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"Promise you will be here tomorrow": Using a multi-informant approach to explore emotional closeness and physical contact between children in care and their foster carers and school staff.

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Declaration

I, Baylee Peters, confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

Children and young people looked after (CYPLA) are vulnerable to adverse outcomes. While relationships with adults can be protective, CYPLA's experiences of such relationships vary. Often, these relationships provide practical support but lack emotional closeness, such as love, trust, and affection, limiting their effectiveness. Various factors influence these relationships, including individual child and adult traits, and systemic issues in education and social services. Educational Psychologists (EPs) are well-positioned to support CYPLA and their surrounding systems, yet their involvement varies, with EPs often being an underutilised resource.

Using Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological theory, this research explores the perspectives of school staff, foster carers and CYPLA on emotional closeness within their relationships, filling a notable gap by including the voices of CYPLA. Additionally, the study examines the role of EPs in supporting these relationships. Employing semi-structured interviews, the views of two CYPLA (aged 10-11), four school staff members and four foster carers were gathered. Thematic analysis of the interviews identified themes which elucidates the relational experiences and barriers for CYPLA.

Key themes from CYPLA included kindness is key; support to connect; and family support and strain. Adult participants yielded themes such as nurturing the child and the relationship; navigating complex feelings and intersecting relationships; intertwined person factors; the ripple effect of school culture; bridging the gap in children's services; and caution and confusion within social care and education. There was a narrative that close relationships, containing togetherness, physical contact, and trust, can thrive despite systemic barriers.

Additionally, the research uncovered how unsupportive school cultures can adversely affect CYPLA's relationships both within and outside of school.

These findings further our understanding of the emotional features within the relationships of CYPLA that require cultivation and inform practice and policy to dismantle barriers and foster close relationships and positive outcomes for CYPLA.

Impact Statement

This research investigated the conceptualisations of close relationships and the influencing factors, according to primary school-aged children and young people who are looked after (CYPLA), school staff and foster carers. It is one of few qualitative studies to combine the views of these groups regarding their relationships and the emotional features of these, addressing a significant gap in the research to understand the unique relational experiences of CYPLA. This is an important area of research as the number of CYPLA continues to rise, and they remain at risk of negative social, educational and wellbeing outcomes, of which relationships have the potential to mitigate. The study found that close relationships can exist for CYPLA, with important features such as togetherness, physical contact, and trust. Despite the existence of close relationships, this research also uncovered individual and systemic barriers that can pose challenges, which are likely to contribute to the variability in CYPLA experiences of relationships. The approach of these adults, and the identified barriers provides valuable insight for policy and practice.

This research has demonstrated the utility of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological theory within education, social and psychological research. This is the first study to use the framework to explore emotional closeness within the various relationships of CYPLA. By applying this model, the research was able to organise the factors influencing emotional closeness across each layer of CYPLA's ecosystem, to provide a comprehensive account of the factors impacting relationships for CYPLA and subsequent implications for stakeholders (professionals, schools, the virtual school, local authority [LA], and government). Key implications include increasing awareness of CYPLA needs and relational approaches, addressing relationships and physical contact in policies, increasing access to therapeutic and EP services, and streamlining bureaucratic processes.

The research findings highlight the value of current educational psychologist (EP) practice in supporting CYPLA, their family and school systems. The findings also indicate barriers, such as the lack of time and awareness of the EP role, in reducing CYPLA's access to EPs, and potential avenues for development of the role. Specific implications for EP practice include:

- Training – for families and school communities on trauma-informed and relational approaches, and collaborating with the virtual school and other LA teams on their training events.

- Consultation – with families and school staff members to celebrate CYPLA's strengths, problem solve concerns, shift within-child narratives, explore relational policy and provision, foster communication between home and school, and contribute to multi-disciplinary meetings.

- Assessment – with CYPLA and families to develop formulations, recommend relational approaches, and gather views. With school staff members and the LA to monitor the needs of CYPLA over time, evaluate relational practices and support available for adults, and contribute to multi-disciplinary assessments.

- Intervention – with CYPLA and families to provide therapeutic support, community groups and Video Interaction Guidance, and with school staff members to provide supervision and implementation of whole-school approaches to wellbeing, and through the LA by engaging in preventative projects.

- Research – with CYPLA and families by forming participatory groups, and with school communities and the LA through action research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Children and young people who are looked after (CYPLA) face well-documented risks of adverse educational, social, and wellbeing outcomes (Department for Education [DfE], 2023b). They underperform academically, face higher rates of exclusion, and have reduced opportunities for higher education or employment compared to peers (DfE, 2023b; Harrison, 2020; Viner & Taylor, 2005). Additionally, CYPLA exhibit heightened social and emotional needs and are overrepresented in the youth justice system (DfE, 2023b; Simkiss, 2012). The complex interaction of multiple risk factors, including predisposing child and family traits, pre-care experiences, and systemic policies and practices, contribute to these outcomes (Berridge, 2017; Sebba et al., 2015).

However, relationships with adults can protect against further adversity. Early relationships and attachment experiences with adults can influence later social, emotional, and academic outcomes (Bowlby, 1982). For CYPLA, who may have experienced insecure or disrupted attachments, forging positive relationships with adults once in care becomes crucial in compensating for early experiences and enhancing life outcomes (Iwaniec & Sneddon, 2001). Research indicates that such relationships contribute to safety, emotional wellbeing, identity development, and academic success (Bombèr & Hughes, 2013; S. Jackson & Martin, 1998; Sprecher et al., 2021; Winter, 2015). However, these relationships vary significantly, and may primarily deliver practical support, lacking the essential elements of close relationships such as love, trust and affection (Cameron & Das, 2019; Cameron & Maginn, 2008; Evans, 2020; Schofield, 2002; Singer et al., 2013; L. Warwick, 2017; Winter, 2015). The absence of these elements limits the impact these relationships can have on life outcomes. There is a lack of research exploring closeness in these relationships, particularly concerning the views of

primary school-aged CYPLA (Holland, 2009). This study seeks to fill this gap by gathering the perspectives of CYPLA, foster carers and school staff.

The relationships of CYPLA are influenced by various factors across different levels of their ecosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), including child and adult characteristics, emotions and experiences (Taylor & McQuillan, 2014), support available for CYPLA and adults (Edwards, 2016) and a culture of fear within caring professions (Ellis & Curtis, 2021; Keys, 2017). However, there is limited research on the factors affecting the emotional closeness of CYPLA's relationships in school and at home, which the present study seeks to address. Additionally, this research explores the role of educational psychologists (EPs) in supporting relational practice. Given their involvement across many systems (e.g. schools), EPs are strategically positioned to impact both policy and practice (Boesley, 2021) to improve relational experiences of CYPLA.

1.1. Theoretical Framework

To examine the complex systems surrounding CYPLA and their relationships, the researcher has employed the bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Utilising this theoretical framework facilitates comparison and synthesis of research findings, and enables the researcher to map these onto a framework to provide clarity and reliability to the research (Tudge et al., 2009). Using this model is beneficial as examining each system sheds light on the multitude of influences on close relationships for CYPLA, offering insights and potential intervention targets at multiple levels.

The ecological systems model (Bronfenbrenner, 1989) proposed that children's development results from bidirectional interactions between the individual and wider contextual factors. The individual level, and thus the child or young person (CYP), is at the

centre, interacting with their immediate environment, such as family and friends (Microsystem), as well as their indirect environment, such as their local authority (LA) and social services (Exosystem). These levels, environments and factors are also interacting with each other (Mesosystem). Additionally, the CYP and other systems are influenced by broader societal factors including laws, policies, and cultural attitudes (Macrosystem).

In his later work, Bronfenbrenner further developed his model to produce the bioecological theory of human development or the process-person-context-time model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Bronfenbrenner wished to emphasise the active role of the individual in their own development, acknowledging the bidirectional nature of influences and the importance of context and timing in shaping developmental outcomes. This was achieved by the addition of the Chronosystem, which acknowledges the importance of duration and timing of experiences over the life course. The model suggested that development emerges from complex reciprocal interactions/Processes between an active and evolving person and their immediate environment. These interactions must occur regularly over extended periods of time and will vary as a function of the characteristics of the Person, the environment/Context, and changes over Time. See figure 1 below for an overview of the model.
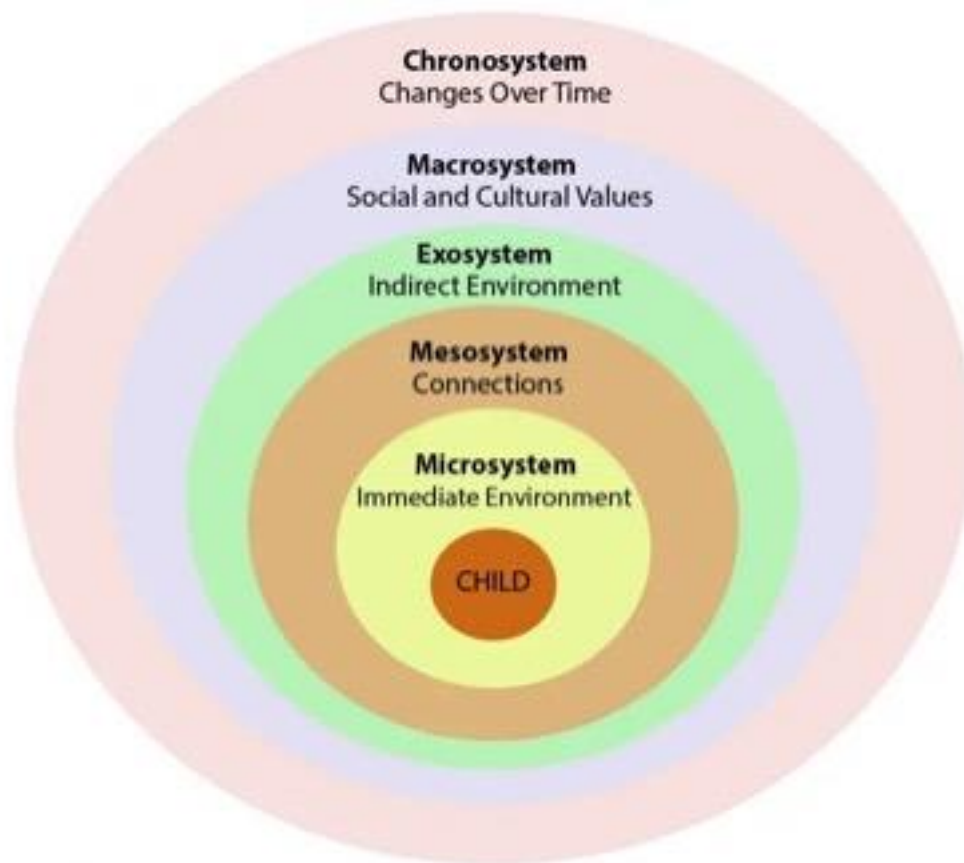
Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological theory of human development.

As mentioned, the present research utilises the bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) to examine the factors influencing the relationships of CYPLA. Due to the vastness of the theory, the researcher recognises it would be challenging to apply every aspect of it in great depth. Additionally, there is a lack of guidance regarding the application of this theory. Thus, researchers are able to draw on specific aspects of Bronfenbrenner's model providing they maintain fidelity to the theory's core principles and developments over time (Tudge et al., 2009). In this study, the researcher draws on the bioecological theory of human development as a theoretical framework to explore the relational experiences of CYPLA. By employing this theory as comprehensive framework, it helps to identify factors at the individual and systemic levels that influence the relationships of CYPLA.

Through this approach, the research aims to contribute insights to practice, guidance, and policy in supporting the relational capacity and needs of CYPLA, foster carers and school staff members. Bronfenbrenner's model facilitates a shift away from within-child explanations for difficulties, encouraging a holistic perspective that considers a wide range of influences within the child's context. This perspective resonates with the core values, beliefs, and practice of the researcher and EPs in the UK (Pellegrini, 2009). Therefore, Bronfenbrenner's model (2005) is highly relevant and supportive of this research.

With the guidance of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory (2005), this research explores the experiences of CYPLA, foster carers and school staff members in building close relationships. The theoretical framework has informed the research questions (RQs), methodology, findings, and implications of the study. The RQs are broad and seek the views and experiences of each participant group to explore factors at different levels of CYPLA's ecosystem that influence their relationships. A multi-informant approach was used to enable a greater overview of the ecosystem. CYPLA and informants within the CYPLA's microsystem engaged in a semi-structured interview to consider factors impacting their relationships and aid reflection on the ecosystemic layers. Furthermore, various levels of the ecosystem were considered when identifying themes, to ensure the wider context was represented, and suggesting implications for practice and policy across many different systems concerning CYPLA. The theoretical framework had a significant impact on this research which will be highlighted throughout later chapters.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Chapter Summary

This chapter aims to review and critically examine literature relevant to the research topic. It will begin by exploring outcomes for CYPLA within the historical and political context. The importance and variability of relationships for CYPLA will be examined, considering child, adult and systemic factors that influence these relationships. The chapter will also emphasise the significance of accessing the voice of CYPLA to evoke meaningful change. Finally, the aims and rationale for the current research and potential contribution to the EP profession are discussed. Details on the literature search process are provided in Appendix A.

2.2. CYPLA

2.2.1. Definition

CYPLA refers to CYP for whom the state assumes parental responsibility as their caregivers are unable to provide care for various reasons. As per The Children Act (1989), a CYP is defined as 'looked after' by a LA if they receive accommodation from the LA for more than 24 hours and is subject to a care or placement order (where a court orders the CYP to be placed in the supervision of the LA).

2.2.2. Statistics

In England, there are currently 83,840 CYPLA, marking a record high, with the numbers increasing each year (DfE, 2023a). The majority of these CYP are under a care or placement order, while others are voluntarily placed by parents. Abuse or neglect accounts for 65% of placements, followed by family dysfunction (13%) and absent parenting (9%) (DfE, 2023a). Most CYPLA reside in foster placements (68%), where adults provide temporary or

permanent care within their homes. Others are housed in secure units, children's homes, or semi-independent living accommodations (17%). Some CYPLA live independently in community or residential settings, like work or school accommodation (5%). Ensuring placement stability is crucial for CYPLA to maintain continuity and enduring relationships. Despite this, 31% of CYPLA have experienced more than one placement within the year, and 1 in 10 faced high instability, defined as three or more placements in a 12 month period (DfE, 2023a). The pre-care experiences and current living situations of CYPLA provide the foundation and context on which relationships develop.

2.2.3. Chronosystem & Macrosystem: The Changing Social & Political Context

Societal attitudes and national legislation regarding CYPLA have undergone substantial changes over time. Early legislation primarily prioritised the physical welfare of CYPLA, reflecting a historical view of them having a low social standing (Gupta, 2015). For instance, The Children and Young Persons Act (1908) established 'orphanages' to divert CYPLA from adult prisons and protect them from abuse. Influenced by theories of child development and relationships and several serious abuse inquiries in residential care, The Children's Act (1948) favoured family-based foster care (Gupta, 2015). Although, this was criticised for potential financial motivations. The Children's Act (1989) similarly responded to child abuse inquiries and highlighted flaws in the system to mandate that LAs investigate a CYP's context and assess risk. The Act also stressed considering the wishes and feelings of CYP in decision-making to ensure their safety, introducing child-centred approaches.

Several notable cases of institutional abuse towards CYPLA in the UK have spurred significant reforms. For example, The Waterhouse Inquiry (1996) was prompted by widespread physical and sexual abuse of CYP in residential homes (Bray & Minty, 2001). The findings

from this inquiry, along with others, exposed systemic failures in safeguarding systems and handling of allegations. This inquiry is believed to have influenced The Protection of Children Act (1999), establishing the disclosure and barring service for thorough background checks on individuals working with CYP. Additionally, the Serious Case Review was introduced in 2003 as part of the Children Act (2004), mandating Local Safeguarding Children Boards to review and learn from serious incidents of child abuse or neglect. Other reforms stemming from abuse cases include improved staff training, increased supervision, and staff-to-child ratios. These cases, alongside The Children's Act (1989), have also spurred greater emphasis on child protection.

Recent legislation regarding CYPLA extends beyond ensuring their safety to prioritising their social and emotional wellbeing (Gupta, 2015; S. Jackson, 2010). The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 recognised the importance of relationships for CYPLA, suggesting care leavers should maintain supportive relationships with their caregivers when transitioning to adulthood. Likewise, The Children Act (2004) and The Children and Young Persons Act (2008) emphasised the need for stable, nurturing environments, emotional support, and advocacy for CYPLA. The Act (2008) also attempts to enhance the academic achievement for CYPLA and mandates all school settings to appoint a designated teacher (DT). Thus, relationships and the views of CYPLA begin to feature in legislation.

The Children and Families Act (2014) was also influenced by high-profile child abuse cases, such as the Rochdale Scandal, where vulnerable CYPLA were sexually exploited by a group of adults that included several carers, reigniting concerns about the protection of CYPLA and reporting failures. The Act led to the introduction of Child Sexual Exploitation Risk Orders to restrict individuals posing a threat to CYP, and reforms to Local Safeguarding Children

Boards to enhance their effectiveness. The Act also established 'staying put' arrangements allowing CYPLA to remain with foster families until age 21. Additionally, The Children and Social Work Act (2017) outlined corporate parenting principles, defining the LA obligations to promote CYPLA's wellbeing and life opportunities. These pieces of legislation indicate the importance safety and relationships.

Historic child abuse cases have had a profound impact on society and legislation, policy, and practice to safeguard CYPLA and elevate their voices. Recent legislation attempts to improve CYPLA's life outcomes by attending to child development theories and introducing education measures. However, critics argue that England's welfare system, focused on detecting abuse, may inadvertently neglect other needs, such as relationships. This emphasis on risk aversion can hinder professionals from forming close bonds with CYPLA due to fear of allegations (Featherstone et al., 2018). The evolving social and political context shapes the practice environment for adults supporting CYPLA.

2.2.4. Outcomes for CYPLA

Despite legislative efforts and shifting attitudes towards CYPLA, significant disparities persist in their educational, social, and wellbeing outcomes, driving the motivation for this research. Academic achievement for CYPLA (in care at least a year) consistently falls below that of their peers throughout school. Both Key Stage 1 and 2 assessments show that a lower percentage of CYPLA obtain the expected standard of reading, writing, maths, and science (DfE, 2023b). See table 1 below. During Key Stage 4, the attainment gap widens, with only 11% of CYPLA attaining a pass in GCSE maths and English, compared to 49.8% of all pupils. Notably, CYPLA also exhibit higher rates of special educational needs (SEN), with 57.5% having SEN (27.2% with SEN support status and 30.2% with an Educational Health Care Plan

[EHCP]). See table 2 below. The most common area of need for CYPLA is social, emotional, and mental health (51.2%). While SEN contributes to the attainment gap, even when accounted for, a significant attainment gap remains (DfE, 2023b). Interestingly, the rate of absence and persistent absenteeism for CYPLA is comparable to that of all pupils (DfE, 2023b), suggesting that low academic achievement cannot be solely attributed to attendance issues, or SEN.

Table 1

Percentage of CYPLA reaching the expected standard of reading, writing, maths, and science in key stage 1 (KS1) and 2 (KS2), in comparison to all pupils.

