

I wish you knew...

#CareDay19

Six things children in care want their teachers to know.

1. ... what being in care really means.

Children and young people are very aware that there are a lot of misconceptions about the care system. They encounter this with their peers, their teachers and the public. Assumptions are made about why they are in care, what their birth families are like, and what will happen to them in the future. In reality, many children in care return to live with their birth families, and care itself can take many different forms, from short term placements to kinship care and children's homes.

What you can do:

- Read things written by children in care themselves about their experiences, such as [Coram Voice's annual creative writing competition](#).
- Find out more about the care system with [Become's website](#) and [factsheets](#).
- Listen to children in care in your school and get their input, or consider reaching out to your local Children in Care Council.

2. ... we all have potential.

We know that young people sometimes think teachers and other adults in their lives don't hold the same expectations for them as for other young people. Teachers can have a huge role to play in determining educational progress and facilitating what happens when a young person eventually leaves school and moves onto further study or employment. Lots of young people aren't lacking in ambition, but might not have an expectation they'll be able to meet the ambitions they hold for themselves. Your role might not be raising aspirations but raising expectations and supporting young people in care to unleash their potential.

What you can do:

- Be visibly enthusiastic and aspirational for every child in care, and help them to identify what they might need to do to get where they want to in the future.
- Act as an advocate across your institution for children in care – challenge the narrative by talking supportively about your students within meetings and highlighting positive examples across school.

3. ... I don't want to be treated differently.

One of the main worries young people have about disclosing their care experience is that it will affect how others treat them – friends, teachers and other people in their lives. This might come from a well-meaning place; young people have told us that some teachers can become more lenient with them after learning about their life outside of school, or expect them to need extra help. School might be the place where looked after children feel most like children first, and children in care second, and so it's important they don't feel singled out or have their 'secret' accidentally revealed to others.

What you can do:

- Look at your school's procedures and consider your actions and how they might affect children in care differently and in ways visible to others (e.g. signing of homework diaries or permission letters for school trips; interruptions to the school day due to social worker meetings; naming of parents or carers etc).
- When specific support is offered, try to be discreet (e.g. we heard from one young person about a teacher who had 'LAC Coordinator' written on her office door).

4. ... no child in care is the same.

Statistics can be helpful in illustrating the scale of an issue or identifying a challenge to overcome. However, it's important for all teachers to look beyond the statistics and remember that each looked after child in school is different. Young people often tell us about teachers who have made unhelpful generalisations or assumptions, basing their expectations for them off experiences – both positive and negative - with other children in care they've taught previously. Language choices can make a real difference. We often hear how care-experienced young people dislike hearing or seeing terms such as 'LAC' which reinforce the idea they are a homogenous group with one shared experience – not individuals with unique personalities, interests and ambitions.

What you can do:

- Get to know each of your looked after students as individuals, demonstrate an interest in their lives outside of school and be cautious about comparing their experiences or behaviours to those of others you've taught.
- Make young person-friendly language choices and encourage your colleagues to do the same. Avoid 'LAC' or similar terms when speaking with young people.

5. ... it's not because we're not trying.

Being in care can come with a lot of challenges. Placement moves, changing social workers, navigating relationships with birth families and foster carers, coming to terms with why you are in care and dealing with any pre-care trauma, to name a few. All of that upheaval can make it really hard to concentrate in school or get homework done on time. Children in care don't want undue special treatment or leniency, but the challenges they face do need to be taken into account.

What you can do:

- Don't write children off for challenging behaviour or a drop in grades. Work with them to find solutions to help them succeed. Designated teachers, virtual schools, and your local authority children's services team may be able to help.
- Read up on some great case studies in the [Attachment Aware Schools](#) programme and see what else your school might be able to do.

6. ... what a big difference you can make.

In the words of one teacher who took part in our [Teachers Who Care](#) research:

"You are a vital person in that child's life and can make a transformational difference - so make it a positive one."