

# CARE EXPERIENCED VOICES

De-escalation tips for professionals 2023

**missing  
people**

Registered charity in England and Wales (1020419)  
and in Scotland (SC047419)

Knowing the child and what they as an individual will need

Stay Calm and Be Kind

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If there is an argument, separate the young people

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## Stay Calm and Be Kind

“No screaming and shouting. I think anyone who has been through the care system would have difficulties or challenges with kind of traumatic situations or experiences, so the worst thing you can do is scream and shout at someone in that scenario, especially if it's a trigger.”

“I walked out, something had hit the nerve and I needed to get out and my foster carer at the time did end up sending me a message but it was more of a case of “You OK? Is everything alright?” and just a little bit of a joke with a TV show that I like, you know, “When are you coming back to STAR Labs?” Little bit of a joke from the Flash, but just making sure that I was OK. They knew that I needed that space. That, from whatever hit that nerve, I can't even remember, to be honest, it was so long ago, but things like that do help a little bit, because then you can end up going back. And it's like, yeah, it's just it was this and just needed a bit of space.”

## Knowing the child and what they as an individual will need

“Not every foster kid is the same. He might not deserve as much patience as I do. I might need more patience than he does. I might not be deserving of as much time as he is. He might take more time to calm down than me. Do you know what I mean? So we are not all the same nor should have the same respect. But everyone should be respected you know what I mean? I go for walks but you do not go for walks you know what I mean?”

“I think structure. They gave me structure. When they were upset they would tell me this is what I do when I am upset. And they would say to me. You have your time. I have my time. Giving me that extra time. And she told me what she needed as well. Respect for respect. She might speak to me, but she needed respect. And she gave me comfort. And to know what she wanted as well. Even though she is the adult.”

# Listening

“Take time and listen to their side of things.”

“Individually talking or even talking as a group would be a good idea, or even both doing like a group talking and an individual talk would have been like really helpful to understand the situation. Using that energy into something more positive.”

## Don't blame anyone until you have had a chance to speak to everyone

“I'm like, you didn't even come and talk to me about the situation and you come back like you're kind of targeting me on that situation. You only spoke to one person about the situation and stuff like that, so I just kept either targeted or felt alone and like they didn't care about my side or they didn't care about like me.”

“Sometimes your keyworker or your person blames things that you haven't done on you. I would get really annoyed because I would have told them that I hadn't done it and they would still blame it on me. So then I would just either walk out the house, go on a walk, and then if they message me and say, ah, it's all your fault, and like carried it on, then I would be like I don't wanna go back in that situation unless they apologise.”

## If there is an argument, separate the young people

“I’d separate the two individuals and I would call for a staff member like immediately and then I would speak to both individuals separately, get an account of what’s happened. I’d then speak with a member of staff, get them to speak to the individuals as well, and then confer back, and come up with a plan or strategy going forward and more often than not... It was just over petty, little things, that was like a power trip. And then when you talk it through they’re best of buddies again.”

(Talking about being told to go to their room and whether this is effective strategy )“Yes because I would be given time off like. I would not be forced into something. You are giving me time by not speaking to me. I would not have to come out of my shell straight away. I can come out of my room and explain what happened. It gives me time to think about myself . And get some control back.”

## Checking in

“I just feel like none of them cared. Like if I got angry, I would like, I would get angry and then I would take myself out of that situation. So I didn’t make the situation worse and none of them came and checked on me. They checked on the other person, but they never checked on me. So I just kind of felt like alone and stuff because I felt like I would have stayed if they started talking to me about this situation, like the next day or something.”

## Distraction

“You've got to separate and do activities that might put you in a good mood, if you've got a shit day and everyone's in a bad mood, the last thing you wanna hear is “come on guys, let's sit down and watch a movie together.” It's because it's easier for the staff all to be together in one room. You know, that's them being scared about something kicking off if they're on their own. But it comes with the job. It's because of that fear that the adults have got, that it spirals that emotion out of control.”

“Maybe separate the young people. And if there was more staff like in the building... that staff member would go out with the young person. So instead of like just letting them go on then calling the police, I think it's the duty of the carers to go and initiate conversation and try and bring that young person back. or if they end up then going out, they're diverted to a different activity, or take them for some food. I know that can be looked at as rewarding bad behaviour, but there comes a time when you need to meet in the middle.”

## Helping the young person to get perspective

“It's about reminding the young person like, you know, this is what real life is, you know, come back to the moment, is it really impacting on you or can you go and do this for a minute? Or do you wanna go for a walk? Or it's about diffusing it.”

“It is the adult or the carers responsibility to kind of instigate that thought of “Do I need to like kind of overreact now?” Like I said, me as a young person, I don't think it would have just come into my head like ohh I'm feeling a bit angry now, I think I'm gonna take a step back and have a fag. Cause yeah, it took me, I feel blessed at 22 to have the understanding of my emotions and kind of my trigger points. They should be doing a lot more therapeutic work I think towards trigger points, understanding fight or flight trauma responses and widening the tolerance, building relationships.”

Honesty and transparency in setting boundaries

Give leeway

Respect goes both ways

Sharing power

**Building**

**relationships,**

**being flexible**

Not threatening placement moves

Providing better alternatives

**missing  
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## Respect goes both ways

“There was people in my childhood that I had a lot of respect for, and I wouldn't mess around because of the relationship we had. And it wasn't because they screamed and shouted at me and told me what to do, it's because they respected me as an individual. And if I made bad choices, they didn't punish me for it. They told me, you know, their opinions and you know, because coming through the system and any young person or any child really, you know, they've gotta be taught the correct way to behave. So I've not ever been taught the correct way to behave. How can you punish someone for not knowing any different?”