	KS1		KS2	
Subject	CYPLA	All Pupils	CYPLA	All Pupils
Reading	44	67	52	75
Writing	33	58	38	69
Maths	43	68	41	71
Science	56	77	47	79

Table 2

Percentage of CYPLA with special educational needs (SEN), including SEN support status and EHCP, in comparison to all pupils.

SEN Status	CYPLA	All Pupils
SEN Support	27.2	12.4
EHCP	30.2	3.9
Total SEN	57.5	16.3

In addition to lower academic achievement, CYPLA are disproportionately sanctioned with fixed term exclusions (when a pupil cannot attend school for a predetermined number of days), with a rate of 9.8% compared to 2.28% of all pupils (DfE, 2023b). While policy activity has reduced permanent exclusion (when a pupil cannot return to the provision) for CYPLA in line with that of all pupils, accurate data on this is challenging due to unreported school placement endings (Black, 2022). Furthermore, CYPLA are less likely to pursue higher education and secure employment post-school than their peers, influencing life outcomes (Harrison, 2020; Viner & Taylor, 2005).

CYPLA also face social and emotional challenges. Data indicates that 37% of CYPLA display social and emotional needs, with a greater prevalence of conduct, hyperactivity, and emotional disorders and risk-taking behaviours, such as early and unprotected sexual activity, among CYPLA (DfE, 2023a; Simkiss, 2012). Similarly, 3% of CYPLA struggle with substance misuse issues and they are overrepresented in the youth justice system, with 2% of CYPLA gaining a conviction or caution within one year (DfE, 2023a). CYPLA are also more likely to face homelessness as adults than their peers (Viner & Taylor, 2005). These statistics highlight the vulnerability of CYPLA to educational, social, and emotional challenges.

2.2.5. Explanations for Poor Outcomes

While outcomes for CYPLA are clear, explanations for these disparities are complex and multifaceted (Coman & Devaney, 2011; Denecheau, 2011; Jones et al., 2011). Individual child and family characteristics (e.g. SEN) and pre-care experiences (e.g. trauma, deprivation) contribute to negative outcomes (O'Higgins et al., 2015; Sebba et al., 2015). Experiences in care can also significantly influence later outcomes. Some CYPLA may benefit from the stability and support of being looked after (Berridge, 2017; Harker et al., 2003, 2004; Narey & Mark, 2018), as earlier entry into the care system is associated with better outcomes (Sebba et

al., 2015), overcoming predisposing factors and early adversity. However, outcomes for CYPLA continue to be unacceptably poor (MacAlister, 2022). Structural features such as lack of communication between professionals, multiple placements and the often abrupt termination of care contribute to these outcomes (McParlin, 1996; Narey & Mark, 2018; Welbourne & Leeson, 2012). Additionally, the type of care setting impacts outcomes, with CYPLA in foster or kinship care gaining greater educational outcomes than those in residential care (Sebba et al., 2015). Hence, the care system does not consistently provide the necessary conditions for CYPLA to overcome early adversity.

Similarly, the education system influences outcomes for CYPLA. Educational instability and non-mainstream school placements (e.g. special schools, alternative provisions) are prevalent among CYPLA, influencing adverse educational and life outcomes (Sebba et al., 2015). Moreover, professionals prioritise the physical safety of CYPLA over their educational needs, resulting in low expectations and outcomes (Berridge, 2017; Harker et al., 2003). The adverse outcomes for CYPLA arise from complex interacting risk factors and experiences before, during and after their time in care and education, making targeted intervention to improve outcomes extremely challenging.

2.3. Relationships

Relationships with adults underlie many of the risk factors for CYPLA, however they also have the potential to be protective. CYPLA's experiences of relationships with adults are variable, however many relationships lack an emotional connection or closeness, limiting their effectiveness in promoting positive outcomes. It is the emotional closeness and affection within these relationships that is the focus of this research.

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2.3.1. Emotional Closeness

Attachment theory, pioneered by Bowlby, highlights the importance of close relationships with adults for all CYP. Initially focused on the emotional connection between a child and their biological mother, the theory later expanded to include any significant adult (Bowlby, 1982). Recent research has further suggested that school staff members can act as temporary or additional attachment figures (Howes & Ritchie, 1999; Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). In the USA, four patterns of attachment were identified: secure, insecure avoidant, insecure anxious (Ainsworth, 1979) and disorganised attachment (Main & Solomon, 1986), which have different features and implications for life outcomes. A secure attachment, the desired outcome, will develop from consistent interactions with an attuned adult over time (Bowlby, 1979). The adult provides a secure base for the CYP to explore and return to for protection or emotional regulation (Woodhouse et al., 2020). When a secure attachment is evident, CYP will explore their environment confidently, and trust that they have a reliable adult to return to. Love, a strong feeling of deep fondness, is the defining feature of adult-child attachments, which sets these relationships apart from others and represents an emotional connection between an adult and a child (Bowlby, 1979). Trust and love are important features of child-adult relationships.

Attachment figures also offer CYP emotional security and protection. This is often facilitated through physical (e.g. interpersonal touch) and non-physical (e.g. emotional interactions) affection. CYP seek to be physically close to an adult to feel safe and secure (Bowlby, 1979), with a lack of affection leading to a sense of insecurity within CYP (Stroebe & Archer, 2013). Interpersonal touch, such as hugging or hand holding, is considered a biological necessity for social and emotional development. Physical contact is a form of non-verbal communication which promotes physical and emotional intimacy within the

relationship. Research from animal and child-mother studies suggest touch contributes to the child's brain development, emotional and behavioural regulation, and stress reduction in mothers (Barnett, 2005), promoting development and bonding. Both physical and non-physical affection enable the CYP to feel emotionally secure and close to an adult.

These early attachment experiences shape a child's expectations for future relationships, their internal working model (IWM), and influence their self-esteem and motivation later in life. A secure attachment is linked to healthy development and positive outcomes (Svanberg et al., 2010), and lacking love or experiencing a loss of love can have far reaching negative consequences for CYP (Bowlby, 1979). Insecure or disorganised attachment may lead to social, emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties (Fearon et al., 2010; Rutter & Sroufe, 2000). Theorists initially believed there was a crucial period of attachment, around 6-30 months old, whereby failure to form a secure attachment would have serious and persistent consequences for the child (Bowlby, 1982; Rutter & Sroufe, 2000). Early relationships shape brain development, specifically the neuronal growth of the prefrontal cortex and associated executive functions (Balbernie, 2001), linked with later achievement and self-regulation. However, recent research indicates CYP can form secure attachment later in life, even after adversity (Rutter et al., 2007). While learning and neuronal growth is most significant in early years, it continues throughout life. Attachment patterns can change and negative consequences may be overstated (Tizard, 2009). Therefore, research demonstrates that early relational experiences are important but may not be deterministic.

While influential, attachment theory doesn't provide a universal account of adult-child relationships. Broadly, it has been criticised for imposing rigid norms for a "healthy" adult-child relationship, which may categorise and pathologize children and stigmatise carers

(Burman, 2016). Attachment theory is heavily based on western research and ideas; therefore, it may also be culturally bias, similarly leading to the pathologization of families and behaviours that might be adaptive and appropriate. This is important to consider in research concerning CYPLA, through an attachment lens, labelling is likely to follow. Labelling and diagnoses can be considered simplistic, and deficit focused. It is also argued that taking an attachment focus in research with CYPLA can lead to important contextual factors and interventions being overlooked, in favour of within-child explanations and solutions. Furthermore, attachment theory focuses on dyadic relationships between an adult and child, it does not consider the broader social and familiar networks of children or "non-normative" family structures (Burman, 2016).

A complementary perspective in understanding relationships and growth, which may address the shortcomings of attachment theory, is the humanistic theoretical approaches of Carl Rogers. Initially focused on developing person-centred therapy, Rogers suggested that an environment characterised by unconditional positive regard (UPR), accepting and valuing the person without judgement, could enable therapeutic growth (Rogers, 1957). Acceptance supported a person to feel free to explore their true self and express their feelings openly. UPR closely aligns to love as a primary form of recognition. From social philosophy, the theory of recognition suggests that humans need recognition from others to develop a positive self-image and achieve personal social wellbeing (Honneth, 2014). Love, being valued for your unique personal qualities and needs, is a primary form of recognition. Love provides emotional support and security, fosters a sense of self-worth and confidence (Honneth, 2014). Rogers also emphasised the importance of congruence (genuineness) and empathetic understanding in facilitating therapeutic growth. Therapeutic growth leads to changes in an individual's self-concept, allowing them to self-actualise and realise their full potential (Rogers, 2004). The key

principles of authenticity, acceptance and empathy can inform our understanding of relationships more broadly.

Attachment theory has utility in understanding the importance of adult-child relationships, their impact on future outcomes and potential to be an intervention later in life. Importantly for this research, it provides a theoretical basis, alongside humanistic approaches and social philosophy, to understand the emotional components of high-quality adult-child relationships. This research does not make assumptions about the "norms" of relationships or seek to label/pathologize CYPLA. This research aims to understand the emotional components of relationships, in the context of the care and education systems. The researcher uses the term emotional closeness, to represent these components and the emotional connection within a relationship.

2.3.2. Emotional Closeness as a Protective Factor

For CYPLA, early attachments are often insecure due to abuse and neglect, or disrupted by entering the care system, which may contribute to negative outcomes. However, consistent, and enduring relationships can develop whilst in care. These relationships contribute to the safety of CYPLA by promoting stability in home and school placements (Dearden, 2004) and reducing the risk of child sexual exploitation (The Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2012, 2013). In addition to safeguarding CYPLA, trusting, safe, and nurturing relationships can compensate for past harm and overcome insecure attachments to promote positive outcomes (Iwaniec & Sneddon, 2001; Winter, 2015). Qualitative research with foster carers and CYPLA has suggested a view that the relationship and trust they develop reduces the risk of CYPLA reliving their own early attachment experiences in future relationships (Langley, 2019; Sprecher et al., 2021). In addition, experiencing love from a foster carer supports CYPLA

to overcome relational trauma and use adaptive coping strategies (Schofield, 2002), highlighting the reparative function. Relationships can also contribute to CYPLA's emotional wellbeing (Bombèr & Hughes, 2013) and develop their resilience (Houston, 2010; Langley, 2019). Experiencing love and developing trust helps CYPLA overcome trauma and improve emotional literacy, implicating an emotional connection with adults as an intervention.

Relationships also influence a range of self-esteem and education outcomes. They can promote identity development, confidence and self-belief (Houston, 2010) and experiencing love can influence CYPLA's self-worth and their perception of being loveable (Schofield, 2002). With enhanced self-worth, CYPLA will hold greater aspirations for themselves, ultimately improving education and health outcomes (Sprecher et al., 2021; Winter, 2015). Regarding teachers, findings suggest relationships with significant adults, such as educators, can positively influence identity formation and sense of agency (Macleod et al., 2021). Although this study conducted a qualitative secondary analysis of interview data which can pose interpretive biases as the researcher was not present for the data collection, the researcher worked closely and reflectively with the academics who collected the data. Other findings corroborate these and indicate that relationships with adults influence educational engagement and achievement, belonging and advocacy skills (Sugden, 2013). CYPLA can see how they are viewed and treated by others and the expectations they have of them, influencing how they view and aspire for themselves. Relationships with adults contribute to identity formation and aspirations, in turn impacting their education, health and wellbeing.

Emotional connections with adults have a significant impact on physical and psychological wellbeing, and education of CYPLA. Therefore, further investigation into these relationships is valuable to support their development and maintenance.

2.3.3. Variability in Experiences of Emotional Closeness

Despite research indicating relationships with adults are protective, CYPLA's experiences of these varies significantly. There is evidence of positive experiences and emotional closeness with both foster carers and school staff members. Qualitative findings from foster carers suggest bonding is natural, instinctive and parental (Langley, 2019). They learn about the CYPLA to respond sensitively, providing the stability and security needed for bonds to develop. They also invest quality time, which creates a space for CYPLA to belong, promoting the relationship. These experiences of belonging and quality time are echoed by qualitative findings from paired interviews with CYPLA and their foster carers. CYPLA felt accepted and belonging within the foster family and enjoyed shared experiences and laughter (Clarkson et al., 2017). Additionally, talking enables emotional and relational difficulties to be overcome, talking and personal sharing increases with time, trust, and respect. Foster carers and CYPLA self-reported the relationships were supportive, which was triangulated by a narrative analysis of the conversations between the pairs (Clarkson et al., 2017). Additionally, these relationships had endured into friendships now the CYPLA was older. Carer leavers have recalled supportive teachers who went above their professional duties and remained involved in their lives after school (Driscoll, 2011, 2013). Although the accuracy of retrospective recall can be contested, longitudinal studies support these findings, with CYPLA describing teachers as taking a personal interest, supporting their education and emotional wellbeing, and motivating them to believe in themselves (Harker et al., 2003, 2004). Therefore, CYPLA have shared experiencing trust, belonging and emotional support within relationships with adults.

Furthermore, an emotional attachment that goes beyond providing safety has been reported in CYPLA's relationships with foster carers, that of professional love. Foster carers

enjoyed developing professional love for CYPLA (Blackburn & Matchett, 2022), The foster carers stated they loved the CYPLA, and even those who did not use the word appeared to love the CYPLA, notably this is an interpretation of the researchers (supported by a singular quote) which may be subject to bias. Yet large-scale research in Denmark has indicated a high prevalence of love in foster care relationships, with 87% of CYPLA reported feeling loved by their carer (Lausten & Frederiksen, 2016). While bonding can be rewarding, foster carers have shared that they loved and grieved for the child following placement breakdown (Langley, 2019; Lynes & Sitoe, 2019). However, due to small samples or low response rates of these studies, it could be argued that there may be a sample bias (i.e., foster carers who had profound feelings may be more inclined to participate). Additionally, findings from Denmark cannot be applied to the UK context without caution. These experiences of love may not be representative of all relationships for CYPLA in the UK.

In addition to feelings of love, the presence of trust has been frequently reported. From survey data of six LAs, most CYPLA have a trusted adult (Selwyn, Briheim-Crookall, et al., 2017). Although caution is warranted due to potential social desirability bias as many CYPLA opted to complete the survey with an adult present. Professional intimacy, including physical and non-physical affection, has also been documented in relationships between CYPLA and residential care workers in a highly reflective and comprehensive ethnographic study (L. Warwick, 2017). Interpersonal touch was child-led and used more often than expected to show affection, alongside spending time together or 'hanging out' as a form of non-physical affection. In another similar study, touch was considered to be central to care, with tender forms of touch, such as hugging, being observed spontaneously from playful interactions and when requested by a CYPLA (Eßer, 2018). Foster carers have described their use of physical contact as unconscious, frequent, and used willingly to express warmth (Rees & Pithouse, 2008). The

presence of love, trust and affection suggests CYPLA experience emotionally close relationships with significant adults.

In contrast, research indicates that not all CYPLA experience positive relationships with adults. Some CYPLA report lacking good quality relationships and opportunities to connect with their social workers, with trust declining as they grow older (Department for Education and Skills, 2007; Selwyn, Briheim-Crookall, et al., 2017). Social workers are described by care leavers as transient and frustrating (Driscoll, 2011; McLeod, 2007; Winter, 2015). Similarly, CYPLA wish for teachers to be more understanding and loving, and treat them like their peers (Goddard, 2000; Honey et al., 2011). Professionals are perceived as holding low expectations for CYPLA and not prioritising forming meaningful relationships (Goddard, 2000; Harker et al., 2003, 2004; Winter, 2015). Although CYPLA seek emotional connections with professionals, there are challenges to this.

Research indicates that emotional closeness to a significant adult is not a universal experience for CYPLA (Evans, 2020). Within the USA, child welfare professionals provide informational support (guidance), but instrumental (resources), emotional (companionship, affection, trust) and appraisal (evaluative feedback) support is lacking (Singer et al., 2013). Studies involving care leaver adults in the UK have similarly suggested a lack of belonging and love (Boddy, 2019; Colbridge et al., 2017; Schofield, 2002), with love and the relationship not prioritised. Similarly, only 48% of CYPLA in residential care felt loved by a carer (Lausten & Frederiksen, 2016). Research from residential settings in Canada found that whilst the majority of CYPLA feel safe in their placements, they did not feel an emotional connection to an adult. The CYPLA also did not believe providing love or affection was part of the adult's role, thus they did not turn to them for this (Côté & Clément, 2022). These findings suggest

that love is not expected or experienced by all CYPLA regardless of location and placement type.

Regarding affection, while research has indicated tender affection is used, the same research also suggested conditions to this. Acts that limit professional intimacy, such as staff retreating to offices to avoid interaction, and constraining forms of physical contact such as guiding CYP away, have been observed (Eßer, 2018; L. Warwick, 2017). In the absence of physical contact, some CYPLA may seek bodily contact in the form of physical restraint to help manage intense emotions and establish security from an adult (Steckley, 2018). Interestingly, CYPLA perceived the practice of carers who provided frequent physical contact to be exceptional and beyond the norm, and foster carers had met CYPLA who didn't understand or expect physical contact, as they were denied physical contact in previous placements (Rees & Pithouse, 2008). These findings suggest that physical contact is often denied to CYPLA, despite being a feature of high-quality relationships (Winter, 2015). Further research is required to understand the use and impact of interpersonal touch with CYPLA.

Sprecher et al. (2021) noted that relationships between CYPLA and adults vary widely, ranging from parental-like attachments to non-familial or painful connections, suggesting a continuum of relationships. Therefore, the presence of love, trust and physical contact is not consistent in the relationships of CYPLA. Relationships that lack emotional closeness may be limited in their capacity to enhance positive outcomes. This highlights the need for further research and an individualised understanding of these complex relationships.

2.4. Factors Influencing the Relationships of CYPLA

2.4.1. Individual

According to Bronfenbrenner (2005), CYP actively interact with their environment, emphasising the need to explore child-related factors affecting their emotional connections with adults. For instance, there is evidence from a large meta-analysis that placement stability is associated with younger CYPLA (Rock et al., 2015). Qualitative studies lend support to this idea, with foster carers suggesting emotional closeness with babies and infants is embodied and natural (Luckow, 2020).

Adverse early experiences and related attachment difficulties can impact a CYPLA's capacity for new relationships (Winter, 2015), as early maltreatment disrupts the development of trust (Brewin & Statham, 2011; Selwyn, Wood, et al., 2017). Sprecher et al. (2021) found CYPLA mistrust and expect the worst of adults, and do not believe they deserve supportive adults, due to their early experiences. As a result, CYPLA may reject adults and their affection, and suppress their own affectionate feelings to maintain control over the relationship to protect themselves (Hopkins, 2000; Howe & Fearnley, 2003). Alternatively, CYPLA may display indiscriminate friendliness, characterised by undifferentiated behaviour towards familiar adults and strangers (Hodges & Tizard, 1989; O'Connor et al., 2000).These behaviours may emerge from a desire to experience love and emotional closeness (Bennett et al., 2009). However, this lack of appropriate boundaries may make CYPLA vulnerable to strangers (Bennett et al., 2009) and pose challenges for adults seeking to establish healthy relationships with them. CYPLA may not know how to accept, manage, or reciprocate emotional closeness from adults due the early negative experiences.

