



Reflective Fostering Study

Participant Information Sheet (Carer)

Full study title: *The Reflective Fostering Programme – improving the wellbeing of children in care through a group intervention for foster carers: a randomised controlled trial*

A number of fostering organisations are collaborating with University College London (UCL), the University of Hertfordshire (UH), Kings College London (KCL), the University of East Anglia (UEA), and the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families (AFNCCF) on a study about how best to support foster carers and kinship (or connected) carers.

We would like to invite you to take part in this research study. Before you decide whether to do so, it is important that you understand the research that is being done and what your involvement will include. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. We know this document is quite long, but it is important that you have all the information you need before making a decision about taking part. Do not hesitate to ask us anything that is not clear or for any further information you would like to help you make your decision. You'll see below that anyone who is thinking about taking part will be invited to a meeting where they can ask any questions before deciding if you want to go ahead.

1. Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part because you have completed a form requesting more details about the study. To be eligible to take part you should be a foster carer or connected/kinship carer working for a local authority or independent fostering agency in the UK. You must be caring for a foster child aged between four and 13 years, the child must have been in placement with you for at least four weeks and the care plan is for them to remain in your care for at least four months.

2. Why are we doing this research study?

A secure and supportive foster placement gives children the best chance in life. But many children in care have emotional and behavioural difficulties, that can make it a challenge to meet their needs. Carers report that they don't receive the support they need,

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and this can affect the quality of care they provide and can lead to placement breakdown, creating yet more disruption for the child. The goal of this research study is to look at a new programme called the Reflective Fostering Programme which was developed to support foster carers (including kinship/connected carers). We want to find out whether offering foster carers/kinship carers the chance to attend Reflective Fostering groups is effective in improving the carer-child relationship and promoting the child's emotional and behavioural well-being.

3. What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research study is to evaluate the Reflective Fostering Programme. This study will help us to establish whether attending the Programme alongside any usual support you might be receiving is more effective than usual support alone, in:

- promoting the emotional and behavioural well-being of the child(ren) in your care;
- reducing your levels of stress and increasing your quality of life;
- improving your relationship with the child(ren) in your care;
- supporting placement stability;
- reducing any feelings you may have of burnout.

We will do this by comparing two groups of carers. Half of those who agree to take part in the study will attend the Reflective Fostering Programme in addition to the usual support received from their local authority or independent fostering agency. The other half will continue to receive whatever usual support is currently provided. Foster/kinship carers will be randomly allocated to one of these two groups.

4. Why will only half of those taking part attend the Reflective Fostering Programme?

Although we are hopeful that the Reflective Fostering Programme will help both you and the child(ren) in your care, and some small studies we've done show promising results, we don't yet have the evidence from research to know whether that is true or not. We don't want local authorities or independent fostering agencies to be investing money in this Programme if we aren't sure that the Programme is going to make a real difference!

By having two groups, with each of you randomly selected to either attend the Reflective Fostering Programme or to continue with the usual support you are currently offered, we will be able to see what difference the Programme makes. Following you up over 12 months will let us find out if the Programme makes any difference in the short-term (4 months) and the longer-term (12 months).

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We know it can feel disappointing to be part of a study like this if you choose to take part and then find out that you are in the group that will not be offered the new intervention. But by taking part in this study, you will be helping all of us to learn what kind of approach helps children and carers most.

5. Do I have to take part in the study?

No you don't. Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. However, at the moment the Programme is only offered as part of this research study.

6. What will happen if I do not take part?

If you decide you do not want to take part, the support you usually receive from your local authority or independent fostering agency will not be affected in any way. Furthermore, if you do agree to participate you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

7. Can you tell me a bit more about the Reflective Fostering Programme?

The Reflective Fostering Programme is a new programme, developed by the AFNCCF, to support foster carers and kinship carers of children aged between 4-13 years old. The Programme focuses on strengthening the relationship between foster/kinship carers and the child(ren) in their care. The Programme consists of 10 sessions lasting 2-3 hours, run with groups of up to 10 carers. It offers carers practical ideas and support to develop their reflective skills, i.e. help them think about and make sense of their own thoughts, feelings and behaviours and those of the children in their care. The group is designed to be supportive, non-judgmental and respectful to the unique and important role carers play in the life of a child in care.

