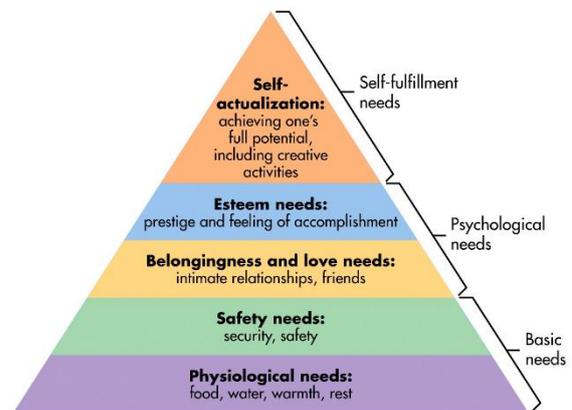


## To what extent does the attachment between a child and their foster carer affect their behaviour outside the home?

In this essay, I will discuss how the attachment that is formed between a child in the fostering system and their foster carers can affect the way that they behave outside of their home. I will explain what the fostering system, including the positives and the negative impacts the system has upon a child. This will help distinguish a difference between the impact the system has and the impact that the attachment between a child and their foster carer has upon a child's behaviour. I will then address the meaning of attachment and various factors that are involved in an attachment before analysing how this affects a child's behaviour outside their home. Finally, I will draw a conclusion on whether I think that attachments affect the child's behaviour outside of the home.

The fostering system is a system which was created in order to help support children in all areas of their lives as they face some life events which can have a huge impact upon how they live their everyday lives. Within England alone there is over 70,000 children in the system. The system is built with a network of local authorities, social workers and foster carers who all aim to give each and every child within the system the same opportunities as those who are not. By allowing a child to know they have support in their life, they are able to feel safe and therefore the possibility of having a good future is now available. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory could be applied here as a child is provided with the basic needs which includes physiological needs and safety needs. However they get the psychological needs of belongingness and love along side self esteem from the bonds that are being created with those around them, in particular their foster carers (this is due to them spending the most amount of time with the individual). Unless the bonds created are good and therefore creates a rise in self esteem



etc then the child would not then be able to reach the self-actualization stage, where they are able to be the best possible version of them self. It's important to consider the different ways a child may find themselves in the system as they may not be willing to accept the basic needs from someone straight away meaning the child will need the additional support to help them overcome the potential traumatic experiences that they have been through. For an example, someone who came into the fostering system through an emergency move or through a S20 Care Order due to neglect and/or a form of abuse is going to be less likely to agree with the system even if they know it will be better for them in the long term because it is so different compared to their usual routine. For a Care Order to be granted 'A court has to be satisfied:

- a. That the child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm; and
- b. That the harm or likelihood of harm is attributable to:
  - i. The care given to the child, or likely to be given to him if the order were not made, not being what would be reasonable to expect a parent to give to him; or
  - ii. The child is being beyond parental control'

They won't be used to having their basic needs fulfilled so for this to start to happen it may cause confusion or even allow the child to unintentionally build up some anger toward the foster carer as they feel like they're replacing their parents. Children who have been through the most traumatic experiences can still have a bond with their parents that have been manipulated so its strong and they feel like they are betraying their parents by creating a bond with their foster carers meaning to form a bond with the child will be more difficult. On the other hand creating a bond with a mature older individual (aged 16/17) who has placed them self within the system is more likely be open to

creating attachments with those who are willing to support them as they are more likely to be trying to bettering themselves.

There are various pros and cons of the fostering system as a whole which has potential to have an effect on a child's behaviour which does not include the bond between the child and the foster carer. One of the main benefits of the system is that a child is removed from a situation which is detrimental to their wellbeing and mental state. Although there is not always an instant change in behaviour, there is a long-term change in the idea of they are able to have more time to focus upon schoolwork and hobbies instead of worrying and being stressed. The flip side to this pro is that the child may be placed in the system to then be failed further and this may result in them becoming more distressed. This may be by going in and out of the fostering system as they grow up and all the uncertainty will have a negative impact towards their concentration and may make them more likely to fall into the same behavioural patterns as their parents.