Due to these early experiences and subsequent protective behaviour, CYPLA often have individualised needs and a higher prevalence of challenging behaviour, neurodevelopmental disorders, and psychological and educational difficulties (Ford et al., 2007). Trauma-exposed

CYP may have heightened cortisol levels, leading to hyper or hypoarousal and fight/flight/freeze responses (Glaser, 2000), causing them to behave as if under threat even when physically safe, which may present as the aforementioned difficulties. The behaviour of the CYPLA is commonly cited by adults as the reason for placement breakdown, although these findings may not be representative of all experiences due to low response rates (Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). However, the impact of a CYPLA's behaviour on placement stability and relationships has been found from a large systematic review and qualitative research (Langley, 2019; Pinto & Luke, 2022; Rock et al., 2015). Foster carers fall into a pattern of responding to CYPLA's rejecting and challenging behaviour by also rejecting them. Therefore, a CYPLA's behaviour may place strain on relationships and placements, limiting emotional closeness.

A CYPLA's relationships with their birth families can impact their relationships with other adults. CYPLA and foster carers can feel that these relationships and family practices conflict with each other. CYPLA may feel instability and uncertainty as to where they belong and wish to return home (Langley, 2019; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014; Winter, 2015), which negatively impacts bonding between CYPLA and their carer. CYPLA can experience rejection and inconsistent family contact, impacting placement stability. In contrast, family contact can be beneficial for the emotional wellbeing of CYPLA, and promotes stability within the placement and relationship (Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). Further research is required to understand the variable impact of the birth family on CYPLA relationships.

A child's age, experiences, needs and existing relationships may influence their ability to form close bonds with foster carers. This warrants exploration with other significant adults, like teachers.

2.4.2. Microsystem

Adult-related factors are influential in the relationships of CYPLA, particularly personal characteristics. Adults must understand the past experiences, needs and vulnerabilities of CYPLA and approach them with acceptance, warmth, and commitment (Boesley, 2021; Goodall, 2014; Sprecher et al., 2021; Whitehouse, 2014). Similarly, foster carers should possess nurturing qualities and a sense of humour (Pinto & Luke, 2022) to respond to needs effectively, and promote their education, sense of belonging, and support their relationship with their birth family (Pinto & Luke, 2022; Rock et al., 2015; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). Research has emphasised a need for school staff and foster carers to have clear boundaries and flexibility (Macleod et al., 2021; Pinto & Luke, 2022; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). Negative perceptions of CYPLA, particularly judgements of 'moral worth', and adult preference for physical contact can affect the frequency of interpersonal touch to show affection (Eßer, 2018; L. Warwick, 2017). CYPLA value adults who demonstrate genuine interest and fondness, availability, and listen with openness and honesty (Baldry & Kemmis, 1998; Macleod et al., 2021) to build an emotional connection. Compassion, nurture and attunement appear to be relevant adult characteristics for building emotionally close relationships.

Working closely with CYPLA can evoke a range of emotions in adults (Edwards, 2016; Goodall, 2014). DTs have reported finding CYPLA's experiences deeply shocking, emotionally disturbing, and onerous to process, especially if they have formed a connection with the child, and feeling unprepared for the disclosures made (Waterman, 2020). Residential workers have reported feeling upset and overwhelmed when CYPLA leave the setting (Ellis, 2012; Ellis & Curtis, 2021). Similarly, foster carers may experience feelings of despair and self-doubt, particularly if they struggle to understand and connect with the CYPLA (Allen & Vostanis, 2005). Findings from an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) explored these

emotional experiences further with foster carers who had experienced placement breakdown with CYPLA under five years old. The findings suggest that these emotional experiences, such as difficulty connecting with CYPLA or being confronted with disturbing experiences or displays of trauma, can make foster carers vulnerable to secondary trauma (Donachy, 2017). This raises concerns for the wellbeing of these adults, and the impact of their emotional state on their interactions with CYPLA. For instance, emotional burnout among residential workers can reduce demonstrations of physical affection towards CYPLA (L. Warwick, 2017). Similarly, KS2 teachers perceived their negative or ambivalent feelings to adversely influence their competency and wellbeing, and considered detaching from CYPLA to be a constructive and necessary protective measure (Edwards, 2016). Adults may also distance themselves emotionally from CYPLA to protect themselves against the pain of loss when the CYPLA moves on (Ellis, 2012; Ellis & Curtis, 2021; Goldstein et al., 1984). Emotional investment leads to a perception of vulnerability, therefore adults may feel more comfortable supporting from a distance (Goodall, 2014). However, detaching is likely to impede relationship development (Winter, 2015). Conversely, positive relationships with CYPLA can enhance teachers' sense of achievement and wellbeing (Edwards, 2016). Effective management of emotions is crucial for adults supporting CYPLA to ensure effective relational practice. This study utilised teacher-report measures of a small sample, which were not triangulated with other sources of information, therefore the impact of adult emotions on their interactions with CYPLA needs further exploration.

An adult's past experiences, both personal and professional, can significantly influence their ability to bond with CYPLA. Attachment theory suggests that an adult's interpretation and response to a child's needs are shaped by their own attachment experiences and IWM of relationships. There is limited research within this area, however in the USA infants in foster

care often exhibit attachment behaviours that concurs with their carers' attachment type (Dozier et al., 2001). Additionally, teachers who recall less harsh parental discipline from their own childhood perceive greater closeness in their teacher-child relationships (Kesner, 2000), suggesting that a secure attachment is important. However, other findings have suggested that early adversity can make foster carers more empathetic and motivated (Dando & Minty, 1987). Therefore, the attachment of adults may influence how they support CYPLA. Furthermore, an adult's experiences while supporting CYPLA can shape their practice. Foster carers with more experience tend to have more stable placements (Rock et al., 2015). However, some carers may experience heartbreak when placements end, leading them to adjust their approach to create distance and prevent future emotional pain (Lynes & Sitoe, 2019; Sprecher et al., 2021). For some of these carers, loss also influenced their decision to cease fostering. It is important for adults to process and resolve these childhood and caring experiences to maintain their ability to form meaningful relationships with CYPLA.

Adult characteristics, psychological wellbeing, and past experiences of parenting and fostering are relevant when supporting CYPLA (Pinto & Luke, 2022). These factors influence an adult's relational capacity and thus how close they become to CYPLA.

2.4.3. Mesosystem

The interaction of factors within and between different levels is crucial to consider in understanding the relationships of CYPLA (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Existing research has primarily focused on the behaviour of CYPLA, neglecting the bidirectional influence on relationship quality (Sargent & O'Brien, 2004). The quality of the relationship between a CYPLA and an adult is shaped by both their characteristics, wellbeing, and past experiences; misalignment of these can lead to placement breakdown within the first year (Donachy, 2017).

Bodily practices in Denmark exemplify how CYPLA and adults bring their own needs and experiences to the relationship. Bodily contact is negotiated, requiring reflection and adaptability from both parties (Luckow, 2020). The factors presented here do not exist in isolation, they are interrelated, this research seeks to understand this complexity.

2.4.4. Exosystem

Close relationships between adults and CYPLA are influenced, not only by individual factors, but by indirect environmental factors (Dando & Minty, 1987). Adequate support for adults is crucial, given the emotional challenges and the impact of these on adult's interactions with CYPLA. DTs and foster carers report that personal and professional social connections can enhance their ability to support CYPLA and mange challenges (Boesley, 2021; Sinclair et al., 2004). Informal support networks may shape the relationships of CYPLA.

Adults supporting CYPLA often express frustration with a lack of time and space for reflection and thinking therapeutically, leading to rushed decision making, particularly around placements (Donachy, 2017). Another source of frustration is little relationship and support from social workers, impacting foster carer's wellbeing and confidence in their ability during challenging times (Blackburn & Matchett, 2022; Lynes & Sitoe, 2019; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). Social workers can provide valuable support to professionals and CYPLA through training, support groups, external referrals, and trusting relationships (Pinto & Luke, 2022), but high turnover and heavy caseloads limit their capacity (Boesley, 2021; Department for Education and Skills, 2007; Winter, 2015). Foster carers have expressed difficulties in accessing support for themselves and CYPLA and being heard. Subsequently, foster carers can feel isolated and rely on their own knowledge and experiences to manage (Langley, 2019). Similarly, teachers feel ill-equipped to understand and address the needs of CYPLA and lack

the necessary support, despite extensive involvement with CYPLA (Greig et al., 2008). Peer supervision is beneficial, as it supports adults to explore their emotional responses to CYPLA and express themselves, preventing the retention of trauma, but it is underused (Edwards, 2016; Waterman, 2020). Thus, foster carers, residential workers, and school staff are shouldering the responsibility of relationship-building without adequate support (Munro, 2011). Enhancing formal support for adults supporting CYPLA is essential to bolster their relational capacity.

Additionally, systemic barriers in local education and social services can hinder the relationships of CYPLA. DTs have expressed concern with lengthy paperwork, that does not always feel relevant or meaningful, and negotiating funding for CYPLA. Processes can be complex and convoluted, which diverts attention from the important parts of the role, such as building relationships with CYPLA (Goodall, 2014). Similarly, CYPLA often feel that relationships are not prioritised by professionals (Selwyn, Wood, et al., 2017). This sentiment is echoed in the frequent placement changes experienced by CYPLA (DfE, 2023a), often resulting in a change of key adults and peers. Placement instability perpetuates attachment difficulties, such as indiscriminate friendliness, and hinders the development of trust and close relationships (Rock et al., 2015; Selwyn, Wood, et al., 2017). Shifting the focus of local services to relationships could enhance the support and stability provided to CYPLA, fostering environments conducive to close relationships.

2.4.5. Macrosystem

Exploring external factors, such as national policy and organisational culture, is crucial given their impact on care and teaching practices. Within social care and education, there is a pervasive culture of fear. Despite attachment theory's influence on legislation and policy, expressions of love within care are often viewed as taboo among professionals, leading to scant

research in this area (Evans, 2020). The inherent risk of loss in loving relationships, compounded by the transient nature of placements, may deter adults from forming deep emotional bonds with CYPLA. Love can feel harmful when there is a high potential for the relationship to end, however perceiving adverse effects of close relationships is barrier to establishing high quality relationships (Winter, 2015).

Furthermore, there is a widespread suspicion and fear of allegations due to the historical context and professional accountability standards (Keys, 2017). This culture alters adults behaviour towards CYP (Carr, 2005). Research has found that social care are not likely to promote the use of touch due to fear of allegations, leading to limits and selectivity around affection (Rees & Pithouse, 2008). Foster carers face challenges when integrating CYPLA into their families, with some CYPLA feeling unloved or unwelcome due to perceived rules (Pinto & Luke, 2022). Similarly, Sprecher et al. (2021) found a key theme of 'you can't do that' which described how the care context shapes relationships between CYPLA and foster carers, such as the carer being monitored, reprimanded, and having to behave more professionally than relationally. CYPLA and carers encounter implicit rules, such as waiting for CYPLA to initiate physical contact, which affect relationship dynamics. CYPLA have an awareness of the care context and appreciate caregivers who challenge these norms and rules, such as sharing information about their own lives (Sprecher et al., 2021; L. Warwick, 2017). In addition to top-down monitoring, colleagues criticise each other for being overly friendly (Ellis, 2012), according to findings from an ethnographic study and in-depth interviews with residential staff and CYPLA within a secure setting. However, these findings represent a singular setting and further exploration is required. Fear of accusation is a barrier to establishing high quality relationships (Winter, 2015), highlighting the struggle for adults to find a balance between nurturing and safeguarding when developing a close relationship with CYPLA.

Ambiguity exists within the role conceptualisation of foster carers. Hollin and Larkin (2011) found differences in the roles outlined in national Care Matters policy compared to how they were perceived in practice. While policy positions social workers as akin to parents, they view themselves more as teammates of the family and research and government reports would agree they do not take on a parental role (Boesley, 2021; Department for Education and Skills, 2007; Winter, 2015). Foster carers, despite their significant role in providing daily care and support, are not explicitly recognised as taking on a parental role in policy or practice (Hollin & Larkin, 2011). This conflict in discourse is a challenge, particularly for foster carers building emotionally close relationships with CYPLA and may be viewed as 'overstepping' their role.

In recent years, the needs of CYPLA have evolved, prompting a shift towards professionalisation of caregiving to enhance the care of CYPLA (Hutchinson et al., 2003). This entails training and payment for foster carers, tied to their qualifications and skills. However, concerns arise regarding how professionalisation may hinder loving relationships, potentially limiting expressions of affection, love and parental language (Kirton, 2001, 2022). Individuals may view fostering as a business, and subsequently bonding and love is not privileged (Langley, 2019; Pickin et al., 2011). Some carers and CYPLA resist the distancing language associated with professionalisation (Sprecher et al., 2021). Moreover, research reveals that some carers struggle to balance their parental and professional roles, impacting their ability to provide emotional support effectively. The ambiguity of these roles lead to the establishment of rigid boundaries for individual carers, hindering optimal performance in either role and potentially impeding the development of close relationships between adults and CYPLA (Schofield et al., 2013). Conversely, other foster carers and CYPLA find value in the professionalisation of care, to mitigate unpredictability and emotional pain, and navigate issues

of loyalty to birth parents (Sprecher et al., 2021). Research suggests that love and professionalism can coexist, challenging the oversimplified dichotomy between being a parent or a professional (Schofield et al., 2013). Carers who can fluidly transition between these roles believe that love and commitment are part of the professional task in meeting the needs of CYPLA. Similarly, while payment is essential for many foster carers, their dedication to caregiving often transcends personal interests (Wilson & Evetts, 2006). The variability in carers' approaches may stem from differing interpretations of professionalism and their role, potentially impacting their relationships with CYPLA.

Adults supporting CYPLA must navigate the fear, debates, and disparities to strike a balance between closeness and distance. Teachers similarly grapple with the importance of relationships amid ethical ambiguity. While there's a recognised boundary between appropriate involvement and over-involvement, 'the line' is challenging to define, varying with professional judgement (Carr, 2005). Limited research explores this boundary for teachers and foster carers supporting CYPLA, but insights from other contexts are relevant. Teachers, wary of favouritism, often approach close relationships with CYP cautiously (Carr, 2005). Also, residential staff maintain a delicate balance between closeness and distance, via professional boundaries and showing only certain aspects of themselves and their lives (Ellis, 2012; Ellis & Curtis, 2021). In a similar study, residential staff were pleased they could use physical contact, although they worried about crossing boundaries in the absence of a clear 'hands off policy' (Eßer, 2018). Observational methods, followed by in-depth interviews, allow perspectives, policies, and everyday practice to be compared, and frequently unreported practices to be observed. Ambiguous boundaries in policy and practice may lead adults to be guarded in forming close relationships.

The systems surrounding CYPLA give rise to various barriers to closeness, a focal point of this research. While policy advocates for relationships, practice are often defensive and suspicious (Kendrick & Smith, 2002). Ambiguity in policy, practice, and roles, along with the fear of allegations and loss, further deters adults from forming close bonds.

2.5. Conclusions

The literature highlights the vulnerability of CYPLA to adverse outcomes, and the protective nature of emotional connections with adults. Research suggests that not all CYPLA experience love, trust, and physical contact within these relationships, minimising the capacity of the relationship to promote positive outcomes. Various factors can influence the relational experiences of CYPLA, including adult and child characteristics, wellbeing, experiences and support, and the ambiguous and suspicious context in which these relationships develop.

2.6. The Voice of CYPLA

Capturing the perspectives of CYPLA is essential to understanding their relational experiences and enhancing outcomes (Unrau, 2007). As mandated by The Children Act (1989) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), CYP should be consulted and empowered to participate in decision making. Research serves as a medium for this, allowing CYPLA to offer their views and contribute to research priorities, enriching our understanding of research topics (Holland, 2009) and informing interventions. While historically neglected, research involving CYPLA has grown significantly in recent years (Holland, 2009). A broad range of research designs have been used to gain the views of CYPLA, with qualitative interviews being the most popular method. This study aims to use this method to empower CYPLA by centring their voices to advance our knowledge and inform relational practice.

Despite increasing research involving CYPLA, studies often overlook younger CYPLA (Holland, 2009), particularly those under 8 years old. While some research specifically targets younger CYPLA (Baldry & Kemmis, 1998; Sugden, 2013), or includes younger CYPLA within the sample (Bennett et al., 2009; Côté & Clément, 2022; Harker et al., 2003, 2004; Jaramillo & Kothari, 2021; McLeod, 2007; Rees & Pithouse, 2008; Selwyn, Briheim-Crookall, et al., 2017; Selwyn, Wood, et al., 2017), most studies rely on adolescents or care leavers (Boddy, 2019; Clarkson et al., 2017; Colbridge et al., 2017; Driscoll, 2011, 2013; Ellis, 2012; Eßer, 2018; Honey et al., 2011; Lausten & Frederiksen, 2016; Macleod et al., 2021; Pinto & Luke, 2022; Schofield, 2002; Singer et al., 2013; Sprecher et al., 2021; Steckley, 2018; L. Warwick, 2017). While valuable, retrospective accounts from care leavers may lose reliability and relevance over time, and findings from adolescents may not apply to younger CYPLA. Additionally, few of the studies involving younger CYPLA delve into their perspective on the emotional aspects of relationships (Côté & Clément, 2022; Rees & Pithouse, 2008; Selwyn, Briheim-Crookall, et al., 2017; Selwyn, Wood, et al., 2017). Within these studies, there are varying methodologies and shortcomings, therefore, our understanding of emotional closeness is limited. There are few qualitative studies in the UK that explore the views of primary school-aged CYPLA in foster care regarding the emotional features of their relationships with significant others.

These gaps in the literature may stem from ethical and methodological considerations. Researchers may hesitate to explore sensitive topics like relationships with CYPLA due to concerns about their vulnerability. Additionally, imaginative research designs are required to enable younger children to participate (Holland, 2009). Methodological preferences may lead researchers to overlook younger CYPLA's perspectives and assume CYPLA lack the capacity

to participate effectively in research. As a result, there is a shortage of research with CYPLA on this topic.

2.7. The Role of EPs

EPs play an important role in supporting CYPLA and their environments across multiple systems. Operating within schools and LAs, EPs fulfil five core functions to influence outcomes for CYPLA: training, consultation, assessment, intervention and research (Scottish Executive, 2002). There is an assumption that CYPLA should be prioritised for EP involvement, however less than 20% of EPs' individual work is dedicated to them (Norwich et al., 2010; Samul, 2021). Additionally, 65% of EPs cite school or statutory-directed assessments, and providing recommendations, as their only means of involvement with CYPLA (Samul, 2021; R. Warwick, 2021). However, up to date research on the specific role of EPs in assisting CYPLA is limited (Norwich et al., 2010; Samul, 2021), leading to uncertainty regarding the consistency and impact of their support.

Within their school-based work, EPs engage in consultation, often providing guidance on learning needs and individual concerns related to CYPLA (Boesley, 2021; Whitehouse, 2014). Consultation facilitates trauma-informed practices, promotes multi-agency problem-solving, and consideration for contextual factors and early identification of EP support needs (Shaw et al., 2021). It also provides a space for consultees to be listened to and build their capacity to support CYPLA (Cameron, 2017; Francis et al., 2017). In addition, EPs have the necessary skills to provide therapeutic interventions for CYPLA, employing attachment-based approaches with adults supporting CYPLA to manage emotions and attachment difficulties (Billinge, 1992; Francis et al., 2017; Norwich et al., 2010). While these interventions have shown benefits, they are underutilised due to constraints within EP services and therefore may not be feasible (Francis et al., 2017; Samul, 2021). EPs primarily collaborate with key adults

to support CYPLA, with limited direct contact with CYPLA, due to pressures within the system to work efficiently (Samul, 2021).