8. How long will my part in the study take?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be involved in it for approximately 12 months. This is because we want to follow everyone up over a period of time, to see how you and the child in your care are getting on.

9. What should I do if I'm interested in taking part?

At the time of receiving this information sheet, you will have been asked to provide some information to check you are eligible to join the study, and invited to attend an online information session to find out more. At this meeting you will have the opportunity to ask any questions about the study and to decide whether you wish to participate. You do not have to attend an information meeting to join the study. If you agree to take part, you will be asked to provide your consent to take part.

If you no longer plan to attend the coffee morning, please let the local site co-ordinators Shayma Izzidien and/or Alay Rangel know reflectivefostering@annafreud.org.

10. What will happen to me if I take part in the study?

After you have given consent you will be asked to complete some questionnaires about yourself and one child in your care (what we call 'the nominated child'). These questionnaires will ask about the child's behaviour, your current stress levels and what your goals are for you and the child you are caring for. All questionnaires will be filled in online, but we'll show you how to do this, so don't worry if you don't feel confident about using technology! After the questionnaires have been completed for the first time, we will use an electronic system to randomly allocate you to one of the groups in the study: Reflective Fostering Programme in addition to usual support, or usual support only. You will be contacted to let you know which group you are in.

The same online questionnaires will be repeated two more times: after four months (which is when the programme is over) and again eight months later (12 months after you join the study) for us to check how things are going over a longer period. If you are no longer caring for the same child at either point, we would still like to follow up how things are going with you and will also try to follow things up with the child's new carer.

For those who are attending the Reflective Fostering Programme:

Shortly after completing the questionnaires for the first time, those carers who are allocated to the Reflective Fostering group will begin attending the Programme. The Programme will consist of **10 sessions lasting 2-3 hours, over a period of up to 12 weeks** delivered by a social worker and a foster carer who have been trained to deliver the Programme. Groups will be of up to 10 carers. They will usually run during term-time, and at a time that makes it as easy as possible for you to attend alongside your caring responsibilities. The Reflective Fostering sessions will be held online. As part of the new normal many of us have been required to maintain contact and facilitate social interaction online, and so we hope that most of you may be familiar with using online meeting software. However, we understand this can be worrying for some. To help you feel confident in using Zoom and/or MS Teams to take part in the sessions, we will be providing foster carers with guides, and there will always be a Facilitator to provide support with this.

You will get the most benefit from the Programme if you attend all the sessions, so it is important to consider your availability over the 12 weeks before agreeing to take part.

Each session will be video-recorded or audio-recorded, and these recordings will be shared with Reflective Fostering Programme Consultants at the AFNCCF. This is done for two reasons. The first reason is so that the group leaders can review the session with one of the team who developed the Programme to obtain feedback on how they are delivering it. This will help them to deliver the Programme as well as possible. The second reason is so that we can check how closely the facilitators follow the Reflective Fostering Programme. Although you may be visible and/or what you say might be audible in some parts of the recording the focus is not on you – it is on the group leaders - and you are not being evaluated.

11. If I'm attending the Reflective Fostering Programme do I have to agree to video-/audio-recording?

Yes – the sessions have to be video-/audio-recorded for the reasons described above.

Although the videos are being used to record the facilitators, if your session is delivered online via Zoom or MS Teams, your face will be captured in the recording as all attendees will be visible on the screen.

We appreciate that some people can feel a bit worried about being recorded, particularly if they are sharing confidential information that may identify them or the children they care for. We want you to be reassured that the intention is to focus on the Facilitators and the way that they deliver the programme, not on you! Other carers who have attended in the Programme before have told us that they soon got used to the camera, and didn't feel that it was an issue for them, even if they were a bit worried beforehand. Further information about how these video/audio recordings are stored and shared, and how we will ensure confidentiality, can be found later in this leaflet.

