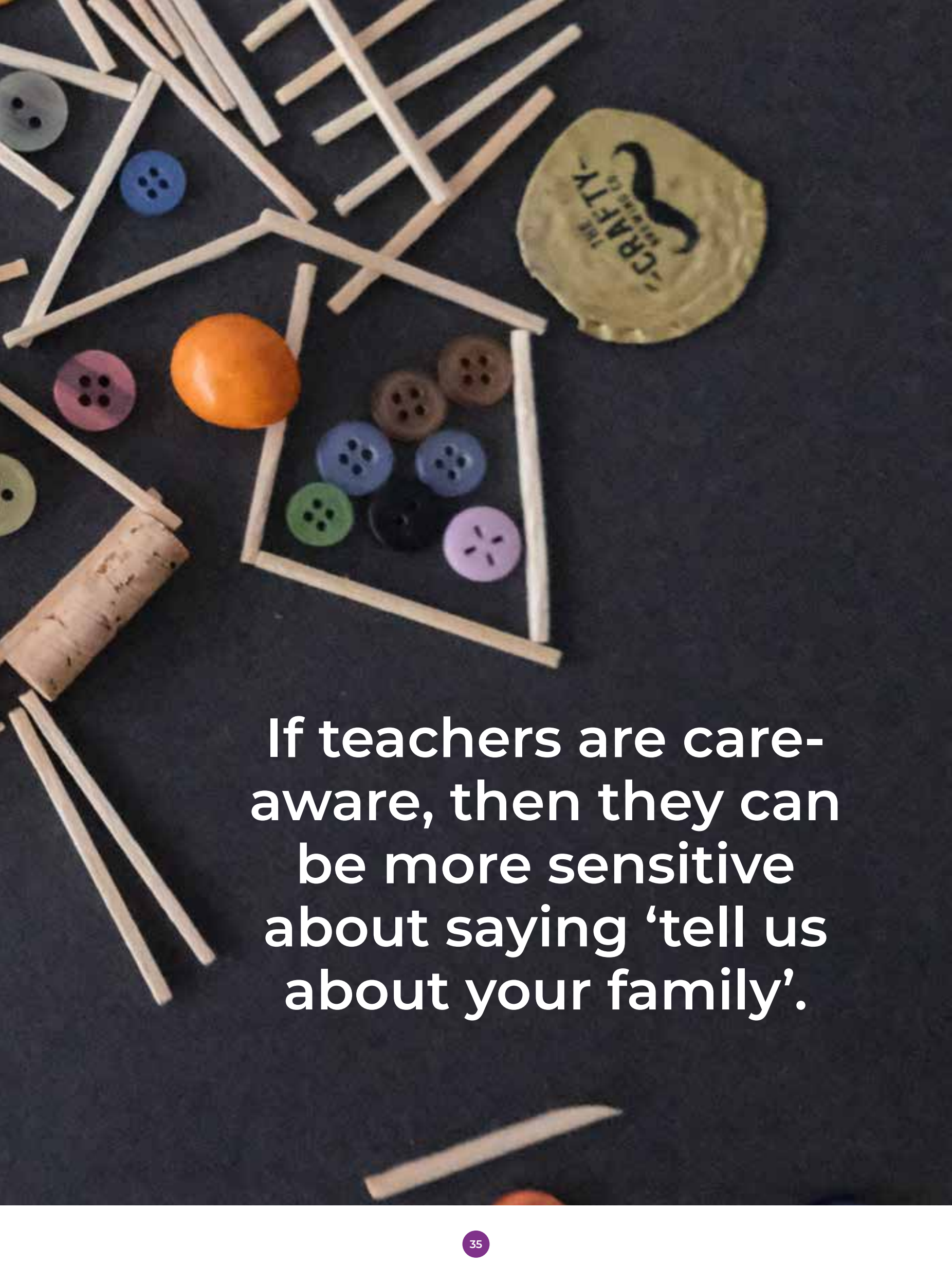
## Types of Care

The care system consists of different types of care:

- › **Foster care involves living with foster parents that care for children and look after them in their home.**
- › **Relative foster care is where a family member cares and looks after the child in their home.**
- › **Residential care is living in a house with other children in care and residential care staff.**
- › **Respite care is time away for a short period of time for the child from their foster home or residential centre.**
- › **Special Care care is a form of care for children aged between 11 and 17 who need secure therapeutic care to keep them safe from harm.**

Every child in care is supposed to have a care team. There may be different people in their care team.

