



This project is funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020)

# FACT SHEET CHILDREN IN CARE



## **Understanding Violence**

Children and young people in the care system may have prior experiences of violence and trauma before being placed in care and some young people described situations where they felt more vulnerable because of their care placements and/or sense of isolation. However, it can't be assumed that children and young people in care all share common experiences, and this point was particularly emphasised to us by the young people who participated in the project from different countries.

As well as emphasising the diversity of their experiences, children and young people in care are not just defined by their care experiences. Children and young people in care are from diverse backgrounds and this may influence experiences and perceptions of violence. For some young people their prior experience may mean that violence is normalised. For instance, one young woman from Belgium commented:

**“When my father screams at me, I don't think this is violence.”**

Some young people understood violence to be something physical:

**“Psychologically...that 's not violence , because that ' s not physical.” (Young Person, Belgium)**

And they discounted other forms of violence, including cyber-bullying:

**I don't think it's violence because it's via the internet. Because that is internet and after the internet it stops. (Young Person, Belgium)**

However, after some explanation and discussions young people could see and accept a broader definition of violence, including emotional violence and neglect. One young person who had a prior experience of trafficking commented:

**“ [Trafficking] is a form of violence...as it leads to other violence.” (Young Person, Romania)**

Some young people included violence towards themselves, i.e. through self-harm such as cutting in their understanding of the term violence. This young woman, linked self-harm with low self-esteem and part of a cycle of bullying:

**“Self-harm can be violent, cutting... You can also have low self-esteem because people are violent towards you, bullying and things like that.” (Young Person, UK)**

## **Support by Service Providers and Institutions**

Children and young people in care will frequently have experienced a range of interventions and services. Their experiences of these services are impacted by the extent to which they feel safe and listened to. Relationships with reliable adults who are warm and empathetic are really important. Some young people spoke about the importance of being spoken to 'gently':

**"Speak gently, to understand pain or abuse, to have patience and to want to help." (Young person in care, Romania)**

Children and young people in care don't like having to repeatedly tell 'their story' to different adults, for some the information is too difficult. And some fear the consequences of disclosure:

**"People always say: talk about it. I was forced by my juvenile judge to tell my life story, but I don't want to do this. I made that mistake once in my life and so I spent eight years in the orphanage. And that's why I just don't want to do this anymore." (Young Person, Belgium)**

Young people want continuity of care and the adults who provide services to be 'genuine':

**"See this support worker where I live, he has been through it himself, he knows what it's like. I'm not being funny like, but some social workers it's like they've just read something out of a book." (Young person, UK)**

**"It is mainly about your character. It's about: do we have the same character, do we belong together, do we have the same mentality, are we link-minded...?" (Young person, Belgium)**

**"That they listen to us. That I have the feeling that they are listening. And that they try to understand." (Young person, Belgium)**

Young people also spoke about the value they place on confidentiality, which was also another way of talking about the importance of trust:

**"You can't show I'm a trustworthy person... You feel this. You just feel it from both sides. There is always one person with whom there is a good match." (Young person, Belgium)**

Being clear about the parameters of confidentiality from the outset is important to children and young people.

## **Focussing on the future**

Many young people spoke about not wanting to dwell in the past. The past is something that has happened, which is indelible, but young people spoke about accepting the fact and having to deal with it and live with it:

**“You have just suffered so much trauma that you think: I really don't want to think about that anymore. You have to think: you only live once, and if you have to experience this in your life, it's just painful. It's not like this: that you die and become alive again and can make a fresh start. That is not possible. Those traumas and memories will haunt you for the rest of your days.” (Young Person, Belgium)**

A possible coping mechanism is being mainly present and future-focused. It's considered helpful when children and young people in care are treated as 'normal children and young people'. Professionals should ask how they feel now, what's going on now, and give them tools and support for the present and the future:

**“I experience this every day, in the morning when I leave the home, supervisors say: “Have fun today “and “See you later”. I hear that every day. Either it's “See you this evening” or it's “I won't work tomorrow so I see you on Thursday”. I hear that every morning, it gives me pleasure to leave. I like this way of leaving, knowing that someone has thought of me and doesn't just say “bye” or keep typing. Then I come back and see supervisors with a smile on their faces asking: “How was your day today?” And then you can start talking and telling.” (Young Person, Belgium)**

## **Issues raised and advice to professionals**

Young people in care often have a lot of experience of different professionals. They want professionals to be honest with them and they consider this to be a marker of whom they can trust:

**“They should tell you what they are going to do, not do stuff behind your back.” (Young person, UK)**

Young people felt that it was important that professionals did not comment negatively on a young person’s appearance, including what they chose to wear. This is also linked more widely to respect and non-discrimination. Young people want the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect them, they want to have their voices heard. As one young person from Belgium commented, it is important:

**“That they listen to us. That I have the feeling that they are listening. And that they try to understand.” (Young person, Belgium)**

Friendships were also a really important source of support for children in care. Friends are often the main confidantes of children and young people and care should be taken to ensure that where possible children and young people do not experience disruptions to their friendship networks when decisions are taken about placements.