

HOW CAN WE ENSURE THAT CHILDREN IN OUR CARE SYSTEM GET THE BEST POSSIBLE START TO LIFE? DR DOMINIC MCSHERRY

TO MAKE THE MOST OUT OF THIS SCRIPT, YOU COULD:

- Stick it in your book as a record of watching Dom's animation
- Pause the animation and make notes as you go
- Add your own illustrations to the sheet
- Create your own animation to accompany it
- Add notes from classroom discussions
- Make notes of areas you will investigate further
- Make notes of key words and definitions
- Add questions you would like answered – you can message Dom through the comment box at the bottom of his article:

www.futurumcareers.com/how-can-we-ensure-that-children-in-our-care-system-get-the-best-possible-start-to-life

SCRIPT:

Did you know that, in the UK in 2020, over 100,000 children were in care? In the UK, a child in care will generally be in one of five types of placement.

In both adoption and foster care, the child lives with a different family to the one they were born into. In adoption, responsibility for the child is given completely to the new carers.

In a foster placement, the birth parents and local authority share a legal responsibility for the child, and the foster parents receive money to help look after them.

If everything is going well for the child in foster care, then the local authority may not to be involved anymore, turning the arrangement into a Residence Order.

Kinship care is when a friend or relative looks after the child.

The fifth option involves children returning to live with their birth parents if they can care for them again.

Every child's experience of care is unique, and many children build strong, loving relationships with their new families.

However, compared to children who are not in care, they tend to do less well at school and have a higher chance of becoming unemployed or being sent to prison. They are also more likely to have health problems and low self-esteem.

Dr Dominic Sherry is a developmental psychologist based at Ulster University in Northern Ireland.

Dom and Dr Grainne McAnee are working on a unique research project known as the Care Pathways and Outcomes Study.

This is the only study in the world to follow a population of children through the care system and includes every one of the 374 children who were in care and under the age of five in March 2000 in Northern Ireland.

This study will help us to understand how children form new parental relationships, what difficulties they might experience, and how these might be overcome.

While adoption is often considered the 'gold standard' placement for children in care, Dom and his colleagues found that children in other types of placement were just as happy and had equally strong attachments to their carers. The important thing was not the type of placement, but whether they had been in the same placement for a long period of time.

The study is now following the young people through their late teens and into early adulthood. This can be a tricky time for young people as they start to seek independence and peer pressure plays a strong role in their behaviour.

Dom and his colleagues hope to understand how and why the risk of placement breakdown increases during the teenage years.

Dom's work in developmental psychology has shown it is vital that young people's voices are heard. What could you achieve as a developmental psychologist?