All children and young people in care are required to have a social worker. Every child and young person living in residential care has a keyworker. An access worker helps to organise visits with the birth family. These visits are called access or contact. Lots of young people like to call it 'time with my family'. **LIAM**



**If teachers are care-aware, then they can be more sensitive about saying ‘tell us about your family’.**

## Importance of the Social worker

I had to put up a fight to get a social worker, I had a lovely one but she left. If you have no social worker your family visits cannot take place. I was five months without seeing my mother, and that was hard. If there's a school trip, you've no-one to sign your form. If you are getting older you have no-one to start getting your aftercare plan together for when you leave care at 18.

It all gets to be very stressful and frustrating and it can really get to you and make you depressed or angry. **CONOR**



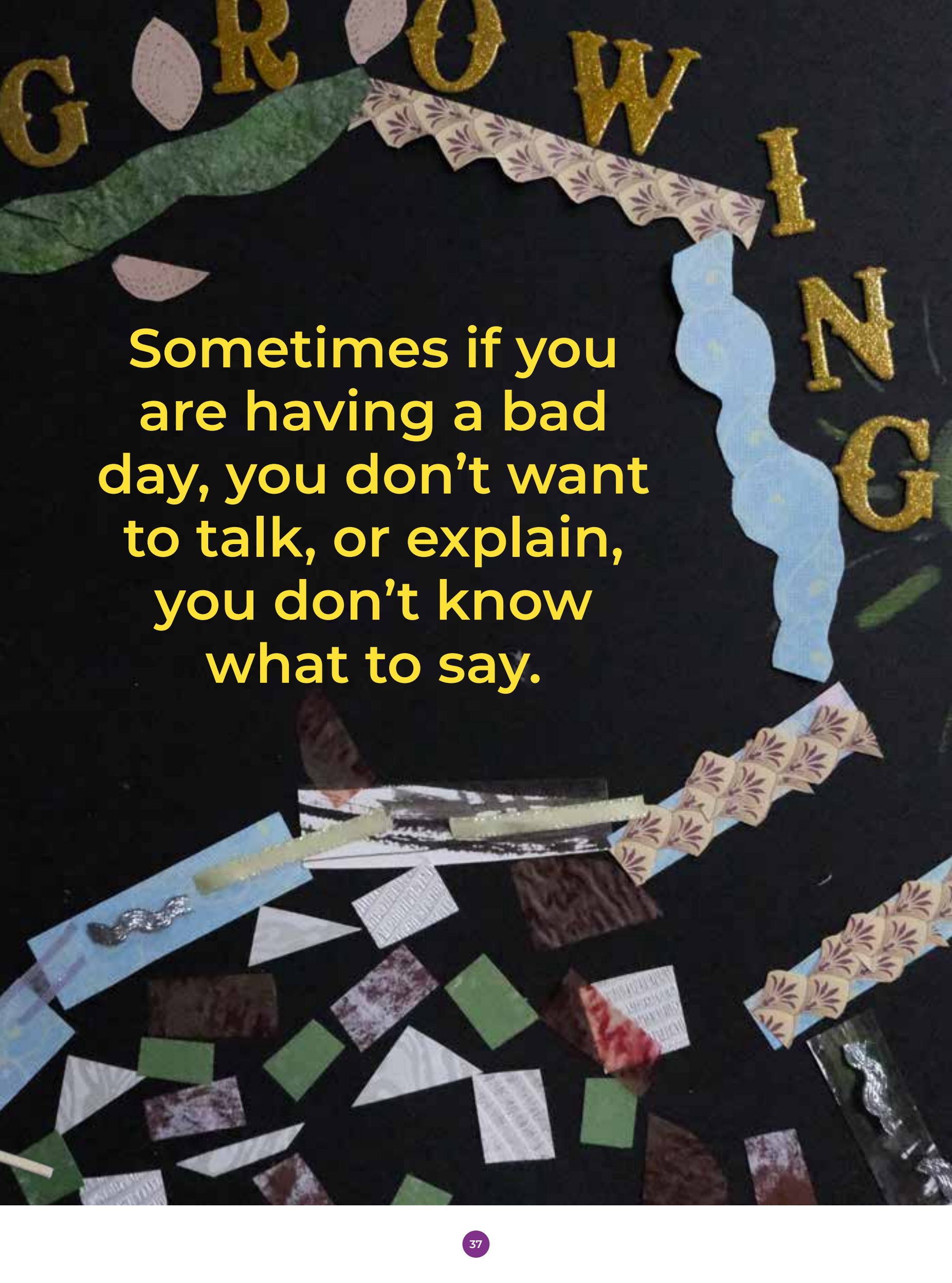
## Child in Care Review

There is a Child in Care Review meeting each year. Every professional that works with the child sits round the table: social worker, link worker and foster carers. Other professionals may also be asked to attend such as teachers, psychologists etc but it's not always the case, with some professionals just sending a report. Along with all the professionals, the child in care and their natural parents may also attend.