EPs collaborate with allocated schools to conduct school systems work, including professional training on topics such as attachment theory and trauma-informed practice to foster supportive and inclusive environments for CYPLA (Dent & Cameron, 2003; Honey et al., 2011; E. Jackson et al., 2010; Samul, 2021; Shaw et al., 2021). Despite training being an efficient use of EP time, training offers vary across LAs (R. Warwick, 2021). EPs may also contribute to school policy development and facilitating reflective practice and support for staff (Edwards, 2016; Shaw et al., 2021), although this type of systemic support is again underutilised (Boesley, 2021).

Recently, approximately 20% of EPs have assumed specialist roles working with CYPLA, these individuals are often navigating a newly constructed position. These roles may involve working within fostering support or virtual school teams (VST), enhancing reflective spaces, collaboration with other professionals and delivery of therapeutic interventions (Samul, 2021; R. Warwick, 2021). However, the specialist EP role and its allocation of time varies (Bradbury, 2006; Norwich et al., 2010; Samul, 2021). Ambiguity surrounds the role of main grade and specialist EPs in supporting CYPLA, both among other professionals and within the profession (Samul, 2021).

As alluded to, the professional context and systemic challenges often hinder EPs involvement with CYPLA. Barriers include a lack of time, collaboration and clarity on the role (Samul, 2021). The EP profession faces staff shortages, increased workload, especially in

statutory duties, and reduced work variety (Lyonette et al., 2019), culminating in a need for greater access to EPs for CYPLA (Whitehouse, 2014).

2.8. Aims and Rationale for the Research

This research aims to explore how CYPLA, foster carers and school staff members, working within one LA, experience and conceptualise emotionally close relationships, and what factors they perceive to influence closeness in these relationships. Limited research has focused directly on the emotional aspects of the relationships of CYPLA, particularly involving school staff members and primary school-aged CYPLA. The research seeks to examine relational practices, considering barriers and facilitators from multiple perspectives, and to explore the role of EPs in promoting close relationships.

2.9. Implications of the Research

The study reveals significant implications for stakeholders across each ecosystemic level, including schools, professionals, local and national policymakers. It highlights a need for a clear and consistent relational policy and practice across the various systems that CYPLA interact with. This approach must be led 'top-down' from those in wider systems to impact subsequent systems and practice. There are specific implications for EPs in promoting relational policy and practice as professionals uniquely situated within multiple systems, such as schools and LAs, and able to offer a range of support.

2.10. Research Questions

RQ1. What characterises a close relationship between adults and primary school-aged CYPLA, according to school staff members, foster carers and CYPLA of primary school-age?

RQ2. What are the factors influencing the closeness of these relationships?

RQ3. How can EPs support close relationships between adults and primary school-aged CYPLA?

The RQs aim to explore the perspectives of CYPLA, foster carers and school staff members on the processes, and personal and contextual factors which may influence their emotional connection.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Chapter Summary

This chapter describes the researcher's ontological and epistemological perspective, followed by the research design, participants, and recruitment methods. The data collection methods and analysis are then reviewed, ending with a discussion regarding the ethical issues pertinent to this research.

3.2. Ontological and Epistemological Position

This research project is embedded in social constructionist ontology and epistemology. Social constructionism suggests reality and knowledge are not objective, they are constructed through social processes, interactions and language (Burr, 2015). Social, cultural and historical context influences how knowledge is constructed. Social constructionism opposes positivism by suggesting that the way we perceive and understand the world depends on when and where in the world we exist rather than any objective reality. We shouldn't assume our understanding is "better" or nearer to the truth than others, as this leads to an imposition of our own knowledge upon others. Through a social constructionist lens, social process and practices which may be subjective can be explored, such as relationships and emotional closeness. Social constructionism underlies the RQs of this study. The RQs seek to gain the views of several diverse participant groups on a subjective concept (e.g. emotional closeness). CYPLA, foster carers and school staff members are not a homogenous group, they have varied life experiences and perspectives. The RQs also seek to understand the context in which relationships develop for these participant groups. Social constructionism also informs the methodology used in this research, including child-centred approaches, and efforts taken to reduce the power imbalance and take a non-expert approach. Taking a social constructionist perspective enables the researcher to privilege the views of the participants, appreciating the potential for multiple

realities, and co-construct collective ideas about emotional closeness and the influencing factors.

Social constructionism is also relevant to the practice of EPs, who work collaboratively with CYP, families and professionals to co-construct an understanding of challenges faced by CYP and educational settings, along with potential solutions. Self-reflexivity is necessary for practice and research based upon social constructionism, acknowledging personal perspectives and values to avoid bias (Moore, 2005).

3.3. Research Design

A qualitative research design was adopted, utilising semi-structured interviews, personal construct psychology (PCP), child-centred tools, and reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). This research design was chosen to explore the complex phenomenon of closeness in the relationships of CYPLA and gain multiple perspectives. Qualitative methods facilitated the in-depth exploration of the subjective experiences of a small number of individuals, providing rich data that quantitative methods cannot fully capture (Smith et al., 2021). Qualitative methods are appropriate for studying fluid social constructions, such as emotional closeness, and the related contextual factors, as they focus on understanding subjective meaning rather than firm facts (Burr, 2015; Robson & McCartan, 2016) and are sensitive to the research setting (Creswell, 2017).

Semi-structured interviews were chosen to elicit rich insights from CYPLA and adult participants, offering flexibility during interviews while addressing the RQs (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This method allows participants to freely express their experiences, and what they perceive as relevant within the research topic. Consequently, the researcher gained insight into novel and unforeseen topics. Although multiple perspectives where being sought, a focus

group would not have been appropriate as it requires homogeneous groups, often with converging views. CYPLA, foster carers and school staff are not homogenous groups. Additionally, relationships are a sensitive topic, thus a group setting would not be appropriate (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Although a social constructionist approach doesn't prescribe a method of data collection, interviews are suitable to comprehensively explore many individual experiences (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Interviews are considered a means of data collection, but also an interactive process where meaning is understood and co-constructed between the interviewer and participant (Burr, 2015).

Multiple tools were employed as a stimulus during the semi-structured interviews with CYLPA. While perspectives diverge on whether research with CYP differs from adult research, the researcher asserts that CYP are similar to adults with different competencies (Punch, 2002). Therefore, a blended approach integrating traditional research methods used with adults (e.g. semi-structured interviews) alongside techniques tailored for CYP (e.g. visual methods) is appropriate. Traditional methods respect CYP's competencies, and creative approaches promote comfortable and enjoyable interactions. Using multiple techniques addresses methodological concerns associated with research involving CYP, such as imposition of adult interpretations and employing methods aligned with CYP's interests and competencies, to ensure CYP are able to express their views and mitigate bias (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2019; Punch, 2002). The researcher prioritised the child's choice of tools to make CYP feel comfortable and empowered.

Several visual methods were devised to complement the semi-structured interviews with CYPLA. These methods, such as drawing, allowed participants to express experiences that are not easily articulated through language, such as emotional closeness, and encourage

creative thinking (Bagnoli, 2009). Although visual representations may not necessarily be more accurate than verbal representations (Buckingham, 2009), they can act as memory aids, allow CYP time to reflect and enhance the concreteness of an interview process (Bagnoli, 2009). Reducing the burden on verbal expression is particularly pertinent for this sample, as younger children may have a limited vocabulary to articulate their experiences and SEN are prevalent in this population. The researcher critically evaluated these methods, within peer supervision groups and research supervision, to ensure engagement from CYPLA while maintaining data relevance.

The 'Ideal Teacher Drawing' and adapted 'Ideal Carer Drawing' techniques were primarily used with CYPLA to elicit views, both based on PCP (Kelly, 2003). According to PCP, individuals form unique constructs of themselves, and their world based on their experiences. Constructs are bipolar, they consist of opposing qualities (e.g. ideal and non-ideal), and influence how individuals interpret events. This approach aligns with social constructionism, recognising the subjective nature of human experience (Burr, 2015; Kelly, 2003). Based on PCP, construct elicitation tools have been developed (Moran, 2020), such as drawing the ideal self, school and teacher. Adaptations for CYP involve techniques based on fictional characters to shift focus from personal experiences (Ravenette, 1997). These methods offer CYP a means to express themselves indirectly, particularly useful for discussing sensitive topics. The 'Ideal Teacher Drawing' is a non-intrusive, child-friendly and useful tool to gather CYP voice (Schulz, 2020). The researcher used the format and questions of established construction elicitation tools (e.g. ideal self, school, and teacher) to produce the 'Ideal Carer Drawing' task. Both the 'Ideal Teacher and Carer Drawing' tools were used to facilitate the interview with CYPLA. These tasks provided a structured yet expressive outlet for CYP, and

addressed challenges associated with visual methods that the openness of tasks can cause uncertainty and discomfort (Bagnoli, 2009).

To alleviate any concerns about drawing abilities and to offer an alternative (Bagnoli, 2009), visual cards were available during interviews with CYPLA. Specifically, sentence completion cards (Therapeutic Treasure Deck of Sentence Completion and Feelings Cards by Karen Treisman) were used. These are a projective tool, where individuals impose their own meaning and interpretations, they contain the start of a sentence followed by '…' or a sentence with a word missing. For example, "I feel happy when…". The cards also contain a picture to aid the comprehension of the sentence. The child is encouraged to finish the sentence using their own words. Projective techniques are a valuable visual method in research with CYP, as they facilitate a deeper exploration of underlying perceptions and beliefs (Bagnoli, 2009). The Personal Values Card Sort was also used (Miller et al., 2011). Developed based on Motivational Interviewing, a collaborative, goal-orientated style of communication with attention to the language of change (Miller & Rollnick, 2012), this technique enables individuals to identify their core values. Participants are presented with a set of cards containing words representing various values (e.g. acceptance, comfort, fun), which they can categorise based on importance. This exercise encouraged CYPLA to reflect on the values they prioritise in significant adults, contributing to a deeper exploration of their perspectives.

To analyse the data, RTA was used, as a flexible and useful research tool to explore and interpret themes within the data and provide a rich account (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). The researcher took an inductive approach to study the data in great depth and understand the participants perspectives, while critically reflecting on their own biases and interpretations to maintain rigor. IPA was considered and rejected due to the reliance on a homogenous sample,

which would not be true for a group of different professionals and CYPLA (Smith et al., 2021). Furthermore, IPA is less suitable for broad, exploratory RQs which consider a wide context. Constructivist grounded theory (GT) was also contemplated as an approach. Data saturation and theory construction are the goal of GT (Charmaz, 2017) but due to the limited access to the participant groups and time constraints, the iterative nature of GT would not have been feasible or appropriate for this research. In addition, theory construction was not the goal of this study.

3.4. Sampling

A purposive, criterion sampling strategy was used to recruit children aged 5-11 years old in foster care. Participants were living within the LA where the researcher was based to ensure consistency in policies and practices and relevance to the context. Primary school-aged children in foster care are frequently overlooked in research (Holland, 2009), yet their perspectives offer invaluable insights into their experiences with adults, which can inform future policies and practices.

A purposive, criterion sampling strategy was also used to recruit foster carers and school staff members, with a minimum of one year's experience working with primary school-aged CYPLA within the same LA. These participants were recruited to gather insights on relationship-building and emotional closeness with CYPLA within the framework of national legislation, LA policies, and professional culture. Kinship carers and 'foster to adopt' carers were excluded, as the familial link and pending adoption provides a different context for relational practice. Additionally, early career carers and teachers (those with less than one year's experience) were not included to ensure participants could draw on their experiences effectively. The perspectives of primary school staff members holding various roles, such as

designated safeguard leads (DSL), DTs, special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs), inclusion managers, and home-school support workers, were incorporated to provide a comprehensive understanding of CYPLA's relationships with adults in school settings.

The researcher was open to the potential for 'cells' of participants (e.g. a CYPLA, their teacher and carer) to emerge. Recruitment via 'snowballing' could have been an effective strategy for these populations, as it is a means for participants to establish trustworthiness in the researcher. However, 'cells' did not emerge, which might be attributed to several factors. Adult participants were first to volunteer, as they were more easily accessible than other groups. Foster carers chose not to involve their foster children, or their stated that their children did not meet the eligibility criteria. It is unclear if all school staff members promoted the project to their foster families as requested. Adult participants may have been hesitant for the CYPLA they support to participate. Recruitment efforts then focused on CYPLA after securing adult participation, resulting in independent participants. Upon reflection, gaining 'cells' of participants could have limited the information participants shared, as speaking with their carer/teacher/CYPLA may have felt exposing. It is a strength that each participant is independent from each other, as it allowed participants to speak freely and to draw on a range of experiences (as opposed to focusing on the relationship they experience with the corresponding participant).

By employing a broad selection criterion, a sufficiently large and diverse sample of individuals were recruited, facilitating a comprehensive overview of perspectives within a single LA. Foster carers and school staff were specifically chosen due to their prolonged and significant interactions with CYPLA (Munro, 2011), compared to other professionals working with them, thereby possessing the greatest potential to cultivate close relationships. While

closeness in the relationships with CYPLA may vary between foster carers and school staff members due to differing contexts, this variability is examined during the analysis phase.

Adults working with primary school-aged CYPLA, and CYPLA themselves, were chosen to concentrate on relationships during a specific phase of childhood, thereby excluding relationships with infants or adolescents, where interactions tend to diverge significantly (Ainsworth, 1989). Infants' relationships with adults may differ due to reduced verbal communication, a greater emphasis on physical contact, and lesser awareness of relationships with birth parents. Adolescents' relationships may vary due to the emphasis on independence during this developmental stage. Moreover, CYPLA interact with multiple teachers and experience less consistent adult contact in secondary school compared to primary school.

A multi-informant approach was utilised, involving CYPLA, school staff members in various roles and foster carers. This approach is advantageous by producing diverse perspectives and richer data (Yardley, 2015). Findings from different informants can be compared and triangulated to enrich understanding of the research topic and reduce researcher bias in the analysis and conclusions (Smith et al., 2021).

The sample consisted of 10 participants, 2 CYPLA (both male), 4 foster carers (all female) and 4 school staff members (all female). See table 3 - 5 for additional participant information for foster carers and school staff members.

Table 3

Background information for CYPLA participants.

Pseudonym	Age
Bradley	10
Ibrahim	11

Table 4

Background information for foster carer participants.

Pseudonym	Age	Number of CYPLA fostered
Amira	55	30
Charlotte	48	5
Claire	55	2
Jacqueline	58	2

Table 5

Background information for school staff participants.

Pseudonym	Role	Age	Number of CYPLA supported
Oliva	Deputy DSL & Inclusion Officer	44	8
Rhea	Inclusion Manager	52	10
Shannon	Inclusion Manager	36	6
Sophie	DSL, DT, Deputy Head	34	12

3.5. Recruitment

A poster was created to convey information about the project, inclusion criteria and participation procedure (see Appendix B). It was used to invite school staff, foster carers, and primary school-aged CYPLA to participate. As an incentive, a £10 amazon voucher was offered for all participating CYPLA. Additionally, school settings with multiple interested individuals were offered a bespoke training session conducted by the researcher to encourage participation. School staff members recruited were from three primary school settings, while foster carers comprised both LA and agency carers.

A meeting was held between the researcher and the head of the VST within the LA to discuss the project, the significance for CYPLA and professionals, as well as recruitment details. The VST agreed to support with recruitment, as they were keen to gather CYPLA voices and understand how they could be further supported. The VST shared the poster via email to foster carers and DTs through their mailing lists. Additionally, the business support team in children's services within the LA distributed the poster to SENCOs and headteachers via email, also urging them to disseminate the information further within their networks. The emails were circulated several times, and after recruiting foster carers and school staff, the email focus shifted to encouraging CYPLA participation. Furthermore, individualised emails were sent to headteachers and SENCOs of primary schools with a high CYPLA population. Despite efforts via email, fostering agencies in the borough did not respond to requests for dissemination via websites, newsletters, or meetings.

The researcher, being a trainee EP within an educational psychology team, enlisted the help of EP colleagues to disseminate project information during termly planning meetings with SENCOs in primary schools. The researcher also used the same approach with their link

schools. EPs provided valuable feedback on schools interested in participating and highlighted any barriers to involvement for further consideration. Furthermore, the researcher attended a SENCO forum to promote the project.

Interested individuals, including those advocating for a CYPLA, contacted the researcher via email to express their interest. The researcher then shared detailed information sheets explaining the study's purpose, methods, and potential benefits, along with consent forms, via email (refer to Appendix C and Appendix D). After reviewing the information, individuals provided their consent to participate. For CYPLA, assent was required in addition to consent from their guardian and notifying their social worker. The researcher scheduled the interviews via email or phone call, agreeing a time and location. In the case of CYPLA, the researcher also conducted a phone call with the foster carer and CYPLA to introduce themselves and discuss what to expect.

3.6. Procedure

Once ethical approval was granted from the UCL Ethics Committee, the recruitment process as described above was implemented.

3.6.1. Data collection

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher after obtaining consent from the participants. Location preferences were honoured to facilitate participation, with adult participants opting for online interviews via Microsoft Teams due to convenience and time constraints. One interview was conducted over the phone due to last minute technical issues. Interviews with adult participants lasted between 30 and 110 minutes, with the majority lasting around 60 minutes. Interviews with CYPLA took place in their foster placements to

ensure comfort and rapport building, in agreement with their foster carers, lasting approximately 30 minutes (excluding rapport-building and debriefing time).

At the onset of each interview, basic demographic information was collected. For CYPLA this information was provided by their carer with the child's consent. Adult participants were asked for the duration of their role, the number of primary school-aged CYPLA they had supported, their age and gender identity. Foster carers were additionally asked if they were part of a fostering couple, and if applicable, the gender identity of their partner. CYPLA were asked for their age, number of previous carers, age upon entering care, duration with their current carer, age, and gender identity.

Separate interview schedules were designed for foster carers and school staff members and reviewed by colleagues to ensure accessibility and relevance (see Appendix E and Appendix F). The semi-structured interviews included questions designed to elicit rich information regarding participant's conceptualisation of closeness, experiences of relationships and influencing factors. These questions were informed by the RQs and the literature review to ensure the research aims were achieved. The questions were broad and open-ended to allow participants the freedom to express their thoughts without influence from the researcher (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Follow up questions and prompts were employed to enable the researcher to be responsive and stimulate more detail, a further advantage of using semi-structured interviews to produce rich data.

An interview schedule was also designed for CYPLA (refer to Appendix G), and reviewed by colleagues, featuring the 'Ideal Teacher/Carer Drawing' tasks to prompt insights into their relationship experiences. Flexibility was key during these interviews, with children

given a choice of activities and guiding the researcher (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2019). One participant preferred verbal interaction while the researcher drew and noted keywords during the 'Ideal Teacher/Carer Drawing' tasks and engaged fully with these tasks. The other participant briefly engaged in all activities, including the drawing tasks and using some sentence completion cards and looking at the personal values card sort. Ultimately, a recreational card game alongside asking open ended questions (based on the 'Ideal Teacher/Carer Drawing') emerged as the most effective tool for eliciting this child's views. The card game was initially used to establish rapport, not necessarily intended as a tool to elicit information, and was later revisited at the child's request when other tools did not appear to hold interest. The researcher agreed as to not hinder rapport building. Reflecting on this, the researcher speculated that the game's familiarity and the child's control over the activity may have contributed to its effectiveness. The research tools may have felt uncomfortable, formal, or assessment-like to the child, therefore returning to a familiar, recreational activity may have felt less threatening. Playing the game fostered a comfortable and enjoyable experience, and rapport building, conducive to open expression during the interview process.