Social services do try their hardest to provide the children in their caseload with a placement that is the most suitable place for them. This is completed through match testing and continuous looked after child (LAC) meetings and also PEPs meeting. During these meetings, the child is discussed so the people who are there to support them can all see what they have to do to ensure progress is being made across all areas of a child's life. Everyone in the child's support bubble has been trained to put the wellbeing needs of a child first, so although the child is entitled to express their thoughts and opinions, they may feel like they aren't being listened to as their demands may conflict with what is best for them.

In my opinion, I feel like the biggest flaw of the system is that within a group of siblings the youngest may get adopted and the oldest ones will be placed into the fostering system. For the youngest sibling this may end up being the best thing for them as they have potential to start a 'brand new' life but for the elder sibling it can be damaging to their mental health as they are fully aware that they have a sibling but they are very restricted with how they keep in contact with them. On the other hand, those who are in the fostering system are encouraged to have contacts with parents and siblings if it is in their best interests. This allows the child to have a few consistencies in their life without placing them in danger. It has been scientifically proven that a stable home with the same consistencies has a positive correlation with achieving academically as they are not always changing and moving around.

Children who have experiences of neglect and/or some form of neglect struggle to trust those who have authority and also those who are supposed to take care of them as they have been let down by those who are supposed to keep them safe. This means it will be harder to start to create a bond with the child but once the start of a bond is there then it has potential to become strong as the child learns to trust more and opens up. A child who has had negative experiences will have a deterioration within their mental health and begin to feel worthless and unwanted which may lead them to overly seek approval by a lot of people so they can build up their self-esteem and self-actualization. Many children in the system will normalise their traumatic experiences as a way to deal with it when it happens, so when they are taken away from the situation they don't know how to deal with the change straight away but after a while they will start to feel a sense of relief.

Now that we have considered what the fostering system is and how a child may feel whilst being in the system, I will now define what attachment is, how it's important for a child and how it potentially could affect different aspects of their life.

An attachment is essentially a bond that is created between two people, in this case between a child and their foster carer. A child will form their initial attachment within the first six weeks of their lives which is considered to be their primary attachment. This bond is usually with the parents of the baby and regardless if the bond was formed negatively or positively the baby will rely upon the strength of the bond that is created to ensure they get their needs and wants met. As the child begins to grow, they will be able to identify whether their needs are being met and if not, they will learn to depend upon themselves in simple and difficult circumstances. Due to the breakdown of a bond between, and the independence that has been created, when the child is placed into the care system, they will struggle to form attachments with other adults and in particular foster carers. Not only will the child feel like they can meet their own needs and wants, they also have not formed the ability to put trust in another adult meaning they will close themselves off. As a result, if they need help with schoolwork, they will be reluctant to ask for the support they need and will struggle along until they find out a solution or just give up completely.

It is important that a positive attachment is formed between a foster carer and a child as it will give the child a sense of security and safeness if they have someone, they can confide in. The feeling of security and safeness with their foster carer means that they can rely upon them and open up to them. Having someone that they can slowly start to trust through the feeling of them being a safety net is important as this will minimise the amount of danger the child could be in as they will discuss things that concern them with their foster carers as well as being able to tell the fun stories with too. After they reach the point of being able to trust those who are there to support them, they might open up about their past experience which will help them come to terms and understand that the bad things that happened to them will not determine how they go forward in the future, resulting in them hopefully feeling inspired to succeed in life. By forming positive bonds with foster carers, they will understand what it's like to form a positive relationship with others and will then use this to help them create a good bond with other people such as teacher and friends. A child in the system will often feel like they are not being listened to but when a good bond is formed with people, they begin to have confidence in other people and allow themselves to rely upon them. Building a relationship with other people once they have had the initial rejection from their original adolescents is going to be difficult but once they begin to feel valued their self esteem will rise and they will begin to want to achieve more.