The aim is to check on how the child in care is getting on currently and whether other supports are needed. These meetings can be quite intimidating and nerve-wracking for children in care because there are so many professionals there and anything could be read out in front of everyone such as your behaviour over the last year, or incidents that may have occurred.

As a child this can be quite hard because if you haven't had a good year you feel like you're not a good person and that you're not going to get better. As these meetings are only done yearly, you feel like the plans will all be forgotten and nothing will be done until the next meeting. As a child in care these meetings can be quite a daunting affair with many kids' behaviour changing in the lead up to and after the meeting occurs. **LIAM**





Sometimes if you are having a bad day, you don't want to talk, or explain, you don't know what to say.

#CareAwareFamily  
Love Care

wanted Broken Accepted

Honesty growth

Stories Parents





# Recommendations





# Recommendations

## Build trust

One-on-one attention can build trust, and it doesn't have to be just talking, it can be doing a piece of maths, and you're having a chat while you're doing it. **Building trust for children in care is really important, because the child in care might be used to adults letting them down.** Even so, kids are resilient and open to making relationships, but they might not be able to initiate it, so the teacher has to put some thought into it.

You might be teacher number six in a short space of time, so the child might think, 'why bother?'. But if the teacher can acknowledge that even if it's for a short while, "I'm a person you can trust while you are here. For now, you are welcome and I want to help you." **LIAM**

Some students may be more extroverted and some more shy. It depends what they're willing to share. They might share more with a teacher, SNA or friends. It's all about relationships. In my situation, I would tell some of my friends and some of my teachers. **JACK**

## Treat us the same

It is important for teachers to treat any child or young person in care the same as all children. Don't single them out or make them feel different. **ELLA**

## School can also provide a distraction from home life, a space where children forget about their home situation.

They can breathe. Just focus on maths. Teachers should be mindful that children may not wish to talk about their home life or care experience, and to respect that. **ELLA**

Kindness, understanding and managing challenging behaviour when it surfaces without it being over-direct works. My siblings were in the same school but in a different foster family and that school was good at not treating us any differently to other children. The same rules applied to us as to other children, even though my sister had meltdowns as the trauma got to her. I also got overwhelmed at times too. I remember one day in school being overwhelmed on yard and the Principal brought everyone in, and one teacher stayed with me until I calmed down and then normalised it to other children having good and bad days. There was good emotional awareness of what was needed.

**LIAM**



## Focus on the Child

Every school system has to meet the needs of children in care and have a calm, positive approach. Respect is a vital thing. People in the care system are more vulnerable than others.

**KATE**

**Let a child be a child where possible. Children in care have to be so grown up in so many ways. It's a lot on a child. ELLA**

Children in care need to be treated as children, not as adults. They may act older than they are. They need leisure time. To just kick a ball around. Time to chill out and step away from school for a few minutes, then go back to the classroom. **JACK**

