

Foster Care and Mother's Day

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Mother's Day is upcoming, and we can anticipate that this may evoke strong, complex feelings for our young people in care. Given the amount of relational loss that our young people have suffered, Mother's Day can be a representation of that very loss and separation. It may even provoke mixed feelings - the inner conflict of our young people knowing that they have been let down by a caregiver/parental figure, yet desperately seeking reunion with that parental figure can cause confusion and distress. Our young people may have mother's that:

- Are no longer in contact with our young people due to court orders
- Have been 'cut off' by our young people as a way of self-protection and preservation
- Unable to commit to contact arrangements
- Have passed away or too unwell to be present in the child's life
- Never had a relationship with the child due to early removal

All of our young people will have experienced a sever in the attachment with their biological mothers at some point, in addition to siblings, family or previous foster carers that have represented a motherly figure in their life. To navigate Mother's Day for each of our young people within our homes, extra sensitivity is required.

Here are a few tips that you can consider over the next few days.

Naming and acknowledging: our young people will most likely know that Mother's Day is on the horizon due to advertisements, or conversations and activities taking place at school. Rather than ignoring or waiting for the young person to mention it, speaking about this difficult topic in a trusted relationship that the child experiences relational safety through will help to ease any anxieties or tensions they have around the conversation.

Using empathy, we can gently encourage the child to share thoughts and feelings surrounding Mother's Day, helping them to feel validated in an emotionally safe context.

Asking how they would like to celebrate/mark it: if the child does not have contact plans with their mother or mother-figure(s) for the day, you can ask the child what they would like to do in advance. This creates a sense of autonomy and healthy control through the decision-making process. It also lowers the risk of plans being disrupted, or the child becoming overwhelmed on the day because they haven't been prepared in advance. There is no wrong or right way to celebrate/mark the day and accepting that the child's emotions may lead this decision in the initial stages is crucial for us to hold in our minds. It is the duty of the caregivers to bring in the rational perspective and help the child make an informed decision before the day begins.

Be conscious of triggers: our young people have experienced a tremendous amount of loss and days like this can bring those feelings to the surface. Plans might change because of this and that's ok! Using the child's existing inner and outer resources, techniques, and the important relational connections in their life (e.g. you!), consider what can be offered to soothe and nurture any emotionally unsafe reactions, expressions, or presentations either in direct relation to, or indirect relation to the plans of the day.