12. How else might my recordings be used in the future?

In addition to using the audio- and video-recording(s) for the Reflective Fostering Study, we also invite you to consider whether you agree to the recording(s) being used for other purposes. These are entirely optional and the consent form enables you to specify which of these uses you agree to. The recordings will only be used if you and other foster carers in your group consent.

a) Use of clips in presentations about the Reflective Fostering Study

If you consent to this option, clips from the audio- and video-recording(s) may be used in presentations about the Reflective Fostering Study to professional audiences of researchers, health and social care staff, and trainees, and for dissemination purposes

b) Use of recordings and transcriptions for future research

If you consent to this option, we would like other professional researchers in the field of health and social care to have the opportunity to study these recordings and transcripts in future research. This might be future research that extends upon the Reflective Fostering Study.

c) Use of recordings and transcriptions for teaching

If you consent to this option, the audio- and video-recordings, and transcriptions from those recordings, may be used in teaching. This might include training Facilitators in delivering the Reflective Fostering Programme to other foster carers in the future.

If you agree to the videos being used for any of these purposes, they will only be available for five years after the end of the study. At this time they will be destroyed in line with all study data.

13. Interviews

At the end of the study some carers will be invited to take part in an interview conducted by a member of the research team. This might happen by phone, online or in person, at a time that suits you. You will be asked some questions about your experience of being part of the study, whether you have found it relevant to your experiences as a carer, what you would change and (if you were randomised to attend) any other aspects of your experience of the Reflective Fostering Programme. This interview should take no longer than an hour.

This interview will be audio-recorded. The recordings will be transcribed by a professional transcribing company and analysed by members of the research team. In the transcript we will remove any references to people and place names that occur in the recording. Your name will not be used in the transcriptions; you will be identified only by a unique number.

Receive information about the Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You will find out about the study from your fostering organisation, via fostering networks or through social media
Express your interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you are interested in joining the study, or finding out more, contact Anna Freud Centre who will share more details about what is involved
Attend coffee morning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There will be an information (coffee morning) meeting hosted by the research team to explain the study to you. You decide whether to take part or not. If you do decide to take part, you sign a consent form.
Questionnaire completion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shortly before the Reflective Fostering group is due to begin, you will be asked to complete study questionnaires.
Phone call with the research team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The research team will contact you to advise you which group you are in. If you are in the Reflective Fostering group, you will be informed of the dates of the programme.
Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You will attend the Reflective Fostering Programme for up to 12 weeks.
Questionnaire completion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You will be provided with the questionnaires to complete on two more occasions.
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A subgroup of parents/carers and children will be invited to take part in an interview about their experiences of taking part in the study.

14. What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

Agreeing to join the study does not mean that you have to complete it. You are free to withdraw at any stage without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw or a decision not to take part at all, will not affect any support you may receive.

If you decide you no longer wish to take part you can contact the Trial Manager, Dr Karen Irvine, using the contact details at the end of this leaflet.

15. What are the possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?

We do not anticipate that taking part in the study will expose you to any particular risks. For those attending the Reflective Fostering Programme we hope that you will find it a positive and helpful experience. It is, however, important to note that attending the groups and completing questionnaires could involve moments when reflecting on your experience as a carer may feel challenging or bring up difficult emotions. Your supervising social worker will continue to be your main support during the time you are participating in the study and the arrangements you have in place with them for support should not change.

16. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

If you are one of the carers attending the Reflective Fostering Programme, we hope you will find it helpful and that you will develop a better understanding of your own and your child's emotions and behaviours, leading to positive changes for you both.

Even if you are not allocated to the group which attends the Programme, there are possible benefits. The information we receive from this study will help us improve services to other families with foster children in the future. By taking part and providing feedback you will be helping to shape how support services are offered in the future, which has the potential to positively impact a large number of foster carers and their children. Some carers have also said that they find filling in the research questionnaires interesting and helpful, as it is an opportunity to reflect on how things are going for them and the child(ren) they are caring for. When the study is over it may be possible for fostering agencies to offer the Programme to foster carers who have been part of the usual support group.

