

“Mind Your Language”

Practice Hub Guidance in Collaboration with Rights and Participation

# Introduction

The words children and young hear and the words you use are important.

We wanted to share this short briefing paper to summarise some of the messages our young people have shared with us.

Our work involved discussions with children and young people from the Children in Care Council (CICC) and our Care Leavers Forum (CLF) and we hope that you can talk about these messages with confidence. This guide also includes some examples where you may have discussed these topics with your children and young people and where it may have already influenced your thinking and practice*.*

# Young People Told Us There is a ‘Language’ of Care

The language you use is very personal and very specific to them as individuals. Young people have asked that professionals take the time to discuss the words they would like you to use with them. Sometimes young people can say things like they “don’t care” when they probably do but do not understand what you mean. Please always ask again and check that the words you use are ok to use with them.

# Words to Consider with your Child or Young Person

The words and phrases we use every day are constantly changing. We are currently seeing a national move away from using terms such as “contact”, “placement”, “respite” and “siblings”.

Birmingham Children’s Trust has adopted the term “child in care” instead of “LAC”, “looked after” or “CiC”. Our young people have been very clear that they are not acronyms but rather children and young people that just happen to be in care or care experienced. They have told us they are definitely not LAC – as are not lacking in anything!

**Contact** – “Family time” or “seeing mum/dad/nan/grandad” is preferable to the term contact.

**Respite** – This literally means ‘relief from’ and usually refers to when carers have time away from their foster children/young people. Other terms young people have expressed a dislike for are word such as “breakaway” or “short break” - using an individual’s actual name is preferred e.g. “so you’re off to Susan’s?”

**Siblings** – Sometimes we use more formal words when there is nothing wrong with saying brother or sister.

The above is not an exhaustive list but hopefully will get you thinking about your language. Nationally, information about children and young people’s preferred words are being updated all the time. We recognised that this is an ongoing discussion we need to have with our children and young people. We do not want to say words are wrong or must be changed but rather that we need to be thoughtful about the word we choose to use.

Here are some tips you can use in your day to day work:-

* Have ongoing and regular discussions with your children and young people and ask which terms they prefer.
* Make a note of them and regularly revisit and update them. Challenge other professionals to use these words.
* Support and enable your children and young people to influence and shape the words you and other professionals use.

Further reading is available in the publication [Language that Cares – Changing the Way Professionals Talk About Children in Care](https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms2/media/16459/language-that-cares-eng-1.pdf).