A social worker will do many things to ensure a child and their foster carer is successfully able to create a positive relationship. Social workers will carry out various assessments which will help contribute towards an official matching process. Successful matching will depend upon how thorough the assessment is and requires a high level of information sharing and careful decision making. All authoritative figures must fully understand every child's situation that they deal with before trying to find them a suitable placement. It's important to consider that children may need to be found a placement quite fast, especially if they are placed into the system as an emergency move, it may not be the most suitable placement to begin with but the child's basic needs need to be met, and then support can be put in place in order to create a bond between the carer and child to ensure the child feels welcome.

The match assessment will consider things (To do with the child) such as:

- 1) Previous care history – this is important to see whether or not the child knows what to expect with moving or not and if so, how they have dealt with the change and meeting new people.
- 2) Age – A child who is six will have different needs compared to a child who is 15.

- 3) Ethnicity and Cultural needs – If the child are religious there is a chance they will still want to practise this religion and therefore would bond better with someone who is of the same religion.
- 4) Language Barriers – Being able to communicate on a high level is important as the child needs to be able to go to their carers and feel listened to.
- 5) Details of previous placements – The number of placements, the duration of placements and the reason they ended is important to consider as they may have failed due to an unsuccessful bond being formed between the child and carer which then results in a deterioration of behaviour in other areas such as school.
- 6) Development Needs - Health, Education, Emotional and Behavioural. These are considered to keep some stability in the child's life to cause the least amount of disruption. The lower the disruption level the more likely the child is to continue to achieve well in school.
- 7) Hobbies and Interests – If a carer is found that continues to support and encourage these hobbies and interests then the child will be more open to getting to know the foster care who is taking the time to make the child feel valued.
- 8) Special Needs due to disabilities - Education and physical as more support may need to be put in place.
- 9) Any behaviours displayed, triggers and potential risks – this minimises the chance of arguments and can make the care experience nicer for the child. If a child is happier at home, they are more likely to be happier and try harder at school and other clubs.

Social workers also look at each individual placement and the potential foster carers such as the household dynamics and the skills that a carer has, for an example, the capacity for empathy, resilience and their temperaments. These are important to consider as some children require a lot of support and time etc in order to form a simplistic bond. Training may be provided if there is any additional needs that need to be met.

There are regular meetings such as looked after child review (LAC) where all the important people in the child's life at that point in time will have a meeting every six months to discuss the child. The child can choose to be present or not however it is advised for them to do so as it gives them an opportunity to voice their own opinions and thoughts. In this meeting, professionals will be able to identify whether the child is coping well or not and if it is the lack of attachment with the foster care that is to blame for the behaviour of the child. Since all the professionals are directly involved in the child's support bubble, it is easier to identify where the problem is coming from and they can come up with a solution on how to deal with it. For an example if the problem is due to the child not feeling like they fit in at home and therefore may be acting out at school, the professionals may recommend that the carers complete activities that may make them feel more included which should then make their behaviour at school improve.

There is also a Personal Education Plan meeting (PEP) which is designed to make sure that the child is on task at school or at college and what their future plans are going to be. Children are advised to go to these meetings when they are aged 16+. This will also give professionals time to address the red flags that may potentially be caused by the lack of relationship between a foster child and foster parent. Many professionals have often stated that there is a correlation between a negative home life i.e. a child being unable to form an attachment with their carer and their behaviours being negatively affected in other areas of their life such as school, and socialising. For an example if a child feels like they are unable to ask their carer for help with homework they will fall behind at school and then that's when they will become more disruptive as they don't see the point in concentrating. This could easily be solved by praising the child for things they do, even the little

things, as they will start to concentrate in order to complete a task so that they can receive praise which will ultimately increase their self-confidence.

An ideal positive response to a successful bond being formed between a child and their foster carer would form a positive domino chain affecting their behaviour. They will ultimately gain trust within other people and will respect them and themselves. This respectful behaviour will then be noticed in other areas of the child's life such as friendship groups, education, hobbies and interests. They feel valued and accepted and will no longer seek constant validation as their mental health will become more stable. This will reduce the chance of therapy being needed as the child can focus upon all the good things happening in their life instead of focusing on the past. They can then normalise this new positive life they have created which will hopefully then increase the chance of them having a good future.