All participants were invited to provide verbal feedback on their interview experience, which was used to refine the researcher's approach for subsequent interviews. Adult participants shared that they found the questions to be appropriate and interesting, and the opportunity for reflection to be personally valuable. Following the interviews, a debriefing period allowed adult participants to reflect and share any concerns, and CYPLA opted to engage in a recreational card game. No participants reported distress or expressed a desire for further support.

3.6.2. Data analysis

The semi-structured interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, ensuring anonymity by removing personal identifiers and assigning pseudonyms to participants (see Appendix H – J). The 'Ideal Teacher/Carer Drawing' tasks were used as graphic elicitation methods, with the researcher creating visuals directed by the CYPLA, the drawings did not constitute data and so were not analysed. While researchers have argued that falling back onto the participants verbal accounts as opposed to finding an approach to analyse visual information is not favourable (Buckingham, 2009), the drawings may not accurately reflect the CYP's thoughts as they were produced by the researcher, therefore omitting the drawings from the analysis is appropriate. Additionally, this method effectively aided further interviewing and communication. The researcher was concerned with the process and the CYP's meanings rather than the drawing (Bagnoli, 2009).

The transcripts were analysed using RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). This involved several iterative steps, including familiarization with the data; inductive coding; collating codes into themes; refining themes; defining and naming themes; and interpretation through producing a report (see Appendix K). This is a flexible method enabling the exploration and interpretation of emergent themes and meanings from data without any preconceived ideas and provided a rich account of the data. Through RTA, the context is considered and understood, and meaning from the data is co-constructed between the researcher and the participants, aligning with a social constructionist perspective. Through the data analysis, the researcher actively reflects on their background, assumptions and interactions with the participants, considering how these factors may influence the subsequent themes and meaning that is constructed. Themes are constructed by the researcher through an interpretative process (Burr, 2015).

Inductive RTA was conducted on the data obtained from each participant group (CYPLA, foster carers, school staff) separately. Initial coding of all transcripts was performed, prioritising CYPLA transcripts to ensure their perspectives took precedence. Codes were assigned based on incidents rather than line-by-line, maintaining proximity to the data (see Appendix L – N). Following coding, codes were organised into subthemes and themes. Comparisons were made between participant groups, revealing significant overlap and similarities of subthemes and themes, particularly between foster carers and school staff members. As a result, foster carers and school staff members' subthemes and themes were combined into adult participants' themes. Unique themes from each group were acknowledged, and contextual differences among participant groups were integrated into the narrative. CYPLA themes were kept separate to avoid diluting their voice. Subthemes and themes were refined, named, and defined (see Appendix O and Appendix P).

2.6.3. Inter-rater comparison

Transcript excerpts were given to fellow trainee EPs for coding to ensure the researchers coding accurately represents the data and not the researchers interpretations (Yardley, 2015). Additionally, an overview of the subthemes and themes were shared with colleagues and supervisors for feedback on the appropriateness of groupings, names, and definitions to ensure credibility and robustness. Their reflections were carefully considered to ensure coherence and appropriateness in the final themes.

2.6.4. Reflexivity

According to social constructionism, the researcher works alongside the participants to construct the 'reality' (Burr, 2015; Robson & McCartan, 2016). The researcher is not considered an objective observer and acknowledges the subjectivity inherent in the research

process. Therefore, the potential for bias during the data collection and analysis phase must be addressed. To minimise these biases, the researcher reflected on their position and the influences of their biases, beliefs, and experiences throughout the research process. The researcher recognises their position as an individual with relatives who are care-experienced and foster carers, professional experience in a residential care setting, and a current role as a practitioner within a LA. This professional and personal experience sparked the researcher's awareness of the needs of CYPLA and their support networks and incited a personal commitment to advocate for and promote their wellbeing. Being previously embedded in two different care contexts (foster home and residential care), observing frequently changing CYPLA and staff and attempting to establish relationships with CYPLA, provided insight into the unique features and challenges of these relationships. This first-hand knowledge of the 'problem' inspired the research and a desire to work towards a feasible solution to enable all CYPLA and their supporting adults to experience enduring and meaningful relationships. While there was the potential for the researcher to bias the findings due to their personal beliefs and connection to the topic, the researcher remained curious and invested in capturing the individual and authentic stories of participants. This positionality is a strength as it enabled the researcher to develop effective interview materials, connect with participants, interpret findings and closely consider their real-life implications.

In addition to utilising inter-rater comparison, the researcher incorporated verbatim quotes to illustrate themes, enhancing transparency and mitigating bias in the researcher's interpretation. Continuous supervision was sought to consider the researcher's role and potential impact on the research process and address the emotional impact of the topic. A research journal was maintained throughout to facilitate reflection on personal views and minimise bias and to document decision-making. This included acknowledging the belief that

fixed narratives about CYPLA can exist within certain educational and children's services contexts, to ensure the questioning and analysis were not seeking to confirm these ideas. The research journal facilitated openness to all perspectives that emerged from the interviews and data.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Department of Psychology and Human Development at the UCL Institute of Education (see Appendix Q). The Codes of Ethics and Conduct and The Human Research Ethics were adhered to (British Psychological Society [BPS], 2021a, 2021b). Given the vulnerable nature of CYP as participants and the sensitive research topic, ethical considerations were paramount (BPS, 2021b). Despite their early adverse experiences, it was arguably unethical to exclude CYPLA's perspectives from the study. A thorough risk-benefit analysis was conducted to weigh the potential harms against the benefits of including CYPLA views within this research. With appropriate ethical safeguards in place, the benefits outweighed the potential risks.

Throughout the study, care was taken with all participants to:

- Clearly explain the purpose and procedure of the study and provide opportunities to ask questions.

- Obtain informed consent.

- Ensure participants were aware of their right to withdraw.

- Ensure the concept of anonymity and confidentiality, alongside safeguarding responsibilities were clearly communicated and upheld.

- Adhere to correct procedures following any safeguarding concerns.

- Address the potential power imbalance between the research and the participants.

- Manage any potential distress.

- Ensure the personal safety of the researcher.

- Maintain professional boundaries and manage the ending of the relationship.

3.7.1. Methods

There may have been a perceived power imbalance between the researcher and participants, particularly during the interviews with CYPLA. To minimise this, participants were given choice over when and where the interviews took place. The researcher emphasised that the participants were the expert of the topic, CYPLA were given a voucher to also indicate the researchers respect for their time and expertise. The researcher showed active listening through eye contact, non-verbal cues, and body language. All participants were given an overview of the themes prior to the interviews to provide time to be aware of what to expect and consider their responses. The researcher held a phone call with CYPLA (and their foster carer) in advance of the interviews to build rapport, explain confidentiality principles and address any questions they have may, ensuring CYPLA felt comfortable and could provide informed consent.

In anticipation of personal information being shared during the interviews, the researcher ensured the principles of confidentiality (and the exceptions) were explained and understood via the information sheet and at the start of the interview. For CYPLA, the information sheet was adapted to be child-friendly (e.g. breaking down information, using visuals and age-appropriate language), and confidentiality was explained multiple times (by the foster carer when considering whether to participant and by the researcher during the initial phone call and at the start of the interview). The researcher established rapport with adult participants via small talk and CYPLA through warm-up activities before commencing the

interviews and remained engaged and attuned to the participants throughout the interview. CYPLA engaged in a card game as a warm-up activity. Adult participants shared that they felt comfortable during the interview and found the experience to be interesting and reflective.

Ending of relationships could have been difficult for some participants, particularly for CYPLA. Therefore, the process and researcher involvement were explained on the information sheets, and participants were reminded that the interview is a one-off occurrence. Again, for CYPLA this was explained via the foster carer and researcher several times. The CYPLA were also sent a personalised letter of thanks following the interviews. All participants will be formed of the findings via a one-two page research briefing and offered to opportunity to meet with the researcher to review and discuss the findings. The findings and offer will also be extended to CYPLA, using an adapted research briefing (e.g. age-appropriate language, information displayed visually and broken down).

3.7.2. Informed Consent

Informed consent was gained from all participants, by providing accessible information sheets to explain the purpose, methods, and potential personal benefits of the study to all participants and reiterating the opportunity to ask questions. CYPLA were given a child-friendly information sheet and consent form to sign, their carers were also given the information sheet and consent form to sign. Foster carers of participating CYPLA were also required to inform the child's social worker of their participation in the research. All participants were offered the opportunity to have an informal discussion or phone call before the interviews to ask any questions. As above, the researcher held a phone call with all CYPLA prior to the interviews, where the information contained in the information sheet was reiterated. The information was recapped for participants at the start of the interview, with additional time

taken to convey the information to CYPLA. CYPLA were offered a voucher as a 'thank you' for their time, it was explained to all CYPLA and their foster carers the purpose of this. CYPLA were reminded at the start of each interview that the voucher would be given regardless of what they said or if they no longer wished to take part.

The VST and primary school staff could be considered gatekeepers to participants. There is a risk that gatekeepers may be coercive and push individuals to take part or may deny access to the research (e.g. if very busy, or protective of CYPLA). To address this the researcher held meetings with the gatekeepers to ensure they understood how to convey messages about the research objectively. The researcher also reiterated the information contained on the information sheet to participants.

Sampling and recruitment of school staff members and foster carers via mailing lists or 'work-related' channels could have caused participants to feel uncomfortable or obliged to take part as it may appear to be linked to the LA. To overcome this, it was explicitly stated that participation was voluntary, that the research was external to the LA and would not influence their employment in any way. This was also reiterated at the start of the interview to ensure participant felt they could speak freely.

3.7.3. Safeguarding/child protection

All participants were informed via information sheets and before the interview that the information they shared would be treated confidentiality to ensure they felt able to talk freely. They were also informed by these means of the professional duty to report a safeguarding concern if themselves or others might experience harm. CYPLA were given additional time and space to ensure they understood what this meant. This professional duty could have

resulted in participants feeling cautious about sharing their experiences. Reporting a safeguarding concern may have an impact on the research relationship and may result in the participant withdrawing themselves and their data from the research. During one interview with a CYPLA, a comment was made that needed to be shared with their social worker due to safeguarding concerns. The correct procedure was followed, and no further action was needed. However, this did remove the opportunity for the researcher to conduct a second interview to gain additional data.

CYPLA are a vulnerable group, due to the high prevalence of adverse experiences and social and emotional difficulties within this population of young people. Therefore, there was potential for the interview topics to be triggering for them. The researcher has professional experience working with CYPLA and had conducted interviews with CYPLA previously. There was a debriefing period (e.g. playing a game), and a handover to carers and advice who to speak to if the child became distressed later. Neither the children, nor their carers, reported any distress following the interviews. The researcher also checked in with the foster carer of participating CYPLA following the interviews, no distress was reported.

3.7.4. Sensitive topics

Sensitive topics could have surfaced during the interviews, which may have been distressing for participants. The measures discussed above (e.g. themes shared beforehand, time to build rapport, debriefing period, handing over to foster carers, welfare check) supported with this, and participants were informed they could withdraw or skip any questions. For CYPLA, the researcher emphasised that receiving the voucher did not depend on their contributions. The researcher had the contact information for The Samaritans and Child Line in case it was felt that participants might benefit from additional support, although this was not

required by any participant. The researcher was available to speak with CYPLA and adults following the interviews to address any questions, concerns, and check on their emotional wellbeing, although this was not required by any participant. The researcher also checked in with the foster carer of participating CYPLA following the interviews, no distress was reported.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1. Chapter Summary

This chapter presents an RTA of data collected from CYPLA, foster carers and school staff. It details features of, and factors influencing close relationships for these groups. Given the similarities noted between foster carers and school staff, their themes were collated into a comprehensive thematic map of adult participants' findings. However, the unique contributions from CYPLA were maintained as separate themes to prioritise their voices and perspectives.

4.2. Overview of Themes

For CYPLA, 3 overarching themes and 10 subthemes were identified (see figure 2). For adult participants, 6 overarching themes and 20 subthemes were found (see figure 3). These themes are presented and exemplified with participant quotes in subsequent sections. There are many examples/quotes that could be used to illustrate each subtheme, quotes have been chosen which represent the subthemes powerfully and succinctly, while also attempting to include a range of participants. Further quotes/examples for provided in Appendix P. Although presented separately, there is inevitable overlap between themes and subthemes which will be explored throughout the discussion
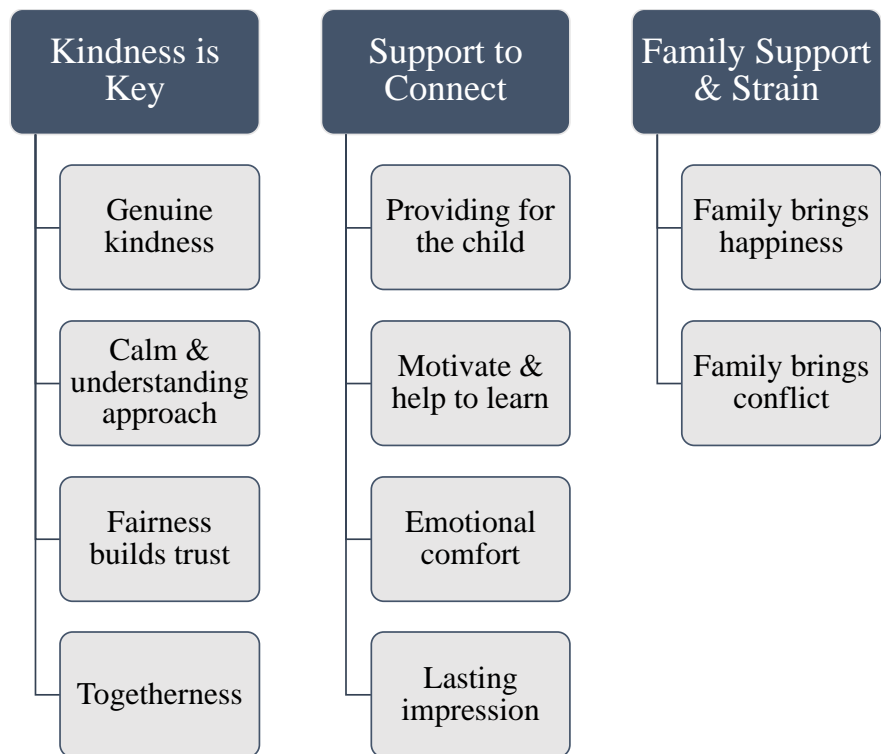
Figure 2: Thematic map of the themes and subthemes identified for CYPLA.
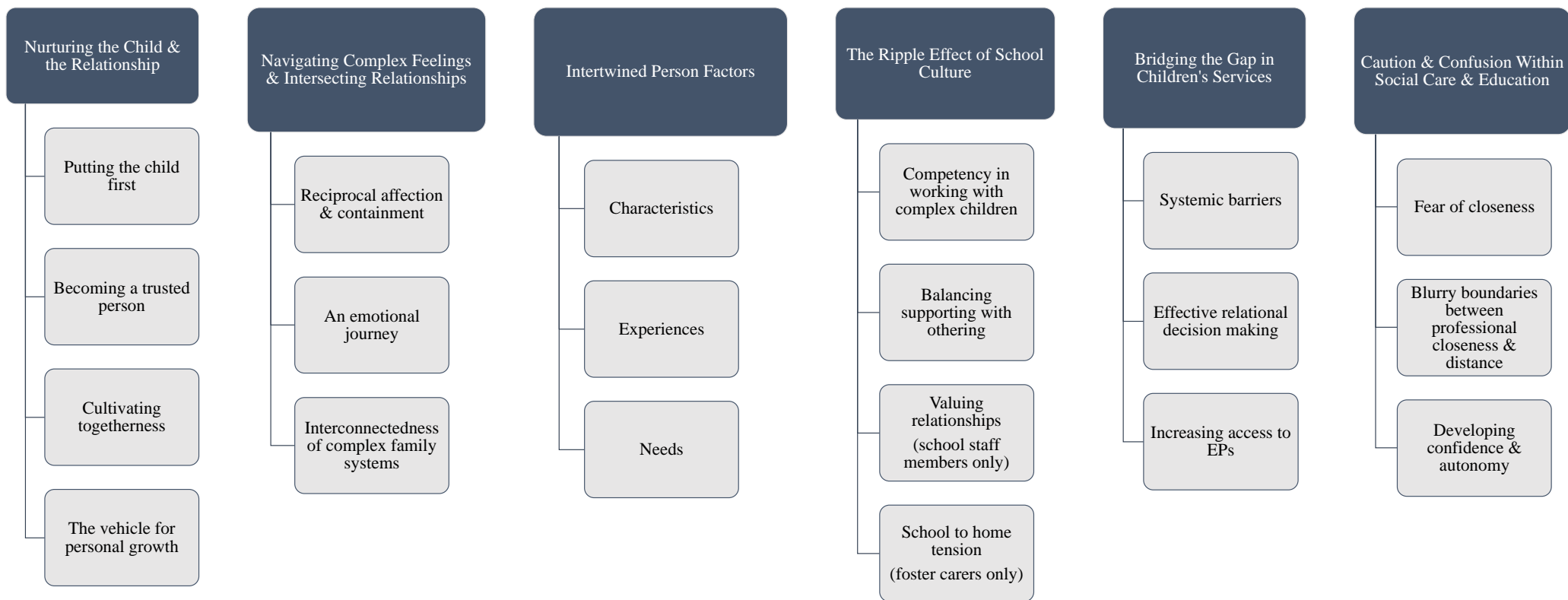
Figure 3: Thematic map of the themes and subthemes identified for adult participants.

4.3. CYPLA Theme 1: Kindness is Key

This theme represents CYPLA's views on what is required of adults for a close relationship to emerge. The theme includes the following 4 subthemes: genuine kindness; a calm and understanding approach; fairness builds trust and togetherness.

4.3.1. Genuine kindness

This subtheme reflects CYPLA's perspective that adults should be kind, generous with their time and resources and polite towards them. The non-ideal adult exhibited opposite traits to this, words used by CYP included 'mean' and 'selfish'.

"*Selfish. They only care about themselves. And not others.*" (Ibrahim, aged 11)

"*[The ideal teacher] buys stuff with his own money like skipping ropes, match attack football cards, prime. He's very generous.*" (Bradley, aged 10)

CYPLA liked foster carers and teachers who engaged in physical contact, such as high fives and ruffling their hair.

"*[The ideal teacher] gives high fives, fist bumps, and he pets you [on your head].*"

(Bradley, aged 10)

CYPLA described ideal adults being genuinely kind, treating everyone with kindness regardless of the stress they were facing. In comparison, a non-ideal adult would be kind to others but not to CYPLA or would display kindness for the benefit of observers.

"On a bad day? [The ideal carer] will still be kind." (Bradley, aged 10)

"[The non-ideal teacher] is kind with other teachers, but not to me… When other teachers or our parents are near him, he acts kind" (Bradley, aged 10)

4.3.2. A calm & understanding approach

This subtheme reflected CYPLA's appreciation for adults being regulated and attuned to their needs. CYPLA believed an ideal adult would intuitively be aware of how to work with children and would not shout or tell them off unjustly.

