Relationships Matter

A conversation tool to support practitioners reflect on caring for young people who are leaving care

Iriss

Relationships Matter conversation tool

This tool was created to support practitioners, individually and in groups, reflect on their views and values when continuing to care for young people who are leaving care (Children and Young People (Scotland) Act, 2014).

We hope these conversations support and enable:

- The identification of cultural approaches, attitudes and values that enable and disable relational-based practice when continuing relationships with young people as they leave care
- Consideration of, and action about, how to better support relational-based practice.

Anticipated outcomes

- Practitioners are more con dent to discuss continuing relationships with young people leaving care/other colleagues/partners
- Practitioners and teams have increased capacity for reflective practice about continuing relationships

Practitioners, teams and organisations have:

- Increased awareness of, and are better able, to articulate their cultures, attitudes and values around continuing relationships, boundaries and risk
- Identified how they enact, enable and disable relational- based care, and how they can better support this practice

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Preparing the cards

The cards in this version of the tool are designed to be printed on A4 paper. They should then be separated by cutting along the dotted line to form a pack of 100 cards in total.

Multiple sets of 'reflection' and 'action' cards are included after the question cards. These should be distributed throughout the pack and are intended to encourage reflection and to help you determine what further actions you may need to take.

Using the tool

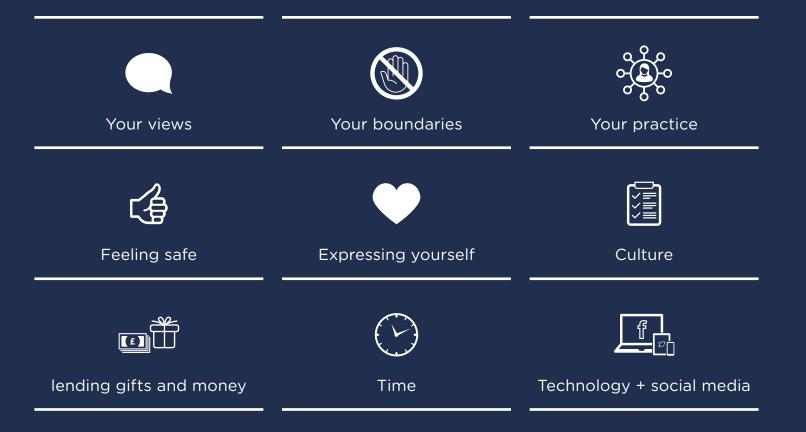This tool comprises a series of question cards.

It is flexible and can be used in a variety of ways, for example, by individuals, in one-to-one or group supervision, or in learning and development sessions.

There are no right or wrong ways to use the cards, however, there are three simple steps you can follow:

1. Choose a question (or group of questions)
2. Use the questions to prompt thinking and/or group discussion
3. Decide how you/your organisation will action the learning from your reflections and conversations

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Categories

Your views

Your boundaries

Your practice

Feeling safe

Expressing yourself

Culture

lending gifts and money

Time

Technology + social media

What is a relational boundary?

What do people bond over?

(for example, shared interests, similar ways of communicating, sharing emotional moments together)

What are your expectations about the length and continuity of relationships with young people?

People use the term 'grey areas' in relation to their relational boundaries.

What are 'grey areas'?

How do you negotiate them?

What is your duty as a professional when continuing relationships with young people?

What does an interdependent relationship look like?

What metaphors would you use to describe your preferred relational boundaries?

(for example: solid like a rock or fluid like water)

When it comes to continuing relationships, what in your view are the differences between professional, personal and private boundaries?

Do you think relationships should be managed and boundaries set?

What is your 'alcohol boundary'?

(for example, would you respond to a young person if they contacted you after you had drunk a glass or two?)

Are there any circumstances in which you would talk to young people about your experience of sex?

What does being 'private' mean to you?

Would you answer questions from young people about your previous experience of drug use?

Have you ever developed a 'special relationship' or a particularly close relationship with a young person?

If meeting a young person in your own time, would you smoke or drink with them, or in front of, them?

How much personal information is it appropriate to share with young people?

Is this similar to the personal information you share with you own children, nieces or nephews?

Do the young people you work with know where you live?

Is it ok to share information with young people about what you do in your time off or on holidays?

Do the young people you work with know members of your family?

What does 'being personal' mean to you?

How do you manage to convey the
professional and personal aspects of your role?

Would you say that you love any of the
young people you work with?

What are your preferences about
where you spend your time with young people?

(for example, in your home,
in a cafe, in a meeting room)

How do you manage young people's
expectations of your relationship?

Do you believe that young people in long-term placements need to feel loved or liked by their carers?

What does 'being professional' mean to you?

Are there questions or topics you find difficult to broach with young people?

(for example sexuality, identity, politics or moral issues?)

What are good ways to develop and continue a relationship with a young person?

What are your organisation's policies around taking photographs of young people and recording precious moments?

Do these support the way you would like to practise?

What would happen in your organisation if a young person wanted to change worker because they were not happy with the relationship?

How does legislation support and enable you to practise continuing care?