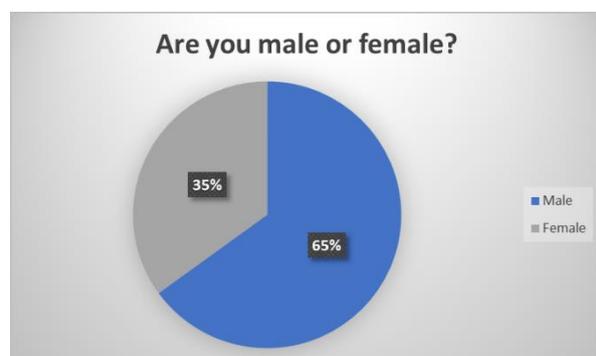
A negative response to a bond not being formed between a child and their foster carer is that an attachment disorder could be formed. The severity of such disorder can vary. An attachment disorder shows on a brain scan as dark areas of inactivity in the brain where the child has literally missed out. Symptoms include:

- obsessively controlling, bossy, argumentative, defiant, angry
- resists affection from parents/foster carers but can be over-familiar with strangers
- manipulative, lies, steals, destroys property, impulsive
- hyperactive and on a continual state of high alert
- has speech and language problems
- has a fascination for the macabre (dead) or dangerous

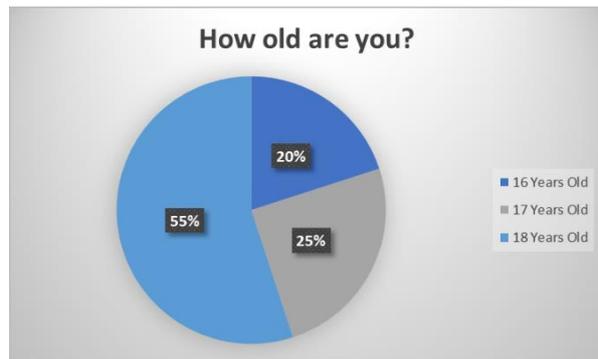
The parents or carers work with the therapist to undo the harm of the early years and to help the child to bond, as well as managing and correcting the child's unacceptable behaviour. However, the older the child gets the more irreversible this behaviour is.

Now I will discuss the response to my questionnaire. First of all, I considered the ethics and social value of my questions. I did not force anyone to answer these questions. They are direct enough to gain results that are targeted towards my extended project qualification; however, they are not personal enough nor direct enough to upset anyone who has taken part in answering these questions. These 11 questions were given to children in the foster care system who I know and consented in taking part. I intend to include diagrams as well as my own personal annotations to show each question. The diagrams will be a pie chart as they are easier to read and are easier to visually interpret.

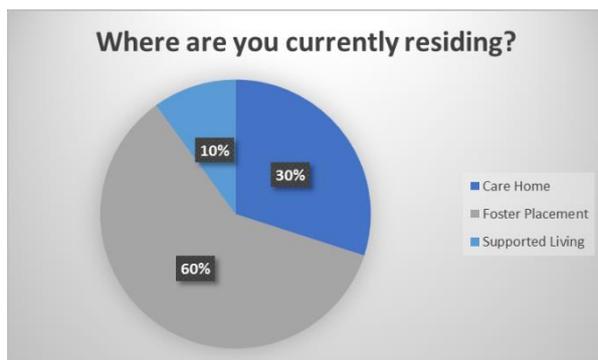
Over half of the individuals I asked in this questionnaire are males. I thought this was important to ask because girls can be seen to be extra emotional whereas boys can be seen as more reserved. On the flip side to this, girls are seen to achieve more academically as they can concentrate more whereas boys do not tend to do as well as they do not have that concentration span. This would then mean that a boy might not be doing well in school due to lack of concentration instead of it being because he does not have a good bond with his foster carer.



