

Companion activity sheet: Don't Blame the Lettuce

Rules, expectations, and the ecosystem of relationships in Foster Care

This short activity sheet is designed to help you apply the ideas from the blog in your own home, one step at a time.

Why rules and expectations matter

Children and young people in care often come from environments where expectations were unclear, inconsistent, or linked to fear. In a foster home, predictable rules and boundaries can provide a sense of **safety, structure, and belonging**, but only when paired with **relationship, understanding, and choice**.

CARE Principles in Practice: Ecologically Oriented Lens

CARE Principle	Connection to Rules and Expectations
Developmentally Focused	Expectations are tailored to the child's stage of growth and past learning, not just their chronological age.
Family Involved	Rules and routines reflect shared values and cultural or familial practices where appropriate.
Relationship Based	Expectations are co-created through trust, not control, strengthening safety and connection.
Trauma Informed	Reactions to rules may reflect trauma. Responses should regulate, not escalate.
Ecologically Oriented	Behaviour is understood within the context of systems, history, relationships, and current pressures.
Competency Centred	Children are supported to learn and grow through realistic, supported expectations.

Activity: Exploring Your Home's Ecosystem of Expectations

1. House Rules Check-In

List your current house rules:

Now ask yourself:

- Are these rules clear and consistently applied?

- Are they necessary for safety and wellbeing?

- How have I explained them in child-friendly ways?

2. Unspoken Expectations Reflection

Write down a few expectations you may hold that haven't been clearly stated to the child:

Reflect:

- Could these be developmentally unrealistic?

- Have I modelled or supported this expectation before assuming it?

- How might this expectation have been shaped by your own upbringing or values?

3. Tending the Soil

Pick one behaviour that has recently caused tension. Ask:

- What systems or relationships may be influencing this behaviour?

- What stress or unmet needs might be showing up?

- What part of the environment (routine, connection, support) might need adjusting?

4. Rewriting the Expectation

Original expectation (e.g. *"They should clean their room every day without being told"*):

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

List two recent examples where you've noticed growth or effort from the child:

Write a simple phrase of encouragement you can use:

Practical Reminders for Carers

- Fewer rules, clearly explained, build safety.
- Expectations need to flex with context, development and past experience.
- Connection and consistency create the conditions for behaviour change.
- We don't blame the child — we look at what's happening around them.

Final Thought

When children aren't thriving, don't blame the behaviour. Look at the whole picture.

Tend the soil.

Together in care, we can ensure every child has a great day, every day.