Does your organisation have policies that restrict continuing relationships with young people?

Could these policies be influenced or changed?

How do the policies and guidance that frame your work support and enable the continuation of relationships?

If they don't, how could they be influenced to change?

Flexible working practices (shift, working from home, hot desking) may hinder practitioners' ability to share information with colleagues about relationships that continue with the young people they care for.

How could this barrier be addressed?

Would you like your organisation's policies to be clearer?

If a practitioner is ill for a period of time, what contingencies are in place to ensure the young people they continue to have relationships with are informed and supported?

How do you reflect on the development of your relationship with a young person?

Are there other ways you could do this?

What may the benefits be of doing this differently?

What should be in place to ensure you feel safe and supported when supporting young people as they leave care?

What worries you the most about continuing a relationship with a young person after they leave care?

Do you ever feel anxious about the possibility of false allegations being made against you?

In what situations?

How would you respond if you saw a colleague with a young person and were not aware about any agreed arrangement for them to be in contact?

How can flexible relationship boundaries be kept safe?

Do you believe relationships with young people need to be evidenced or documented?

Do you need to document informal contact?

If you do, what do you record?

Of the young people you currently work with,
do you have a favourite?

Should workers always use 'side hugs'
if they give a young person a hug?

Do you think it is helpful to tell a young person
that you are angry with them?

Should 'horse play' or play fighting between
practitioners and young people always be avoided?

Is crying with a young person when you feel sad
for them likely to be helpful or unhelpful?

♥

Do you feel that you love young people you work with,
and how do you express this?

♥

Do you speak to young people about how you feel about them?

♥

How do you support young people to feel that you
really care and are not just at work to be paid?

♥

Would you sign off a text/facebook message
(or equivalent) with a kiss or smiley face?

Why would you do this?

♥

Would you wear a badge (or similar)
that highlights your political/religious preferences
and/or sexual orientation?

♥

Are there situations where you would not share something
a young person has told you with other practitioners?

Who is responsible for the relationship between you
and a young person as they leave care?

Should this responsibility be made explicit?

How can this responsibility be
modelled to be understood?

Who do you most often talk to about
your relationships with young people?

When do you have this kind of conversation,
and why do you choose these people/this time?

Do your relationships with young people come to an end?

If so, when and how?

What do you think about the terms
'exiting a service' and 'ending a relationship'?

What are your organisation's expectations about
continuing relationships with young people?

Does your organisation support and enable you
to continue relationships with young people?

If so, how?

Is gender important to continuing relationships?

What age/gender balances do you consider to be appropriate?

(for example, what do you think about a 40-year-old man
continuing a relationship with an 18-year-old young woman?)

Is there a shared understanding of the different
perspectives about continuing relationships in your team?

Would you be happy to lend a book, CD or DVD
to a young person?

Would you be happy to borrow a book,
CD or DVD from a young person?

Do you ever buy gifts for young people
on their birthday or at Christmas?

Would you accept a Christmas gift
from a young person or parent?

What do you spend your own money on when in the company
of a young person and what expenses do you claim back?

Would you ever lend or give money to a young person?

How would you respond if a young person gave you a gift you suspected was stolen?

What messages should you give to a young person about your availability?

Do you ever spend additional time with a young person or a group of young people when you are not on shift or at work?

How realistic is it for practitioners to have time to continue relationships with young people?

When is it appropriate to be supporting a young person who no longer accesses the service you provide?

Would you ever invite a young person to spend time with your friends and family?

Would you invite a young person to go away on a short trip or holiday with you?

If you were going to a football match or music event in your own time and knew a young person you work with who would be interested in going, would you invite them?

Are you flexible about your working hours so you can be available for important occasions?

(for example, a birthday celebration, Children's Hearing, review, or school meeting?)

Would you send a text to a young person while you were not at work - at a time that this contact might be welcome or helpful?

(for example a birthday, a job interview or a difficult time?)

If you stay in contact with a young person using facebook, what are your expectations of this contact?

Under what circumstances would you give out
your personal phone number?

Would you connect with a young person on twitter or facebook?

If so, what are your expectations about your relationships
with them (and others) via this technology?

How can we negotiate issues of vulnerable young people
putting themselves at risk via new technology?

Would you consider accepting a friend request
from a young person you worked with?

What impact do educational and generational differences have on the use of social media as a way to keep in touch?

What would you do if a young person had your personal number and called you late at night?

Do you answer?

What if it's your work phone?

What are your organisation's policies on engaging with young people via social media?

What may happen to your relationship with a young person if you need to block them from accessing your twitter or facebook account?

Reflections

To support your reflections, you may want to consider your own, your team's and your organisation's:

1. Choice of question(s)
2. Approach to relational-based practice
3. Learning

Depending on how you want to action your reflections you may want to have a pen and paper, or an audio recorder to hand.

Action

If you have learned something new:

1. What needs to happen to enable this learning to become part of your practice?
2. What needs to happen so you can be better supported to practise this way?

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The Relationships Matter conversation tool is produced by Iriss, and has been developed by people who care for, and support, young people with experience of leaving care. It is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.