"[The non-ideal teacher] is not good with children." (Bradley, aged 10)

"[The non-ideal teacher] just sits at the desk and keeps telling you off for nothing."
(Bradley, aged 10)

They also felt an ideal adult would know them well, be able to recognise and understand their needs and respond effectively.

"When we try to put a hand up to ask him something, [non-ideal teacher] ignores me. And we have our hands up for a long time and our arms are sore". (Bradley, aged 10)

"If you have a headache and you don't want to go to school with a headache… [the ideal carer] knows that you're actually sick." (Bradley, aged 10)

4.3.3. Fairness builds trust

This subtheme captures CYPLA's desire for adults to be fair, firm and trusting. CYPLA preferred flexibility over strictness, allowing them reasonable freedom for the activities they enjoy, while maintaining supportive boundaries.

"[The non-ideal teacher is] Strict and bossy." (Ibrahim, aged 11).

"I think my carer should let me do whatever I want and let me watch TV all night. But

she doesn't." (Ibrahim, aged 11)

They acknowledged that they needed to trust the adult, but the adult also needed to trust them for a relationship to develop.

"If somebody passes the maths test, he [the non-ideal teacher] won't believe that.

Then he gives us a zero." (Bradley, aged 10)

4.3.4. Togetherness

This subtheme represents CYPLA's expectation for adults to engage in play and spend leisure time with them. CYPLA recalled teachers who sacrificed their break times to be with or play with CYP, contrasting with negative views towards teachers who do not prioritise outdoor play.

"He sits and watches the children play. And sometimes [the ideal teacher] plays

Foursquare with you. Sometimes he lets you go outside for more than 15 minutes." (Bradley,

aged 10)

"When it's break for lunch, [the non-ideal teacher] doesn't let us go out. Just watch

Newsround." (Bradley, aged 10)

Similarly, CYPLA valued foster carers who created fun opportunities for them, going above basic needs, and engaging in shared activities. CYPLA appeared to respect adults who put them first, valued play and enjoyed spending time with them.

"[The non-ideal carer] won't do basically anything fun. They just give us food and just make us do our work and go off to bed." (Bradley, aged 10)

"[I like to] walk the dog together." (Ibrahim, aged 11)

4.4. CYPLA Theme 2: Support to Connect

Theme 2 reflects the support CYPLA would need from adults to feel safe and able to build an impactful close relationship. This theme encompasses the following 3 subthemes: providing for the child; motivate and help to learn; emotional comfort and lasting impressions.

4.4.1. Providing for the child

Within this subtheme CYPLA believed that foster carers should have enough money to meet the basic needs of the child and that their homes and garden should have sufficient space for the child. Similarly, teachers should have adequate equipment, so that they can provide the child with the necessary resources.

"[The ideal carer] is rich. [That is important] Because they do basically everything and I need money." (Bradley, aged 10)

"[The house is good because] it is big and has a back garden. And the football goals." (Bradley, aged 10)

4.4.2. Motivate & help to learn

This subtheme reflects CYPLA's request that teachers make learning accessible and rewarding. They emphasised the importance of teachers breaking down classwork, providing help when needed, and creating engaging lessons. CYPLA also expressed motivation to learn when reward systems are consistently used.

"The teaching is good… [The ideal teacher is] helpful with the work." (Ibrahim, aged 11)

"When you behave you get a raffle ticket. And when you get one, you get one put in the pot. And the more you have the better chance you have to get picked, then win some of the prizes". (Bradley, aged 10)

4.4.3. Emotional comfort

This subtheme captures CYPLA expression that adults should understand the child's emotions and promote their emotional wellbeing. A non-ideal adult would only see the child's behaviour and would not try to understand the child's feelings.

"They should make you feel happy." (Bradley, aged 10)

"If somebody's upset, the [non-ideal] teacher would just tell them to go sit outside and calm down." (Bradley, aged 10)

An ideal adult would be able to comfort the child if they were upset and have useful strategies to help, such as talking or providing a small token to cheer the child up. The non-

ideal adult by contrast, would expect the child to manage their emotions by themselves or respond with a sanction.

"He helps people. If your upset he'll talk to you" (Bradley, aged 10)

"Let's say if the student doesn't listen to them because they're upset. He moved their name down twice." (Bradley, aged 10)

4.4.4. Lasting impressions

This subtheme presents one CYPLA's belief that they will remember their teachers for years to come due to the support they give.

"I will remember basically everything [about the ideal teacher], the [non-ideal teacher] I won't even remember him." (Bradley, aged 10)

4.5. CYPLA Theme 3: Family Support & Strain

This theme captures the CYPLA views concerning the complexity of their relationships with their birth family members. The theme contains the following 2 subthemes: family brings happiness and family brings conflict.

4.5.1. Family brings happiness

This subtheme emerged from the sentence completion tasks, one CYPLA shared that seeing their birth family is important to them and supportive of their emotional wellbeing while in foster care.

"[I am happiest] When I see my dad." (Ibrahim, aged 11)

"[The things which are important to me are] my family." (Ibrahim, aged 11)

4.5.2. Family brings conflict

This subtheme also arose from the sentence completion task. One CYPLA also shared that they often experience conflict with their biological sibling while in the same foster placement, regarding privacy and maintaining their own space.

"He bugs me. He went into my room without my permission. He kept taking stuff and ruining my bed." (Ibrahim, aged 11).

4.6. Adult Theme 1: Nurturing the Child & the Relationship

This theme represents how an adult can nurture the child, but also prioritise the relationship, to build closeness between them and enable the adult and CYPLA to flourish. Theme 1 consists of 4 subthemes, all of which were present for foster carers and school staff members. These are: putting the child first; becoming a trusted person; cultivating togetherness and the vehicle for personal growth.

4.6.1. Putting the child first

This subtheme highlights the importance of child-centred and trauma-informed practices in prioritising the needs of the child and fostering close relationships with CYPLA, as perceived by adults. It emphasises the significance of acknowledging the child's adverse experiences and their ongoing effects. Being trauma-informed also meant demonstrating flexibility and a genuine interest in the child.

"They are actually coping with a huge amount and even if their experiences happened early on in life, they're still coping with those years down the line." (School staff member, Shannon)

"Children know if you're not genuinely interested, children know when you genuinely care and genuinely want to know about their weekend. If you know they've been somewhere that the weekend, on the Monday, just remembering to ask how that was, building up the relationship that way." (school staff member, Sophie)

Adults also referred to making the child feel like they belong, within the foster family and school community. For foster carers, this meant treating the CYPLA as part of the family.

"We would hope they feel like they are our own children and a real part of the family. You can really get the best out of these kids, in terms of improving things for them and forming attachments and making relationships if they really feel like they belong." (Foster carer, Charlotte)

Foster carers and school staff mentioned child-centred practices, including being attuned to and guided by the child's feelings and needs, advocating for them, and considering their perspective, which was achieved by getting to know the child.

"It's taking time, it's been quite slow and gradual, but it's all been done on her terms." (Foster carer, Jacqueline)

"I think it's because I understand her better. So, if she's upset, I generally will know why and understand why. I know pretty much what she's thinking, what she needs without her having to do anything." (Foster carer, Claire)

Child-centred and trauma-informed approaches also relates to the use of physical contact, which participants believed should always be available and led by the child's needs and wants.

"I don't think it's the wrong thing, but it must be led by the children. You can't just force yourself to start hugging and or whatever with this child, because you don't know what they've been through." (Foster carer, Jacqueline)

"If they do need that physical touch or a handheld, then I think we should try and fulfil that." (School staff member, Rhea)

4.6.2. Becoming a trusted person

This subtheme represents the views of adult participants that being firm and reliable, and communicating openly, builds trust with CYPLA, which is an essential feature of close relationships. The participants referred to clear boundaries, consistency and keeping promises, to enable the child to feel secure with them in the home or school setting.

"She knew the boundaries were made straight off, so I think that built trust and the relationship, and she trusted everything that I said from day dot. She had a sense of security when she was around me." (School staff member, Olivia)

There was a significant emphasis on being there for the child which allows them to feel secure and able to seek the adult for support.

"They know that I'll have their back at any time. He needs that reassurance that you're there and that you're not going to go anywhere. They need to be able to rely on you."

(Foster carer, Jacqueline)

"It was having someone that would believe in her and say, I will be here, I'm going to be here tomorrow, we're going to do exactly the same tomorrow, you will come to school, and you will be safe here, building that up."

(School staff member, Rhea)

"I remember that night that child saying do you promise that you'll be here tomorrow. The next morning, I could see the relief on her face when she came through the gate."

(School staff members, Sophie)

The foster carers and school staff emphasised the significance of open communication, creating time and space for the child to express themselves freely without pressure. This involved informal conversations as well as being able to openly discuss the child's situation, experiences, and address any incidents as needed.

"We're talking about nonsense things like breakfast and TV programmes, however, it's an informal check in every day." (School staff member, Rhea)

"The other way that I find to build bonds with children is I always explained to them. Look, I know you've got a mum and a dad. I'm not here to replace your mum. I'm not here to replace your dad." (Foster carer, Amira)

"She was able to open up after a while as to what brought her to be in care and speak to me about how she felt about that." (School staff member, Sophie)

4.6.3. Cultivating togetherness

This subtheme captures foster carers and school staff members' belief that regularly having one to one time together and engaging in shared activities, without the presence of other foster or birth children or classmates, builds closeness and physical contact.

"She's very jealous of the younger one, so I tend to spend more time in the evening with her when she's going to bed." (Foster carer, Jacqueline)

Adults discussed creating and engaging in shared activities or interests, such as playing, reading, or swimming. Togetherness enables the child to get to know the adult, feel important and create enjoyable joint experiences.

"It's about the being together and doing things together to make those connections."
(Foster carer, Amira)

"To bond quite quickly with children, I take them swimming. It is exhilarating for the child and it's fun. If they can't swim, they are very, very dependent on you and that helps build a very close trusting bond very quickly. They feel physically protected and cared for." (Foster carer, Amira)

"We went through the clothes together, we both tried on different outfits, making it really light-hearted." (School staff member, Rhea)

Adults suggested that cultivating togetherness and closeness takes time and consistency, often through regular quality time spent together. A foster carer highlighted the COVID-19 lockdown periods as a time of significant togetherness and closeness, as it provided time to dedicate to being with the child without external distractions.

"The best time was in the lockdown. It was almost like when you have a new baby, and you have that time that first few months where you're in your own world just going with the flow. There was nothing to do and nobody else to do anything with, that is probably the closest I've felt to her." (Foster carer, Claire)

"Spending enough time with them that you can build up that sort of relationship where you will know whether they want a cuddle or not." (Foster carer, Charlotte)

Similarly, school staff with diverse roles within the school environment reflected that being present in the classroom naturally offered more opportunities for togetherness, whereas not being directly involved in classroom activities meant making deliberate effort to achieve togetherness.

"We did build that relationship solely because we spent a lot of time together."
(School staff member, Rhea)

"There's more of those opportunities, even if you're doing a lesson about history, they might share something with you about something they like that I wouldn't be privy to because I'm not in the class." (School staff member, Sophie)

4.6.4. The vehicle for personal growth

This theme captures adults' views that the relationship is a means for the child, but also themselves, to develop and grow in multiple domains. Via a close relationship with adults in school and their home, children can be motivated and supported in their school attendance and academic studies.

"We took a long, long time building a relationship to enable her to come into school."
(School staff member, Rhea)

In addition, the relationship aids their personal development. Adults referenced the relationship fostering the child's sense of identity, self-esteem, life skills and values, as the child can view themselves positively and learn from the adult.

"I know she needed a lot of nurturing and she needed to feel loved, and she needed to feel good about herself. That was my main goal, to get that self-esteem up because she didn't have any." (School staff member, Olivia)

"I teach them life skills. I want him to be able to stand on his own feet to be able to support himself." (Foster carer, Jacqueline)

"I'm very pro school and education… education is the one thing that will get you on in life, the better education, the more options, and choices you could have. That's something that I've always expressed to the children I've cared for." (Foster carer, Amira)

There was also consideration for how the close relationship, and subsequent physical contact, enabled to CYPLA to understand and experience safe touch, boundaries, and bodily autonomy.

"I understand it to get foster children to have autonomy over their bodies." (Foster carer, Amira)

"It's starting those discussions about consent from a really young age and talking about boundaries." (School staff member, Sophie)

A close relationship was also felt to support the child to develop their emotional literacy and wellbeing, as the child can reflect and express themselves with the adult and be supported through co-regulation.

"They were times when she may have been in the wrong but to guide her to see how she perhaps could have behaved differently in that situation." (School staff member, Sophie)

"Finding fun expletives is a thing of mine. You can understand it, needing to express yourself, but they need some new angry words." (Foster carer, Amira)

Both foster carers and school staff members held a holistic view of learning, recognising their responsibility to support the child beyond academic endeavours, through a close relationship with them. They reflected on the multidimensional progress observed in the CYPLA they had supported.

"It is that well rounded and holistic approach, if they didn't achieve their SATS results but at the end of year six they've made a solid group of friends, that is more important, they go to secondary more prepared." (School staff member, Sophie)

Similarly, foster carers reflected that by attempting to build and maintain close relationships with CYPLA they themselves learn and develop their practice.

"It's just learning and you're learning all the time." (Foster carer, Jacqueline)

4.7. Adult Theme 2: Navigating Complex Feelings & Intersecting Relationships

This theme represents how close relationships produce pleasant but also difficult emotions for the adults and the child, as they navigate two families, multiple relationships, and approaches. Theme 2 encapsulates 3 subthemes that were evident for both foster carers and school staff members, these are: reciprocal affection and containment; an emotional journey; and interconnectedness of complex family systems.

4.7.1. Reciprocal affection & containment

This subtheme captures the views of adults that there is mutual affection, which is regulating for the adult and CYPLA. Some foster carers explicitly stated that they loved the child.

"We really loved her." (Foster carer, Charlotte)

For school staff members, and foster carers who did not explicitly mention love, their affection, and protective feelings towards the CYPLA were evident. They found forming a close bond to be a rewarding and impactful experience for them.

"My headteacher used to say to me, you just take her home. There were times when you know what, I probably would of." (School staff member, Shannon)

"The relationship can be different for children in care because there's an extra layer of protection, because you see them as fragile, because their life is uncertain. It's hard to not feel emotionally protective of that child." (School staff member, Sophie)

Adults believed the child reciprocated these feelings due to their words or behaviour.

"He will say thank you. I love you, this is the best day ever, and sometimes she'll say that, but not as often." (Foster carer, Jacqueline)

"She was so loving towards me. She has come back a few times and we have seen that she's still in foster care and she is OK." (School staff member, Olivia)

A significant feature of this theme is the use of physical contact, and the containing function it serves for adults and CYPLA. All adults utilised physical contact, and believed it was important for the child's development and made children feel safe and close to the adult.

"They actually feel physically protected and cared for cause you're holding them. It can say more than words, sometimes a lot more than words. (Foster carer, Amira)

"I do believe that children do need a hug, and they need that physical reassurance. They've come to school, and they've got the weight of the world on their shoulders. Often, they just want someone to listen to them, hold their hands, maybe stroke their arm, or give them a hug." (School staff member, Rhea)

"It's security, she's comfortable. She's secure in the relationship." (Foster carer, Claire)

4.7.2. An emotional journey

An emotional journey reflects the challenges adults faced when emotionally investing in a CYPLA and the subsequent impact on them. Adults described feeling sadness for the child's experiences and struggling to help or connect with child but also finding the journey rewarding because of the challenges and investment.

"I do get emotionally invested and I'm quite an emotional person anyway. But there are times, like that night, that did affect me because you see their world change in front of you." (School staff member, Sophie)

"If you have absolutely no idea what's going on or why they are upset, you're just fumbling around trying to guess and I generally do that and make things worse just by existing." (Foster carer, Claire)

"I never feel that I really reach her. I don't feel that I see the real child very often. It's very, very difficult to get close because you don't really see what is really going on. There's so much going on emotionally that the real child is very far from me." (Foster carer, Claire)

"It's been really rewarding when their barriers may actually set you back and you're trying to help. It's more rewarding the more work it takes." (School staff member, Rhea)

When asked to comment on the research interview experience, adults shared that they had found it useful as they rarely have the time or space to reflect on their practice and emotions.

"You don't often stop and consider why you do some of the things that you do or where that's come from. So, it's actually quite nice. Gives you a reminder really, the reasons

that we do the things that we do, which can sometimes forget when you're busy." (Foster

carer, Charlotte)

One school staff member had experienced clinical supervision in the past and was able

to reflect on the usefulness of this.

"I had supervision that year, that really did help, it's having somebody to talk to

openly about how you're feeling about to discuss what it's like and those emotions that you go

through." (School staff member, Shannon)

4.7.3. Interconnectedness of complex family systems

This subtheme reflects the views of foster carers and school staff members on the

challenges and benefits of CYPLA having connections with multiple families. Adults

highlighted the practical difficulties of facilitating contact with birth families, which can leave

CYPLA feeling uncertain about their daily whereabouts.

"It was something ridiculous like 8 times a week, because she'd have contact with

mum and then she'd have contact with Dad because she didn't have contact at the same time

with them and she didn't know what was going on." (School staff member, Shannon)

Additionally, family contact can unsettle CYPLA as relationships with birth family

members can be strained, and the contact inconsistent. This can result in the CYPLA becoming

dysregulated and displaying challenging behaviour at home and in school as they manage these

difficult feelings, which places tension on their relationships.

"They'll have some contact from family, but whether mum will turn up, I don't know. The last time they saw their mum, they hadn't seen her for six months. That's challenging because you get all the bad behaviour then." (Foster carer, Charlotte)

"If they've had a bad contact last night or parents missed a phone call with them, that actually could set the child up for a bad day." (School staff member, Shannon)

Adults also noted family contact producing feelings of loss and confusion. When reminded of their previous lives, CYPLA may have questions about their past and miss their family. Adults also noticed feelings of guilt in the child over their relationships with other significant adults, leading to internal conflict and a desire to create distance between them and significant adults to minimise these feelings.

"They used to suffer a fair bit of guilt, at first when we went to contact their behaviour could be erratic. Would it hurt my feelings for him to be saying that he loves his mum." (Foster carer, Charlotte)

"Mum told her that I'd cancelled contact and I said to her, look I'm not allowed to cancel contact. She thought about that, but she didn't know who she should believe, me or mum. That can cause little rifts." (Foster carer, Jacqueline)

Foster carers emphasised the importance of respecting and building a relationship with the birth family. This positively influences the relationship and trust between the child and the carer, as the child perceives the birth parent's confidence in the carer. Additionally, it can improve the child's relationship with their birth parents by the carer demonstrating trust in the birth parent. It also helps to reduce the child's feelings of guilt, loss, and confusion.

"They made massive strides with us when they saw that we were accepting of their mum and tried to build a relationship with her…so it's not us and them, this divide between everyone." (Foster carer, Charlotte)

"She says mummy abandoned me and I had to say no mummy has not abandoned you, mummy's not well. So I'll never down the families to them, you just lose any relationship you have the moment you start downing their families. They won't trust you." (Foster carer, Jacqueline)

Family contact can also create challenges due to differing practices within the birth and foster family. CYPLA can struggle to understand and navigate different rules and values in different context, which can challenge the relationship between a CYPLA and significant adults.