“Respect. Just be respectful what you say. Be mindful. Whatever you say.”

## Give leeway

“It's about giving that leeway. Do you know what I mean? Even though young people have got vulnerabilities and they've got complex needs, if you don't give them that, then it's going to affect them and impact them at a later stage because they've never learned. And that's when they say that like 'you give them an inch and they take a mile'. I say 'If you've never given an inch, they're always gonna take a mile'.”

“I just think like making allowances for that kind of arguing behaviour. Like you would if they were two brothers.”

## Sharing power

“I think there’s so many rules and regulations around people in care that have to be followed, that there’s certain things that I’m just like, give them some slack. You don’t have to be so like “we are in charge” because more often than not, when it gets to the point where they have to call the police, it’s because they don’t have the power to do anything. So stop tricking young people into thinking you have. Because they will overpower you. You don’t have to trick them for them to show you respect, they will if you build that bond.”

“We’re too quick to make judgments, and kind of put the hand down to slam and show the power rather than having that like ‘we are human, there’s people dealing with emotions’.”

“I was never allowed like my alone time.”

## Honesty and transparency in setting boundaries

““I was sixteen and I wanted to be with some people. They posed a risk to me. They said ‘you can’t do that’. And I asked why and they said ‘we can’t tell you that’. Tell me why I cannot be with them or leave me alone. They put me on the child protection register. They did not tell me what they were protecting me from.”

“You need to know things. They are your friends. And I understand that some people are really bad people. They are not good for you. Your friends are doing...You deserve to know. You just need to know. Are your friends selling drugs? Are they hanging out with people they should not be hanging out with? Just tell you. You know what I mean.”

“When they did not tell you things? I think that was opposite from care.”

“Yeah, if I understood reasons and stuff if I can’t go out with my friends, if I understood the reasons and they were valid reasons, then I would have listened to him.”

## Not threatening placement moves

“So I think it’s having that security that you can’t just be kicked out, that you are allowed to express your emotions in a way and then, you know, seeking help and support in what better ways that can be expressed.”

“I think as well like dealing with care experienced young people’s emotions, there’s always that threat in a home that it can be removed. Like you can be removed from that home, so there’s always that element of bottling up emotions until it becomes that state that they can’t be controlled because you don’t know how to express yourself in a way that’s going to be accepted without someone turning around and being like, I can’t deal with this.”

## Providing better alternatives

“Something that I think would help like if you’re being told not to go out with people or a specific group, I think an alternative, maybe rather than going out with the family, if that’s not something that can always be done, an alternative could be having offers in place to maybe join like something like a youth club or certain events that social services might hold where you can meet other young people in care and be able to make new friends with different people.”

(If a young person goes out to meet friends that are considered unsafe and the carer threatens she’ll be reported missing if she goes )“It’s not her fault that she’s got friends that are unsafe. It’s because of her upbringing and the non-social life that young people have in the care system. That ends up being the only friends that they have cause they’re the only people that latch on to the vulnerabilities of the young people. The adults need to be aware of that and potentially offer other social groups or take the time to look into, I don’t know, activities or clubs they could join where they could make friends that are more positive.”

Understanding mental health

Understanding power dynamics

# Understanding

# us

Trauma-informed practice

Building skills

## Understanding mental health

“I never really learned, I had a prognosis then years later of my complex PTSD, whereas if my adults and carers knew about that beforehand, they would understand the kind of freeze, fawn, fight and flight responses. And once you understand that about a young person, you're able to work with them to widen their window of tolerance. But if you don't have an understanding, a psychological but basic understanding of someone with complex needs, then you're not going to be able to deescalate the situation and it's going to get worse.”

## Understanding power dynamics

“There's this power imbalance, especially between young people living in a residential home, from my own experiences, the oldest one becomes the top-dog of the house. The staff have got to be aware of that? And I think it's about, when you've got young people living together in a home as a group, it's about establishing that kind of group dynamics, and getting one another to see equality between one another.”

## Trauma-informed practice

“Young people who have been through trauma, really complex trauma, it takes a long time to heal.”

“They might hear it (a particular trigger someone has )and go that is a bit stupid. Why would that set you off? Or why would that do anything for you. It is because they have not been in the situation for that trigger to develop. It is not something they have had to deal with.”

“They do not think it will be a trigger for you because it is not a trigger for them.”

## Building skills

“If you want a young person to reach their truest potential and develop into an adult that is, you know, successful and empowering and motivating and pass that on to their children, then they’ve got to have that guidance, they’ve got to have someone that is willing to put that work into them because a baby is not born with skills and understanding of how to be in this world.”

(Talking about negotiating in advance )“Yer, yer people would be less likely to fly off the handle. They need to have an idea of what to do in the situations. How to deescalate things.”

“Tell him it’ll be OK, or like, tell him that they can feel these emotions. Like, tell him like a better way to express it. Maybe not to throw the mug, but tell them they are allowed to feel angry, just like deal with it in a better way.”

“And maybe like a good way to resolve that issue would be put in them both into an activity where they can express anger like boxing and that’s something that they can do together and that’s kind of like that relationship would be mended itself then as well.”