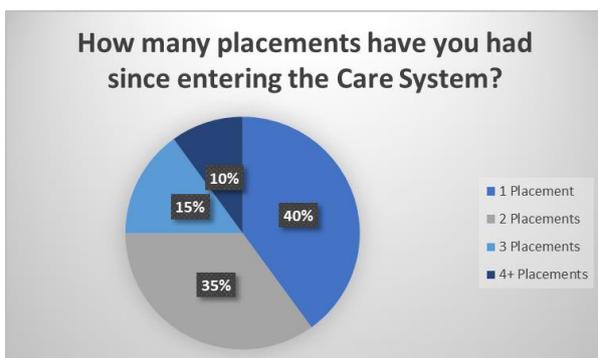
The people who took this questionnaire were from the ages of 16 to 18. I felt like this was an appropriate age range as they were mature enough to say whether they wanted to be apart of this questionnaire. These people are also at the point in their life where it's clear to see if they have a successful future ahead of them and whether that is due to a good attachment being formed with their carer or if it is due to other circumstances within their life.



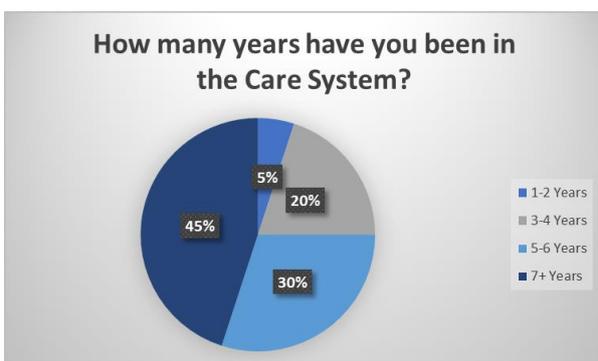
As you can see the majority of the people asked are residing in a foster care placement meaning that these people will have created a bond with the foster carers, they live with whether that be good or bad. The other people who are residing in a care home or in supported living will have formed attachments with other key people in their supported bubble.



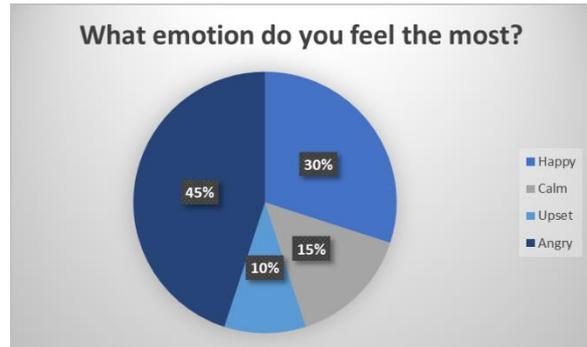
Most people have had 1 or 2 placements meaning that the need for moving was require as much so disruption levels were kept to a minimum. This means that if these people who have had one or two placements and still had negative experiences in other areas of their life such as school then it could be due to a weak bond being formed.



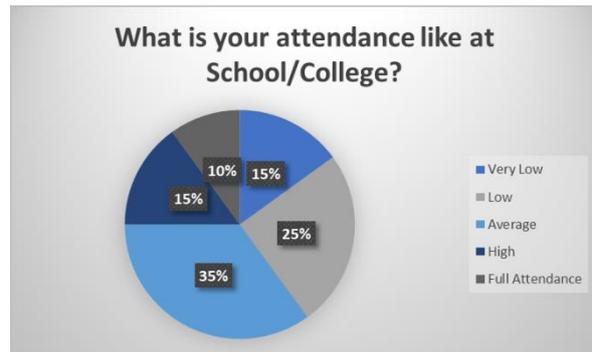
Just under held of the people asked to have been in the foster care system for 7+ years of their life. This means that they've had time to adapt to the change hat has happened in their life a to potentially deal with the experiences that they've have meaning if they are worked up/agitated it could be down to another issue.



The emotion that was felt the most was anger which was followed up by happiness. After some further secondary research, I found that is was because most people in the care system do not feel listened to which frustrates them as they feel ignored. However, happiness is the second most felt emotion as the children get to enjoy experiences and opportunities that usually they would not be able to.