## Check and connect

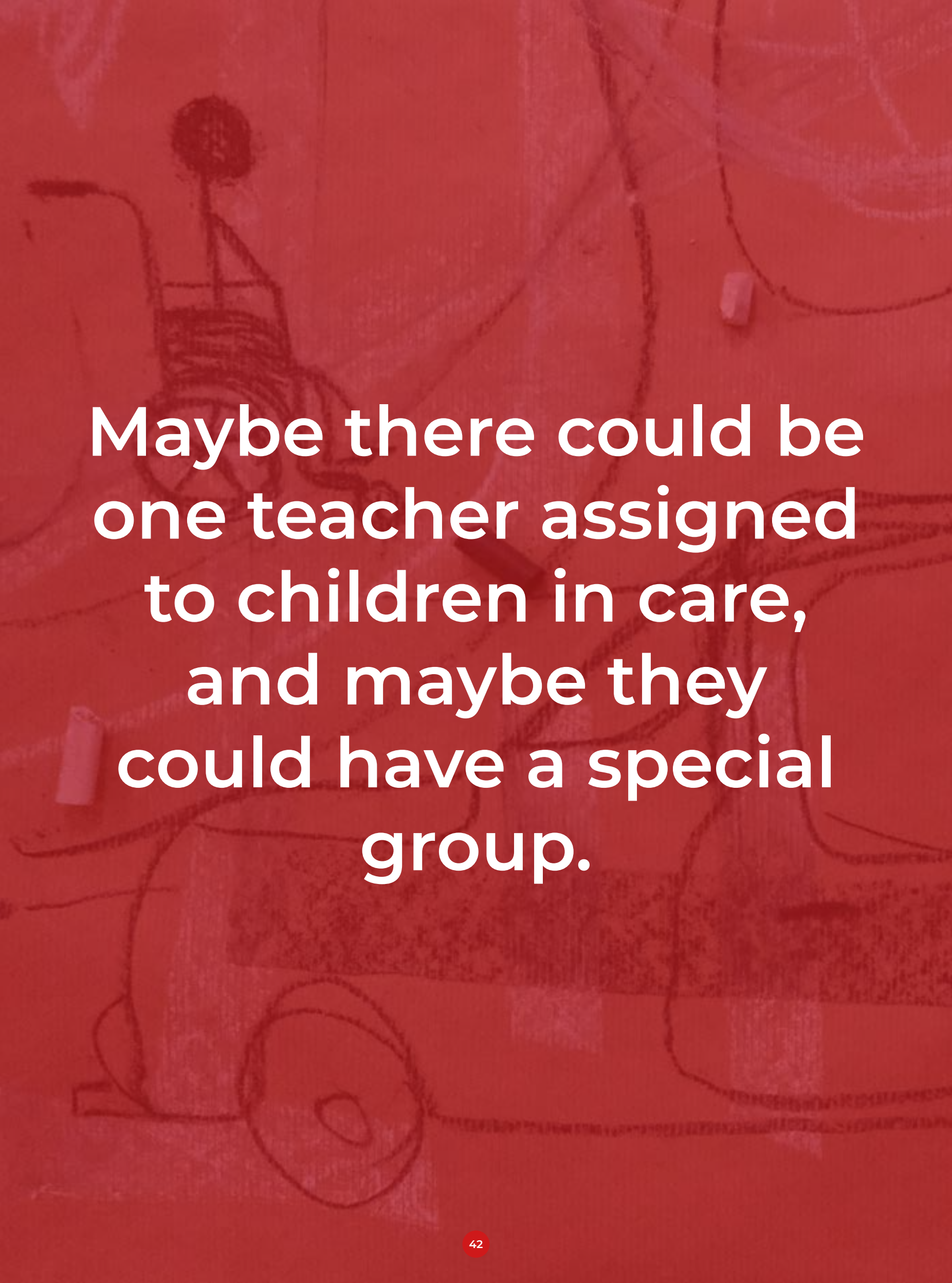
We have a thing in our school called check and connect: I've only had that since my Nan passed over. Those supports were there but I didn't know about them and no-one thought I needed them. What happens is they designate a teacher to you that you always get on with and you get to meet that teacher once or twice a week. It depends on what's going on and how you are doing. It is available in our school and it is very private also. You don't want everyone saying "What's he going out to that teacher for?"

There are a few designated teachers, everyone in the care team I suppose, if you were a teacher who cared you might be able to ask to join and get training to be a designated teacher. **CONOR**

Check-in with the child in the morning and before going home at the end of the day. Ask if they're ok, be aware if they say something important to them. Reach out if you haven't heard from them, if they're not turning up or not doing their homework. Give extra tuition or reduce their homework if needed. **ANNA**



Love Care  
wanted Broken  
Honesty growth Trust  
Stories Parents Home



**Maybe there could be  
one teacher assigned  
to children in care,  
and maybe they  
could have a special  
group.**

## Have a go-to person

It's so important that the Principal of a school is nice to you, both at primary and secondary. Any support can help you, like a Home School Liaison, but often you have to be the one to go and seek that out and that's ok for me because I can talk. I'm able to say what I need and want, but it wasn't always like that.

I know others in care who find it difficult to talk. It needs to be led by adults. **CONOR**

Maybe there could be one teacher assigned to children in care, and maybe they could have a special group. In my school there is a check in group for some students run by the Guidance Counsellor. **TANYA**

There's a combination of people and situations that need to be working together to make things work: you, an understanding foster family, a good social worker, Year Head, class coordinator, ongoing counselling, school routine and subjects you are interested in. School rules need to be flexible, not inflexible.

