

Key speaker Plenary Conference

Supporting relational stability in foster care



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In this final session of the conference, I will focus on how relationships for children in out-of-home care can be supported and sustained beyond placement endings, recognising the importance for young people and foster carers to have an ongoing relationship even if they are no longer living together, along with the importance of foster care facilitating relationships with birth family.

I will draw on my own research over the past twenty years, and other key literature, and position this within the key themes that have emerged throughout the conference. A particular focus will be placed on mechanisms to restore relationships, and to establish social networks for children in out-of-home care. The concept of 'managed moves' to support placement endings will also be explored. Managed moves is a term used to ensure that placement endings include planned elements, in an attempt to ensure transparency and clarity for all involved. Examples will be drawn from research that differentiated between the placement ending 'event' and 'process' with the views and experiences of children, young people and foster carers being central to the latter. The issue of recording placement and relational stability will also be examined within the context of systematic recording, and administrative datasets. I will argue that often our focus on placement stability rather than relational stability is driven by data that are easy to collect rather than meaningful to collect.

Lastly, the presentation will position the themes within the policy and practice landscape in England, and recent emphasis on relationships in the recent Independent Review of Children's Social Care. The applicability of these for other child welfare systems, and international comparisons will also be considered.