17. How will my taking part in this study and my personal data be kept confidential?

The University of Hertfordshire is the sponsor for this study based in England and Wales. University College London (UCL) hold the funding for the study. Both UH and UCL will be using information from you in order to undertake this study and will act as joint data controllers for this study. This means that UH and UCL are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families (the Anna Freud Centre) and the University of East Anglia will be processing (collecting, storing etc,) the data on behalf of UH and UCL.

In order to carry out the above project we need to collect some personal data from you, including sensitive personal information which is classed as special category data. Personal data is information which individually or in combination, allows a person to be identified. Special category data is information which may be considered sensitive, such as information relating to your ethnicity for example.

The personal/special category data being collected at each stage of this project is as follows:

Completion of expression of interest form

- Name and contact information

Consent to involvement in study (data collected at the start of the study when you are agreeing to statements about what the study involves)

- Name, Participant unique study ID

Initial Survey Data

- Demographic data (gender, age, ethnicity, age and gender of the nominated child).
- Contact information (email address, mobile phone number)
- Participant unique study ID

Data collected during delivery of the Reflective Fostering Programme

- Your name and image will be visible on the video recording of the Programme sessions
- You may reveal sensitive information during the sessions audible to researchers. If this includes information about family members, we will assume you have agreement from them to do so

Data protection legislation requires us to have a valid legal reason to process and use personal data about you. This is often called the 'legal basis' for processing.

In the context of research undertaken under the Reflective Fostering Study, the legal basis for processing is as follows:

- a) processing your personal data is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest (Article 6(1)(e) of the GDPR); and
- b) processing special categories of your personal data (which is personal data about your gender, ethnicity, etc.) is necessary for archiving, research or statistical purposes (Article 9(2)(j) of the GDPR)

Individuals have certain rights under data protection laws. There are exemptions from some of these rights where personal data is used for the purposes of research. Your rights to access, change or move your information are limited as your information needs to be managed in specific ways for the research to be reliable and accurate. If you withdraw from the study, information about you that we have already collected will still be kept for the purposes of the study. To safeguard your rights, the minimum personally identifiable information possible will be used.

Your data will only be shared with members of the project team.

The AFNCCF will keep your name and contact details confidential and will not pass this information to UH. The AFNCCF will use this information as needed, to contact you about the research study, and make sure that relevant information about the study is recorded for your care, and to oversee the quality of the study. Members of the research team or regulatory authorities may look at your research records to check the accuracy of the research study. The University of Hertfordshire will only receive information without any identifying information. The people who analyse the information will not be able to identify you and will not be able to find out your name or contact details.

Participant confidentiality will be maintained. Your answers to the questionnaires will be stored anonymously and your contact details will be kept confidential. You will be allocated a unique study ID number when you join the study, so your name will not be linked to the research data. All information collected will only be used for the purposes of the study and will be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018. Any results will be reported in 'aggregate form' only. Aggregate form means the reports will only talk about the group or sub-groups of foster carers instead of picking out individuals. This means that you can't be identified in any ensuing reports or publications.

Video files will only be stored on secure servers belonging to either the AFNCCF, UH or the UEA. These files will be kept for 5 years after the study has finished after which they will be destroyed. Videos, including clips from these videos, will only be available to the Reflective Fostering Programme Consultants at the AFNCCF and to the research team at UH and UEA for the purposes of ensuring that the Programme is delivered in a consistent way for every group. The exception to this is that you may decide that you are happy for us to use the video data for other purposes (as outlined above) and provided consent for us to do this. If so, then the videos/clips from the videos may be seen by other researchers, by students or by professionals when presenting the results from the study. The videos will only be used in this way for up to 5 years after the study has finished after which they will be destroyed.

All electronic files will be password-protected, and the research data will also have a password-protected system. Data relevant to your participation in the research may be requested by regulatory authorities who monitor research activity.

Personal data collected as part of this project will only be held by UH/UCL for as long as is necessary to allow for collection and analysis of the data to take place. As described above, your personal identifiable data will be removed as soon as possible so it is not attributed to you.