"If I say no, she says I'll tell Daddy to. Then that's not helping our relationship, cause I'm always the baddie." (Foster carer, Claire)

School staff members discussed some of the challenges to working with two families for one CYPLA, such as differing approaches and views or conflicts between the families.

"It was difficult because we would put things in place and then a contact session would undo what we would put in place. He could say quite negative things about school." (School staff member, Shannon)

School staff also found it difficult to challenge or report the 'approved carers' at times, but overall, school staff members considered working effectively with the families beneficial.

"If you've noticed the mark on the child when they've been getting changed for PE. You have to report that straightaway. And that's been hard. [Foster carers asking] Why are you doing that? Are you reporting me? And sometimes that's been a barrier to forming a really good relationship with them." (School staff member, Rhea)

"They are a lifeline, they can tell you all kinds of information, for example that they had a bad contact last night." (School staff member, Shannon)

A foster carer also referred to the impact of fostering on their biological children. They believed they had to change their approach and rules in the home to ensure all children were treated the same.

"I had to bring up my daughter understanding that she couldn't come into bed with me in the mornings because you can't do that. Can you imagine if you were looking after children, and one was allowed in your bed in the morning and one wasn't." (Foster carer, Amira)

4.8. Adult Theme 3: Intertwined Person Factors

This theme describes individual child and adult factors that can influence each other and the closeness of the relationship. This theme represents 3 subthemes that emerged for foster carers and school staff members. These were: characteristics, experiences, and needs.

4.8.1. Characteristics

This subtheme represents foster carers and school staff members views that theirs and the child's individual personality and traits have relevance in a close relationship. Adults expressed that their relationships varied with different children, due to the child's characteristics.

"The younger one is a lot more of a calm and contented child. I can't really compare the relationships cause they're very different children. They've very different personalities."
(Foster carer, Claire)

Concerning child factors, the age and gender of the child were factors influencing the closeness of the relationship and use of physical contact. Some adults found it easier to establish close relationships with younger children, as their needs are simpler and physical contact feels more appropriate and natural.

"I think it's easier with younger children because you're doing more physical care with them. You get into responding to their needs a lot more easily because their needs are more straightforward. There's a limited amount of things that you can respond with." (Foster, carer, Claire)

"He was only quite small when he came, and he has always wanted you to cuddle him and to sit on your knee." (Foster carer, Jacqueline)

One school staff member expressed that they found it easier to establish close relationships with girls, as they believed girls exhibit fewer externalising behaviours than boys.

"With girls it's been easier because they're wanting that mother figure which I've been able to step into. With boys sometimes, especially if they've a lot of behavioural issues or there has been abuse, that has been harder." (school staff member, Rhea)

Adults also considered their own personality traits and values to be useful in relational practice. The participants referred to having nurturing traits (e.g. empathy and playfulness) and resilience and considered these characteristics to be important to build a close relationship with a CYPLA. Adults expressed a personal enjoyment of physical contact and an ease with using physical contact with CYPLA, which was often shared as a part of their identity. One carer expressed that their male partner was not comfortable using physical contact with CYPLA and did not personally like physical contact.

"You've gotta have a warmth about you." (Foster carer, Charlotte)

"I have a lot of empathy. I'm a good talker for one thing, so people say." (School staff member, Rhea)

"You have to be pretty strong because in a lot of cases, you've got a lot of damaged children on your hands." (Foster carer, Jacqueline)

"I am a cuddler. I am that person. If the child needs a cuddle, they're going to get one." (School staff member, Olivia)

"I've never felt uncomfortable, but I think that's probably me as a person. I haven't ever found it a problem." (School staff member, Shannon)

"My partner is not a touchy-feely person. Definitely, definitely is not confident using physical contact with children." (Foster carer, Amira)

Some foster carers also referred to a strong belief that education was important and a means to a successful life. They felt that all adults working with CYPLA should value education.

"This is the way that you're gonna have a lovely life, pick and choose what you want to do when you're older. Have the opportunity to have nice material things, be comfortable financially." (Foster carer, Charlotte)

Adults also shared that personal commitment was an important characteristic. Foster carers viewed their role as more than just a job, expressing a strong dedication to improving the lives of the children in their care. They held negative perceptions towards carers who approached their role purely as employment.

"We've always done fostering with a view to improving the lives of children. It's not something that we consider to be our job. We've done it from the viewpoint of building proper positive relationships with kids." (Foster carer, Charlotte)

"It has never, ever been about money. I wanted to make a difference. I want to give a child the life that they really should have." (Foster carer, Claire)

Similarly, school staff felt committed and motivated to improve the lives of the CYPLA they supported. They believed their relationship and care for the child went beyond the duties of their role.

"They are our sole focus and that's what drives us every day." (School staff member, Sophie)

"I think it is how much time, and how willing a teacher or an adult is to dedicate themselves to that child because you do have to put in extra time." (School staff member, Shannon)

Both groups aspired for, and believed in, the CYPLA's future.

"I have a continued focus that those children [looked after] have the same aspirations as all the other children." (School staff member, Sophie)

4.8.2. Experiences

The subtheme of Experiences captures the belief among foster carers and school staff that a child's previous experiences, as well as their own personal and professional backgrounds, could influence their relationship and presence of physical contact. Adults made significant reference to the influence of trauma, loss, and unmet needs (before entering care or while in care) on the child's capacity to trust and form close bonds. Adults believed CYPLA can resist closeness to protect themselves, based on their previous experiences of adults.

"[Children think] I'm going to trust you? Another person? In a string of many that say they're going to do this; say they're going to do that and then leave or disappear." (Foster carer, Charlotte)

"There's a bit of a barrier in a lack of trust because they think that people leave. Sometimes they can almost have a bit of armour on because they think well, I need to protect myself and not get too close to anyone because I could be leaving again." (School staff member, Sophie)

Additionally, a child's trauma also appeared to make adults wary of closeness or the use of physical contact. Adults were also considerate of therapeutic support and talking about difficult experiences with the child in case it lead to additional distress.

"You need to have a close bond with the child, but not so much that they feel like they're losing a mum again." (Foster carer, Amira)

"Their family dynamics could constantly be changing and how can things like [therapeutic support] be delivered to support the child but not cause distress?" (School staff member, Shannon)

Adults also reflected on their own personal experiences, from their childhood or their own family and how this shapes their beliefs and practices. For a few participants, their parents have been foster carers, teaching them important skills and values.

"I come from a very traditional working-class background where children are the central part of family life, and growing up as a kid, they were the most important thing." (Foster carer, Charlotte)

"My mum fostered so I understand when they turn up at that door with their clothes. I've seen the other side of it… I have a sense of that fear. I think maybe that's what helps my role with building the relationships with foster carers and the children." (School staff member, Olivia)

Adults cited their professional experiences, including academic and vocational training, independent study, LA forums, or previous roles. These experiences appeared to enhance their compassion and knowledge, increasing their relational capacity.

"I'm lucky enough to have my degree, we did a lot on childhood trauma." (School staff member, Rhea)

"Some of the [carer] training that you do is essential, very influential in making you put yourself in the shoes of that child. Even with the skills to foster course that you do, you learn a lot." (Foster carer, Jacqueline)

"When I looked at fostering, the skills I've learned working with older people were actually transferable in children". (Foster carer, Jacqueline)

Their professional experience also developed their belief in the importance of physical contact and comfort utilising it.

"I probably have been around too long. I don't ever even question it." (Foster carer, Charlotte)

"When I first started, I would say no I don't see why you would have to hug children. But of course you do. After working in a school for so many years, something you learn through experience." (School staff member, Rhea)

4.8.3. Needs

This subtheme reflects the adults' views that a child's additional needs, often attributed to the child's early experiences, can influence the emotional closeness within their relationship. Adults mentioned CYPLA having developmental or language needs, and social differences, such as neurodiversity or attachment difficulties, which could manifest in cautious or overly friendly behaviours or inappropriate physical contact. These needs appear to require additional understanding, care, and support from the adult.

"He didn't have that communication. You had to listen so carefully and sometimes you wouldn't be able to understand what he was saying." (School staff member, Shannon)

"He literally threw his arms around him and hugged him. Now he will do that with a lot of people. He has no awareness of stranger danger, and he could go off with somebody."
(Foster carer, Jacqueline)

One foster carer experienced a CYPLA whose preference for physical contact was not age appropriate, although it might have been developmentally suitable. They found interacting with this CYPLA uncomfortable and challenging, reflecting different levels of comfort in using physical contact with different children.

"It's making me uncomfortable the way she's wanting to touch, which if she was a younger child, which is what she presents as, it wouldn't be a problem." (Foster carer, Claire)

Adults discussed instances where CYPLA struggled to express and regulate their emotions, leading to behaviours that were difficult to interpret and manage. Addressing these needs also required extra care and understanding, but they could undermine the adult's sense of competency, potentially straining the relationship.

"If she was angry, she would hit me. She would bite me. She would throw things at me." (School staff member, Shannon)

"With their actions, I might think I don't know I'm doing. She's doing all this, and I just don't know how to help her sometimes." (Foster carer, Jacqueline)

Difficulties with emotion regulation also have implications for physical contact. Adults shared that a child's emotional state, particularly if they struggled with regulation, could influence whether they provided physical contact due to the risk to themselves.

"We did look after a lad once that was very troubled. I'll give him a little pat on the arm or a little arm around, but I wouldn't have been as physically affectionate with him because he could be quite volatile and violent." (Foster carer, Charlotte)

4.9. Adult Theme 4: The Ripple Effect of School Culture

This theme describes the notion that a school's culture, and the experiences of CYPLA while at school, can influence a child's relationships in the setting but also spill over into relationships at home. The 4 subthemes were: competency in working with complex children; balancing supporting with othering; valuing relationships (school staff members only) and school to home tension (foster carers only).

4.9.1. Competency in working with complex children

This subtheme represents the views of adult participants regarding the variability in knowledge and support for complex CYP, such as CYPLA with SEN, within school communities. They noted a lack of experience, awareness, and knowledge among staff members and the wider community regarding the needs of CYPLA, leading to inadequate support and inclusion.

"I've totally ruled out a school if they've never had a looked after child." (Foster carer, Jacqueline)

Foster carers and school staff observed stereotyping and gossiping within the school community, prompting the foster family keeping the child's care status private. School staff described a reluctance among colleagues and pupils to support or bond with the CYPLA.

"Not only do the children chat about it, then you've got all the parents coming up to you and saying why are they in foster care?" (Foster carer, Amira)

"I know that the foster mum used to get sad that he didn't get invited to parties. You would see she was the mum that none of the other mums really made a beeline to talk to." (School staff member, Shannon)

"Not a lot of the parents in the class were very understanding, there were other parents that always were wary of him. Sometimes I used to have difficult conversations with other parents and defend his needs because they didn't quite understand." (School staff member, Shannon)

Adult participants shared many examples of effective support and provision for CYPLA, and the significant impact this had on the child and their experiences of education and their relationships.

"It's brilliant because he now gets one to one support, small group support and the same teacher from last year. It's helping him make friends. He wants to learn." (Foster carer, Jacqueline)

"Some of our children are on the ELSA caseload, and that's brilliant." (School staff member, Sophie)

"He had quite intensive speech therapy at school." (School staff member, Shannon)

However, adult participants also shared instances where early intervention and more support was needed. For example, CYPLA should have a key nurturing adult, greater access to counselling services and whole staff trauma-informed training.

"Certainly, teachers could do a lot more trauma training." (Foster carer, Charlotte)

"All looked after children in primary school need an auntie teacher… They almost need a grown-up friend, that is trauma-informed to help them daily in school. Go up to them and check in with them, their special person." (Foster carer, Amira)

"It would be amazing if every primary school had funding to have a counsellor."
(School staff member, Sophie)

School staff reflected on challenges with implementing effective provision, such as staffing and time pressures.

"A lot does seem to be left for schools to arrange and you're trying to do this quite quickly and you can't necessarily get those things put in place that quickly. Children need those bonds, but you don't just want to go and get someone from an agency because they don't know them." (School staff member, Shannon)

4.9.2. Balancing supporting with othering

This subtheme reflects the acknowledgement of foster carers and school staff that CYPLA may need additional support, but also that certain educational practices can make CYPLA feel different. Participants emphasised the importance of striking a fine balance, as CYPLA wanted to be treated like their peers while still needing additional attention and support

to address their complex needs. For school staff the additional support, including home visits or frequent check ins, meant the relationships they had with CYPLA differed from those with other children.

> *"I'd always pay a little bit more attention to those children. You'd check up on them a little bit more. They had a little bit more extra praise.*" (School staff member, Shannon)
> *"I think the relationship can be different for children in care… due to the complex needs of some of those children."* (School staff member, Sophie)

Adults noted that CYPLA wanted to be treated like other children. However, they observed instances within education where practices inadvertently resulted in othering, such as labelling parents/caregivers or discussing weekend plans. School staff members displayed concern that well-intentioned actions could have negative consequences for the child and made efforts to minimise such practices.

> *"Why don't they just call everyone carers instead of parents? Or the adult in charge? They stand out more than they should, more than is helpful for their emotional wellbeing.*"
> (Foster carer, Amira)
> *"When we do learning walks, monitoring those children, but without them feeling like they're being monitored in addition to the rest of the class.*" (School staff member, Sophie)

School staff members reflected on the balance regarding information sharing. Individuals recognised benefits to sharing information to better understand and support the child. However, they also acknowledged the child's rights to privacy and that oversharing could also make CYPLA feel different.

"Making sure that everyone is aware of that group of children because they are a vulnerable group." (School staff member, Sophie)

"It is important to keep a child's history as secure as possible and not sharing things that don't need to be shared, only the minimum. I do think it's important that people do know he's a looked after child in school, so they're a bit more cautious about what they say."

(School staff member, Shannon)

4.9.3. Valuing relationships

This subtheme, specific to school staff members, captures their strong belief in relational practices, and the need for the entire school community to value relationships for CYPLA to maximise their impact. Some school staff members felt supported and encouraged by their school community and senior leaders, who allowed time, space, and resources to facilitate the development of close relationships with CYPLA.

"My last school was completely open to close relationships. Maybe I'm a one off, maybe I have been lucky." (School staff member, Rhea)

"We have ELSA here at this school. So that's very much promoting relationships. So that makes it a lot easier to justify your time spent with children." (School staff member, Rhea)

One school staff member reflected on experiences of settings throughout their career that did not value relationships. They believed that not all staff understood their commitment, closeness, or emotional reactions to working with the child.

"If teaching staff don't get attached to children, or if they don't necessarily have such close bonds, if they don't put in that time, they can find it hard to understand why other staff might feel more emotional and like you can't let it go." (School staff member, Shannon)

4.9.4. School to home tension

This subtheme, unique to foster carers, reflects their views that challenges experienced by CYPLA in school, coupled with lack of support, often spill over into the home environment, impacting their relationship with the carer. Foster carers reflected that their home provides safety for the CYPLA where they can express their emotions, potentially fostering a positive relationship. However, foster carers also acknowledged the difficulty in managing the child's feelings and behaviours, sometimes feeling unfairly blamed for school-related issues.

"Everything is then my fault because she comes home to her safe space, and I get the brunt of it all. I get all the anger that's been building up during the day." (Foster carer, Claire)

"When he has a bad day at school, it has a knock-on effect at home… When your work is repetitive all week and you come to Friday, and you have a meltdown, and it takes ages to calm down and then I get to solve it." (Foster carer, Jacqueline)

One foster carer reflected on how the COVID-19 school closures reduced the pressure on the child, which helped their relationship.

"It was just less stress, less pressure on children… particularly that long, long summer, that was a nice bit of time, and the schoolwork was fine… It did help the relationship, then real life kicks back in." (Foster carer, Claire)

It also meant foster carers had to work hard with the school to improve the child's experiences.

"*It is a sort of three-way relationship, child, carer, school. If that's working, it just helps everybody.*" (Foster carer, Claire)

4.10. Adult Theme 5: Bridging the Gap in Children's Services

This theme outlines the acknowledgement that additional time and money is needed in education, health, and social care, to move beyond supporting basic needs and enable CYPLA to develop close relationships. This theme consists of 3 subthemes, present for foster carers and school staff members, which were: systemic barriers; effective relational decision making and increasing EP time and awareness.

4.10.1. Systemic barriers

This subtheme reflects the views of adult participants that children's services have limited resources and an overly bureaucratic focus, making relationships seem unimportant and orchestrated. Adults frequently mentioned the strain on social care services, attributing it to rising demands. This strain was associated with frequent changes in social workers and reduced capacity for communication and relationship building.

"*I don't quite know how to improve it because it's just how this system works and it's probably coping with far more children than it was designed to cope with. It will come down to more money and time.*" (School staff member, Shannon)

"We've had 15 different social workers over the years, and you can't provide any consistency." (Foster carer, Charlotte)

"The communication between social workers and schools is not always great. Social workers I know do direct work, but that direct work doesn't necessarily get fed back to us." (School staff member, Shannon)

"Social workers could be a bit more user friendly, to have a relationship with a family that doesn't just involve checking up on them, but an actual, genuine relationship." (School staff member, Rhea)

School staff members considered additional funding for CYPLA to be useful.

"The PEP funding is useful because we can look at how that money could be used to best support that child." (School staff member, Sophie)

Adults also referred to challenges in accessing children's mental health services for similar reasons.

"It's taken over a year to get a CAMHS referral and for a first meeting. He really needs some help." (Foster carer, Charlotte)

Adults also commented on the bureaucracy within children's services, including lengthy paperwork, jargon, and intermittent involvement from numerous professionals. These practices could make children feel different and relationships seem contrived, undermining a relational approach.

"Every year, when you're coming up to an annual review, you fill out a million and one bits of paper… it becomes a bit of a tick box exercise." (Foster carer, Charlotte)

"Biggest thing that really irked me is all the jargon in front of children. They say, what's contact? When I see my mum, my real mum? That really does get in the way because it's in their face all the time." (Foster carer, Amira)

"I think if you make children feel different from other children, it just puts them off you." (Foster carer, Jacqueline)

One foster carer shared that they did not find social workers to be a useful resource when considering how to build relationships with CYPLA.

"I've never really found them to be that helpful, with a great idea of a way of bonding with the child." (Foster carer, Amira)

4.10.3. Effective relational decision making

This subtheme captures the belief among adult participants that decisions made with CYPLA's relationships in mind lead to positive outcomes for them, particularly placement decisions. There was a strongly held view of adult participants that frequent placement moves had a detrimental impact on CYPLA.

"Some of the poor youngsters that go from pillar to post and have 5678 placements in different places. That's probably the most damaging thing in my opinion. They end up not caring for themselves. And lacking self-respect, because they don't ever feel like they belong

anywhere, they're probably the hardest cases that we've looked after over the years." (Foster

carer, Charlotte)

There were reflections on the matching process in social care, based on their characteristics. Some participants thought successful matching could facilitate the natural development of close relationships, resulting in successful placements and settled school experience. Others held concerns about the potential for foster carers to be selective in choosing children, raising questions about fairness.

"It worked out really well for all of us and it was a lovely match with these particular

boys." (Foster carer, Charlotte)

"Many people will attempt to pick and choose and say, well no, we don't want difficult

teenagers." (Foster carer, Charlotte)

Some foster carers expressed views on the importance of keeping siblings together, to minimise the loss a child experiences.