**KATE**

A child will know who to trust among school staff, it would be helpful if this person remained available to the child, to be a reliable go-to person. The ones I trusted were the ones who didn't ask me questions. My history teacher let me do what I needed to do. **ELLA**



## Set up a social group

I'd like to recommend to schools that a group is formed for children in care and that they can meet once a week and have a cup of tea and conversation. A teacher checking in also can make such a difference, just seeing how you are. **CONOR**

Have smaller groups and opportunities for circle time, circle of friends.

**KILDARE /DUBLIN SOUTHWEST CARE GROUP (KDC)**

**In my school there is a group, a check in group for some students run by the Guidance Counsellor.**



## Trauma-informed practice

Look at the bigger picture, observe the young person and see what is triggering them, work with them one on one. **ELLA**


Make more counselling hours available for all students who need it. **KDC GROUP**



As a teacher you can learn a lot about the child, what their triggers are, what their traumas are, and maybe you get to figure out an appropriate response if the child is triggered by something. **LIAM**

Teachers are pulled in every direction but for children in care, what's important is understanding what may be going on for the child and being there for them. **KATE**





Teachers can make such a difference, in a subtle way. Care needs to be normalised and we need to be talking about care from Junior Infants on.





## Be care-aware and promote awareness of care in the classroom

What would a care-aware teacher look like? They would be collaborative, observant, reflective, compassionate, non-judgemental, trauma-informed, proactive, trust-building, child-centred, adaptable, patient. **KATE**

Staff training is needed for all teachers on this and fine tuning the supports in each school.

## Some children have been in care for a very long time and it's a sensitive topic but also a reality. Children are in school from playschool up to Leaving Cert, and care families exist at every stage too.

Schools need to acknowledge this, that the traditional family is not everyone's situation. Teachers can make such a difference, in a subtle way. Care needs to be normalised and we need to be talking about care from Junior Infants on. **TANYA**

There's people asking questions about why you're in care, what care is, why you don't call your foster parents mom and dad, why you say you have two families, and all of this goes on through primary school. Because no one gets or understands it. **QUINN**

Make information available for teachers about the care system. Teachers have training days, TUSLA could do awareness talks with them. In TY, many businesses come and talk about what they do, so it would be great if TUSLA could come and meet students and tell everyone about their work. **KDC GROUP**

Awareness of care needs to be implemented in school from an early age. **JACK**

## Flexibility and breaks

There needs to be a lot more flexibility, more options to take or drop subjects. There's too much going on, too many subjects, classroom based assessments, too much pressure. Exams can bring you down and make you feel less smart than you are.

Make spaces available for time out and sensory rooms like in primary school: a meditation room with bean bags and special scents, and calm music where you can go to chill.



Be allowed a movement break if you need it. At primary, we used to be allowed to walk around the yard with our friends for 15 mins and you could chat and arrive and then be ready to start work. **KDC GROUP**





Quinn



Jade



Liam



Kate



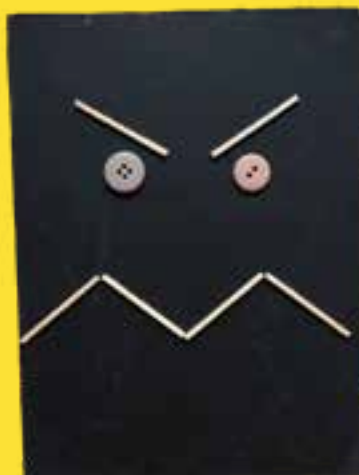
Michael



Ella



Tanya



Conor



Jack



Anna



Amelia



Michelle

## Take Care

In this book, we hear the voices of children and young people who have experience of the care system and how this lived experience has impacted their journey through education. The book not only provides unique insight into these children and young people's lives, but also shares children and young people's thoughts on the positive impact teachers can have on the lives of care-experienced children and young people, and recommendations for how teachers and other professionals can continue to be of vital support.

The children and young people who created this book said: "We would like teachers to know that there is an opportunity to make a positive difference in a child or young person's life... It's important for us to bring home just how important the school community is to a child in care. To students going through the care system and in school, we hope this book will bring some comfort and guidance."

Kids' Own Publishing Partnership is a children and young people's arts organisation and publishing house, and Ireland's only dedicated publisher of books by children, for children.

This book was commissioned by EPIC - Empowering People in Care. EPIC aims to champion the rights of care-experienced children and young people, ensure their voices inform the policy and practice that affects their lives, and cultivate a care aware society.



[www.kidsown.ie](http://www.kidsown.ie)