Personal data (e.g. names and contact details) will be destroyed within 12 months of the study end-date. Anonymised data will be kept for up to ten years after the full trial has been completed. After this the data will be securely destroyed. Any data in physical format will be stored in a lockable cabinet at The AFNCCF Consent forms will be stored in a lockable cabinet separately to other study data.

Where we use third party system providers to process your information, we will ensure we have the necessary safeguards in place.

We keep your information very private and confidentiality will be respected subject to legal constraints and professional guidelines. All members of the research team have received safeguarding training and are aware that there are particular circumstances in which confidentiality has to be broken. If any concerns are raised regarding possible harm/danger to yourself or another individual, for example the child in your care, then confidentiality may need to be broken as safeguarding procedures must be followed. If that happened, the researchers would follow their safeguarding procedures and will contact the Site Lead and a safeguarding officer from your local authority or independent fostering agency for further discussion and appropriate action.

It should be noted that while ground rules regarding confidentiality will be set in the Reflective Fostering Programme sessions and focus groups which involve other study participants, we cannot guarantee that other carers will stick to these rules.

To find out more about how we use your information, please contact our Data Protection Officer:

Abi Tomlinson
University of Hertfordshire, College Lane, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, AL10 9AB

✉ dataprotection@herts.ac.uk

The University of Hertfordshire Privacy Policy is available here:

https://www.herts.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/233090/IM08-Data-Protection.pdf

Alex Potts
University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT

020 7679 2000 ✉ a.potts@ucl.ac.uk

The UCL Privacy Policy is available here:

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/information-security/sites/information-security/files/data-protection.pdf>

18. What will happen to the results of the research study?

We will try to keep you updated about how the research is going on a regular basis, through a study Newsletter. When the study is finished, we plan to publish our results in a scientific journal and may present anonymised findings at scientific conferences or to professionals working with looked after children and foster carers. The data collected may also be used as part of PhD research studies. At all times your data will be totally anonymous: any research publications or reports will not identify you or your child individually. We will send you a summary of the research report within 12 months of the study's end-date. If you would like a copy of the published research, please let one of the researchers know and we would be delighted to send any publications describing the results of this research to you as and when they become available.

19. Who is funding the trial?

Funding for the study is being provided by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Public Health Research funding arm. The NIHR are the nation's largest funder of health and care research and are primarily funded by the Department of Health and Social Care.

20. Who has reviewed this trial?

All research in the UK is looked at by an independent group of people, called a Research Ethics Committee. This committee is here to protect your interests. This study has received ethical approval from the University of Hertfordshire Ethics Committee. Ethics protocol number: cLMS/SF/UH/04242

21. Who can I contact if I have any questions?

If you would like further information or would like to discuss any details personally, please get in touch with the Clinical Trial Manager in writing, by phone or by email:

Dr Karen Irvine,

Department of Psychology and Sport Sciences, University of Hertfordshire, College Lane, Hatfield, AL10 9AB

 **01707 286182**  k.irvine2@herts.ac.uk

22. What if there is anything I'm not happy about with the study?

If you are unhappy about any aspect of the research study or would like to raise a complaint about your participation in the study, you can contact [Nick Midgley](mailto:nicholas.midgley@ucl.ac.uk) (Email: nicholas.midgley@ucl.ac.uk) the Chief Investigator of this study. If you still feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, you can then contact the Chair of the UH Research Ethics Committee at the following email address: hsetecda@herts.ac.uk

If you are unhappy about any part of the Reflective Fostering Programme sessions or you would like to raise a complaint about the delivery of the Programme you can contact the Site Lead, Sheila Redfern (sheila.redfern@annafreud.org).

The sponsor of the study is UH. You may also contact the representatives of the sponsors if you have any concerns or complaints.

Professor J M Senior,

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and International), University of Hertfordshire, College Lane, Hatfield, AL10 9AB

 j.m.senior@herts.ac.uk

Thank you very much for reading this information and considering taking part in this study.