

# Companion Activity Sheet

## Building Developmental Relationships in Foster Care

### Purpose:

This companion sheet supports the blog "*Building Strong Foundations: The Power of Relationships in Foster Care*" and unpacks the concept of developmental relationships within the CARE framework. Developmental relationships are powerful tools in healing, growing, and empowering children and young people in foster care.

### What Are Developmental Relationships?

Developmental relationships are close connections through which children and young people discover who they are, develop abilities to shape their own lives, and learn how to engage with and contribute to the world around them. These relationships are built on repeated interactions that are emotionally attuned, growth-focused, and responsive to a child's developmental needs.

Within the CARE framework, four key elements define developmental relationships.

## Developmental relationships



### Attachment

Provide a secure emotional base for them to explore and grow from.



### Reciprocity

Engage in two-way interactions and respond to each other's signals.



### Progressive Complexity

Help them build skills and tackle increasingly challenging tasks.



### Balance of Power

Share power and decision-making in a developmentally appropriate way.

These elements reflect what children need to thrive: connection, responsiveness, trust, challenge, and meaningful participation:

## 1. Attachment

**Definition:** A consistent and emotionally available relationship where a child feels safe, valued, and seen.

### What it looks like:

- A carer responds sensitively when a child is upset, offering comfort and stability.
- The child begins to seek out the carer for help, play, or reassurance.

### Developmental Impact:

- Builds secure attachment.
- Lays the foundation for trust and emotional regulation.

**Example:** After a tough day at school, a young person comes home frustrated. The carer notices and calmly invites them to talk or simply sit together. Over time, the young person begins to expect that their emotions will be met with care, not criticism.

## 2. Reciprocity

**Definition:** A dynamic relationship where both child and adult respond to each other's cues, needs, and interests.

### What it looks like:

- The carer and child engage in a back-and-forth conversation about a shared interest.
- The adult adapts their approach based on the child's mood or signals.

### Developmental Impact:

- Strengthens the child's sense of being respected and heard.
- Encourages communication and social-emotional development.

**Example:** While cooking dinner, the carer involves the child by asking what they would like to help with. The carer adjusts tasks to suit the child's skills and interest, leading to shared success and enjoyment.

### 3. Progressive Complexity

**Definition:** The relationship grows in complexity over time, gradually increasing expectations and opportunities to learn.

**What it looks like:**

- The carer introduces new responsibilities as the child becomes more confident.
- Encouraging problem-solving, decision-making, and self-reflection.

**Developmental Impact:**

- Promotes resilience and a sense of competence.
- Encourages movement through the Zone of Proximal Development.

**Example:** The carer helps a child learn how to budget their weekly allowance. At first, they do it together. Over time, the child takes the lead, with the carer offering support as needed.

### 4. Balance of Power

**Definition:** The adult intentionally shares power with the child, providing opportunities for voice, choice, and control.

**What it looks like:**

- Involving the child in decisions that affect them.
- Respecting the child's preferences and supporting autonomy.

**Developmental Impact:**

- Builds confidence and identity.
- Fosters self-determination and decision-making skills.

**Example:** A carer includes a child in the planning of weekend activities. When the child makes a suggestion, the carer listens and follows through, showing their ideas matter.

## How Developmental Relationships Foster Resilience

Children who experience trauma or disruption often face barriers to healthy development. Developmental relationships buffer the impact of adversity and foster resilience by:

- Creating consistent, safe, and predictable relational experiences.
- Helping children make meaning of their experiences.
- Encouraging the development of critical life skills, like self-regulation and problem-solving.

## Bringing It All Together: Everyday Practice Tips

- **Be consistently available:** Your presence matters. A simple check-in or shared laugh builds connection.
- **Match and respond:** Notice what the child is communicating and respond appropriately.
- **Challenge gently:** Provide opportunities to try new things with scaffolding.
- **Empower choice:** Invite children into decision-making whenever possible.
- **Celebrate growth:** Recognise progress and effort, not just outcomes.

Developmental relationships are not 'extra', they are essential. In foster care, they are the foundation for healing, belonging, and growth. Through these relational experiences, children begin to believe in themselves, trust others, and imagine a future that feels safe and full of possibility.

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