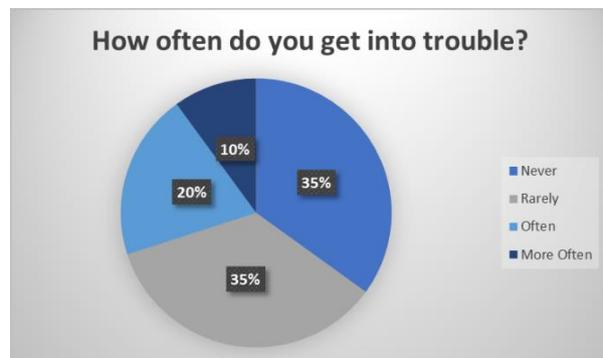
Only a third of the people asked in this questionnaire could confidently say that their attendance was average. About a quarter could say their attendance was high/full, and a large amount said theirs was low or very low. From the question previously we can establish that moving around is not the issue tats causing a lack of attendance meaning there is a possibility that the children don't have a bond with their foster carer and therefore may lack to esteem and confidence to want to do well.



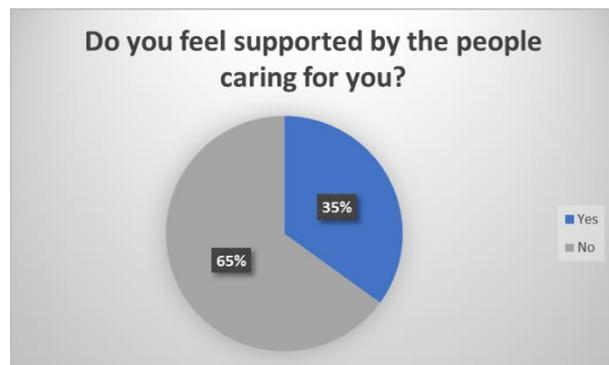
70% of people are not involved in any extra curricular which could be due to the lack of clubs provided by schools and local areas or it may be due to their lack of confidence in meeting people and building up those bonds.



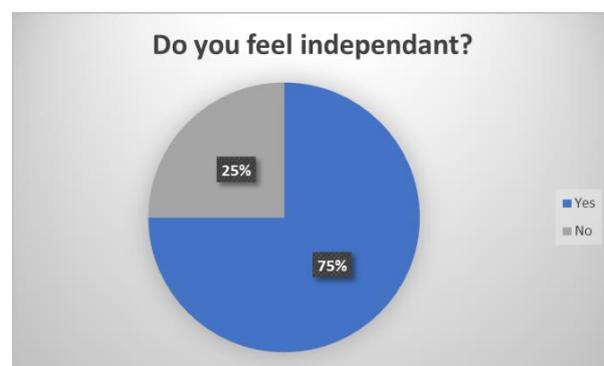
These answer are varied. This may be due to the question not being specific enough or directed to one area of the childs life. This means that the results could range from someone getting in trouble at school for talking to someone getting in trouble with the police which are clearly two different levels of trouble. However, they do show that two thirds of those asked rarely or never get into trouble.



Two thirds of people asked in this question claimed that they did not feel supported by those caring for them. It is important to consider that some people were in supported living and a care home which are run differently to a foster placement. However, children not feeling supported by those caring for them will mean they will close them self-off and potentially lack skills to form the bonds with other adults that they really should be having a relationship with. They will also find it harder to trust and rely upon other people.



Three Quarters of the people asked could confidently say that they would consider themselves as independent. I know that most 16 to 18-year old should be feeling independent but to feel independent and unsupported changes the idea of what independence means. Normal independence would be to confidently complete tasks but know you have people there for you if you need help but to have no support and to be independent kind od means that you have to do it your self somehow no matter what with no assistance.



In conclusion, after looking at my primary and secondary research, I have found out that there are various aspects of a childs life that can impact upon other areas. For an example, the disruption moving can cause can affect schoolwork etc due to stress and worry. However, I have to ultimately agree with the main factor that can change the way a child behaves in other areas of their life is down to the attachment formed with their foster carer. Linking back to the Maslows theory, I do believe its ultimately through a strong bond being created is how the basic needs are met which boosts the confidence and self esteem of thee young person and therefore allows them to have some self-actualisation and become their better self.