"At the first LAC meeting I said whatever the decision is for the children, just keep

them together. Once she saw how comfortable B was, she then settled. In the end I had to say

it's OK. I'm here now. You can be a child again." (Foster carer, Jacqueline)

Adults also referred to a need for CYPLA to be placed early, as this is supportive of close relationships. This was beneficial as CYPLA may have little memory of other care givers and loss, and the relationship can develop from a young age, which promotes closeness and physical contact.

"I've got a good relationship with her, a close relationship, but I've had her since she was very, very small. She has no memory of not being here, which I think makes a difference."

(Foster carer, Claire)

4.10.4. Increasing access to EPs

This subtheme represents a need for increased access to EPs and awareness of their roles. Foster carers and school staff members frequently associated EPs with learning and EHCP's, although some participants acknowledged their involvement with social and emotional needs.

"I was all geared up for a big fighty meeting. But actually she was brilliant and she really got the trauma side of things as well, which I wasn't necessarily expecting because the child has a lot of learning issues." (Foster carer, Claire)

Adult participants reflected on their experiences working with EPs, and shared many strengths of these professionals, such as rapport building, valuing everyone's views and a holistic understanding of CYPLA, and the positive impact they can have on CYPLA.

*"Children are whole beings, social and emotional, and their cognitive abilities especially. I think actually educational psychologists are almost the best placed because of their training." (*Foster carer, Amira)

"He was fantastic because he had such a way of putting families at ease and putting educators at ease and great with the children as well." (School staff member, Shannon)

A desire for increased access to existing support was expressed, including individual assessments and staff training. School staff members highlighted the value of EP support, but they felt limited by insufficient time with their link EP, attributing this to stretched EP services. Some schools had the option of accessing an EP through their local EPS or VST.

"You don't see them nearly as often as you need to. I understand the same old moan and its services being cut." (Foster carer, Charlotte)

"If I could have an EP here all day, every day, I would pay for it myself. Because your time is so restricted, we don't see them anywhere near enough." (School staff member, Rhea)

Adult participants also shared ideas for additional ways EPs could support the relationships of CYPLA, such as training and implementation of trauma-informed practice for school staff and foster carers, direct therapeutic work with CYPLA and a proactive role for EPs within multidisciplinary teams (MDT).

"I'd like to see a trauma-informed educational psychologist in every primary school that looks in on every looked after child." (Foster carer, Amira)

"We send children for a paediatrician appointment as they come into care, maybe an educational psychologist should be part of that. We want that educational psychologist to see all children coming into care." (Foster carer, Claire)

"I would like them to be doing sessions with the foster parents, understanding about trauma and one especially for school staff." (School staff member, Rhea)

4.11. Adult Theme 6: Caution & Confusion Within Social Care & Education

This theme represents the idea that there is a fear of closeness causing allegations and distress, but also a lack of clarity on the role of foster carers and school staff members in building relationships with CYPLA, which leads to adults finding their own approach. This theme encapsulates 3 subthemes which were present for foster carers and school staff members. These subthemes were: fear of closeness; blurry boundaries between professional closeness and distance and developing confidence and autonomy.

4.11.1. Fear of closeness

This subtheme captures the views that adults perceived a sense of caution towards closeness and physical contact from the wider social care and education systems. Foster carers referred to social workers being particularly cautious of physical contact and expressions of love.

"Social workers are a lot more frosty or cold. They're much more: do a side hug, don't tell them that you love them." (Foster carer, Amira)

Foster carers and school staff members attributed this caution to concern for false allegations against adults due to the child's previous trauma; a concern that they also shared. A foster carer referred to the increased risk of allegations for single carers and male carers.

"If you're a male, you've gotta be more careful. I'm sure the statistics will show that there's many more complaints against men than there are of women." (Foster carer, Amira)

"But you're thinking about your own wellbeing, your own safeguarding and security as well." (School staff member, Shannon)

Foster carers also believed there was a systemic fear that closeness would cause more distress to themselves and the child when the child moved on. Foster carers and school staff members acknowledged that it could be difficult when a child moved on, and that can be a worry.

"If there's gonna be a new mum/dad on the scene, you've got to get them ready for that and that's actually really tough piece of work." (Foster carer, Amira)

"That can be challenging when you know the child may not be here for a long period of time because you really want them to settle, and then it's a concern that they will leave." (School staff member, Sophie)

Adult participants referred to necessary and important guidance to minimise the risk of allegations and distress. They outlined recommended protective practices. For foster carers these included an open-door policy and physical boundaries in the home (e.g. child not able to access the carers bedroom). For school staff members, protective practices included having other adults present when engaging in physical contact with a CYPLA and limiting physical contact. Additionally, adults provided examples of safe physical contact, such as hugging the child from the side.

"When she's having her story at bedtime, I'm sitting with her on the sofa and I'm trying to get her to sit next to me and snuggle rather than being up on me." (Foster carer, Claire)

"When I hug, I put an arm around rather than be a full, front on hug." (School staff member, Shannon)

"It's good practice to make sure you're never in a room alone with any child."

(School staff member, Sophie)

One foster carer also believed there was understandably a high level of accountability for foster carers.

"It's pretty gruelling, you have to go through every detail, but they have to be scrupulous… they need to be accountable for the carers that they have." (Foster carer, Jacqueline)

4.11.2. Blurry boundaries between professional closeness & distance

This subtheme reflects the ambiguity among adult participants regarding the appropriate level of closeness necessary in their roles. Some foster carers perceived their parental and professional roles as complementary, due to their professional training enhancing their parenting skills. However, others perceived a conflict, resulting in an unnatural relationship. Those in the latter group believed they provided parental-like care for a child, constrained by rules and regulations. They also expressed frustration at feeling disregarded by social workers despite their intimate knowledge of the child.

"My whole life is geared around these two little girls: day-to-day you're bringing up these children as if they're your children. You're doing everything that a parent would do. But… they're not my little girls and I am professionally a foster carer, caring for them under all the regulations that are there and that does make things that bit unnatural sometimes."

(Foster carer, Claire)

School staff felt their role differs to foster carers, with varying opinions on whether close relationships were their responsibility or considered 'above and beyond'. While some regarded themselves as assuming a parental role while the child was at school, others emphasised the importance of maintaining professional boundaries and did not view physical contact as within their responsibilities.

> *"But you're the parent in school, you're putting their needs first."* (School staff member, Rhea)

> *"I would never wanna cross the line and be hugging children too much because that isn't the role of a teacher."* (School staff member, Sophie)

Adults were sceptical of the applicability of theoretical ideas and guidance in practice. For example, one foster carer noted the arbitrary nature of guidance, especially as a single carer always alone with the child where allegations could occur regardless of protective practices. There was a view that guidance was too restrictive for real life or lacked consideration for younger children's natural inclination for physical contact. Concerns were raised about CYPLA feeling rejected if they couldn't reciprocate desired contact, and the guidance aimed at minimising allegations could hinder building close relationships.

> *"They can't call you mum and dad, but you can't stop a small child calling you mum or dad if they want to and I don't think it's helpful… I would like to see them relax a lot more on what a child calls you. I'd like to see things be more natural"* (Foster carer, Amira)

> *"It's hard to not give the I'm pushing you away, rejecting you vibe, but also to stop her inappropriately touching."* (Foster carer, Claire)

"Doing a side on hug and not letting a child sit on your lap is a bit out of order. Some of these things are very instinctive and natural for children and adults." (Foster carer, Amira)

4.11.3. Developing confidence and autonomy

This subtheme represents the individual resolution to the conflicts, confusion, and caution, by considering advice and opinions from many sources but ultimately finding their own way and developing confidence and freedom in their practice. Adult participants cited many sources of advice, guidance, and general opinions, including social workers, foster carers support groups and professionals. There were examples of foster carers feeling supported by the child's social worker and their supervising social worker, and by foster carer forums and training.

"I can turn to my supervising social worker and say, this is happening. Because I'm a bit unsure and she's really good and she will say do XY and Z." (Foster carer, Jacqueline)

Similarly, school staff members often felt supported by colleagues and professionals.

"We do staff wellbeing check ins, two evenings a week. It's very holding, as it can be a job that you want to bury your head in the wall sometimes." (School staff member, Rhea)

"The Virtual School, I think that's really helpful because you know there's a contact you can speak to." (School staff member, Sophie)

However, at times, foster carers and school staff members disagreed with and rejected the advice they received based on their own judgement on what is best for the child. The result was adult participants finding freedom and developing their confidence in their own practice.

"I did say that maybe that wasn't the best thing to do. I did override the decision and say, well, actually this is the best thing for the child. And that's what we should be focusing on. Not the rules of the school." (School staff member, Rhea)

"I fully accept that I'm probably not supposed to do that in the modern day, and I also fully accept that the day I don't give a child a cuddle would be the day that I gave it all up." (Foster carer, Charlotte)

"You've gotta find that common ground or make those decisions for yourself really by getting to know the child." (Foster carer, Charlotte)

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1. Chapter Summary

This research employed qualitative methods to explore emotional closeness between CYPLA and foster carers and school staff. It identified features of close relationships and influencing factors across various systems. This chapter will discuss the findings related to theory, literature and three RQs: definitions of closeness, influencing factors, and the role of EPs. Implications of these findings, particularly for the EP profession, will be discussed, along with strengths and limitations of the research. Suggestions for future research and concluding remarks will follow.

5.2. Summary of Main Findings

CYPLA face risks of adverse life outcomes, stemming from complex and interacting factors including individual characteristics, pre-care, care and education experiences. While relationships can mitigate these risks, not all CYPLA experience close relationships with adults. The relationships of CYPLA often focus on practical needs rather than emotional connection, an important feature of relationships. There are individual and systemic factors that can shape the relationships of CYPLA. Thus far, limited research has explored emotional closeness and physical contact, less so from the perspective of young CYPLA.

This study, involving school staff, foster carers and young CYPLA, identified three themes for CYPLA and six for adults' participants relating to close relationships. Figures 4 and 5 below indicate which themes/subthemes of adult and CYPLA participants address which RQs.

This research demonstrates that close relationships can exist for these populations, characterised by togetherness, emotional comfort, affection, and physical contact, which builds trust and enables personal growth. Child and adult traits and experiences interact and shape the closeness of the relationship. Systemic barriers, school culture, and caution and ambiguity within social and education services create a challenging context for meaningful relationships development. EPs support the relationships of CYPLA through individual assessment, consultation, and training, but could increase and diversify their involvement to include therapeutic work, whole-school approaches, and MDT collaboration. However, challenges such as limited time and awareness of the role could hinder access for CYPLA.

Kindness is Key	Support to Connect	Family Support & Strain
Genuine kindness	Providing for the child	Family brings happiness
Calm & understanding approach	Motivate & help to learn	Family brings conflict
Fairness builds trust	Emotional comfort	
Togetherness	Lasting impression	
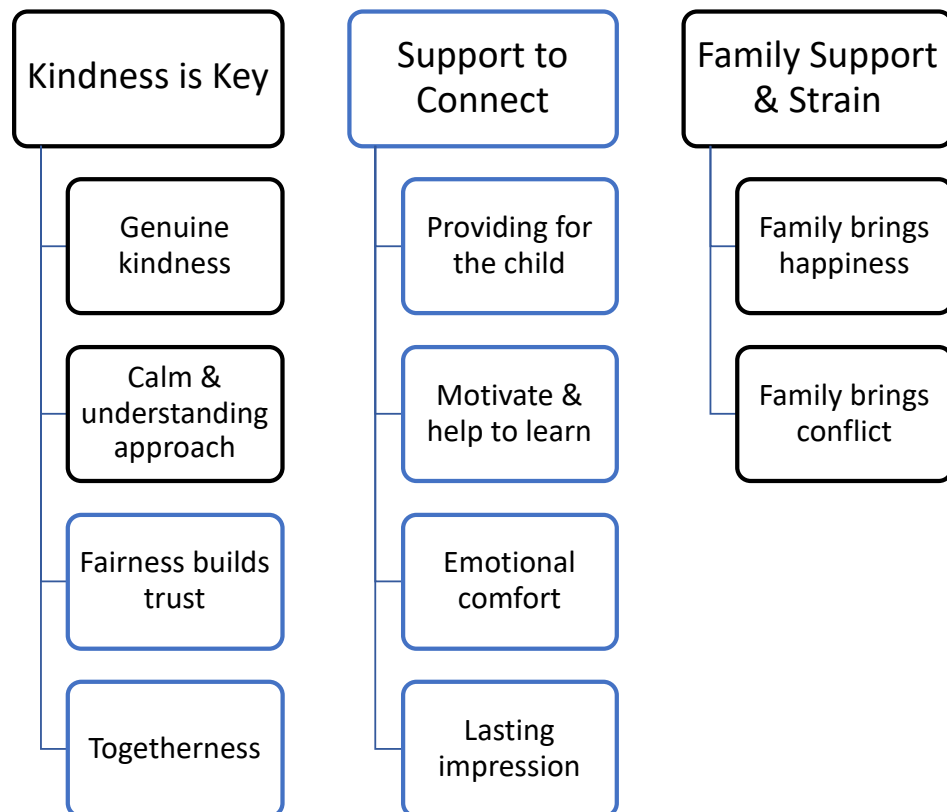
Figure 4: A map of themes/subthemes for CYPLA, colour coded by which RQ they address (blue indicates RQ1, black indicates RQ2). Whereby themes contain subthemes which address multiple RQs the researcher colour coded according to which RQ the theme predominately addresses.
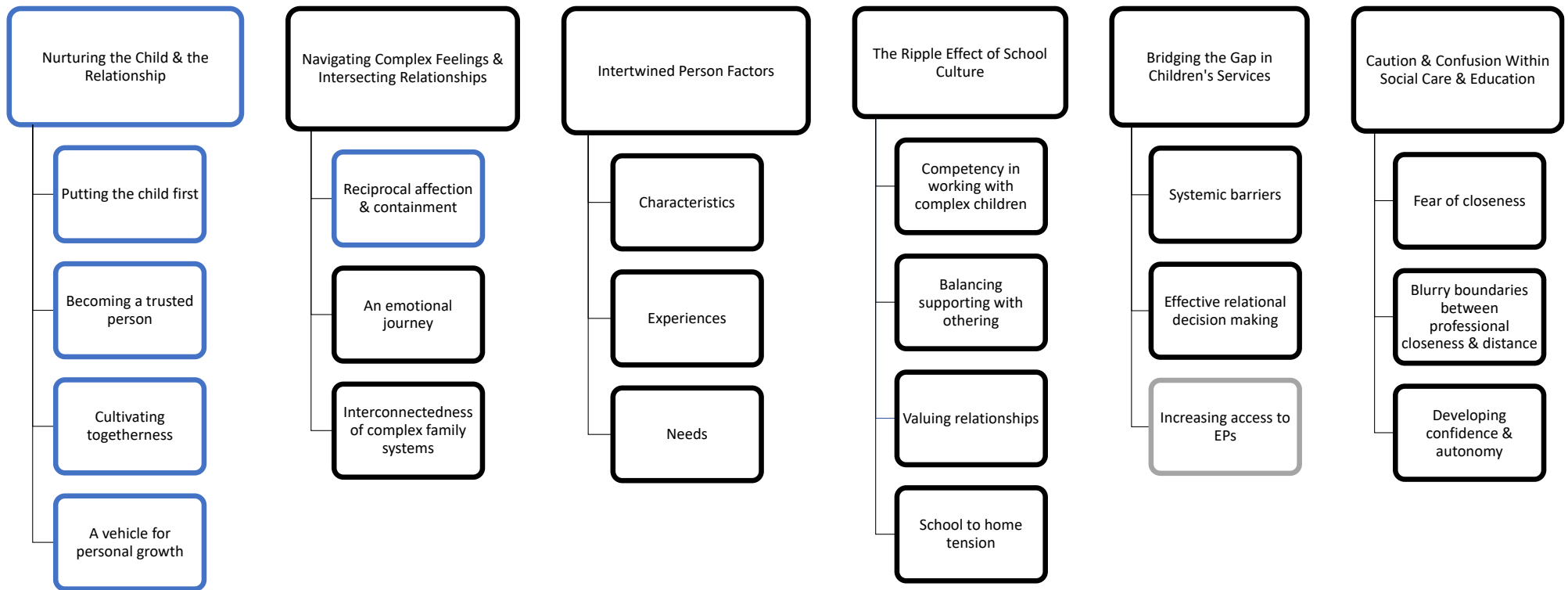
Figure 5: A map of themes/subthemes for adult participants, colour coded by which RQ they address (blue indicates RQ1, black indicates RQ2, grey indicate RQ3).

5.3. RQ1: What characterises a close relationship between adults and primary school-aged CYPLA?

Togetherness, emotional comfort, affection, physical contact, leading to trust and personal growth**,** emerge as significant aspects of close relationships, according to CYPLA, foster carers and school staff. These features are characteristics of attachment relationships with carers and teachers, arguably setting them apart from other relationships (Bowlby, 1979; Howes & Ritchie, 1999; Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). While it is beyond the scope of this research project to establish whether foster carers and school staff are attachment figures for CYPLA, its findings suggest that these relationships can exhibit attachment-like features.

An important distinction in the conceptualisations of close relationships was CYPLA's emphasis on adults' ability to provide for them. This was a simple yet unexpected finding, likely rooted in their experiences of unmet needs. This emphasis aligns with attachment theory, which posits that bonding is innate and vital as young children are reliant on caregivers to meet their needs (Ainsworth, 1989). While foster carers acknowledged addressing these needs, they did not consider it a crucial aspect of the relationship. CYPLA may appraise an adult's capacity to provide resources before forming a close bond, having experienced dependence on adult's who could not meet their needs.

5.3.1. Togetherness

All participants emphasised the significance of being together and doing things together in building closeness. Adult participants believed togetherness created shared memories and provided CYPLA with typical experiences. This concurs with findings that suggest togetherness offers a sense of belonging for CYPLA (Langley, 2019) and can replace adverse

experiences to recover from maltreatment (L. Warwick, 2017). Furthermore, togetherness allows both parties to become familiar with each other. Physical activities can dissolve physical barriers and promote comfort in each other's presence. This parallels Clarkson et al.'s (2017) conclusion that shared experiences develop emotional warmth in an unspoken and embodied manner. Similarly, Warwick (2017) refers to 'hanging out' as a non-physical act of intimacy. These findings highlight the importance of adults actively participating in shared activities and dedicating quality time for CYPLA to develop emotional closeness and physical contact.

5.3.2. Emotional Comfort

The findings highlighted the importance of emotional comfort in these relationships, contradicting prior research which indicated emotional support from professionals is lacking, leading to a reluctance from CYPLA to seek support (Côté & Clément, 2022; Singer et al., 2013). Notably, these studies were conducted in Canada and USA respectively, differing policy and context could provide a different landscape for relationships. Adult participants believed they provided emotional support through open communication with CYPLA, echoing previous findings of the importance of talking and UPR (Clarkson et al., 2017; Rogers, 1957). The CYPLA in this study reported encountering individuals who recognised, understood, and supported their emotions, aligning with findings from Harker et al. (2003, 2004). The act of sharing feelings and having these validated and contained promotes closeness. These findings resonate with attachment theory, which suggests that CYP seek emotional support, guidance and protection from caregivers (Ainsworth, 1989). Therefore, there is a need for school staff and foster carers to ensure open communication.

5.3.3. Affection

The presence of affectionate feelings emerged as a characteristic of close relationships; however previous research presents conflicting conclusions. Some foster carers explicitly expressed love, and all adults appeared to have affectionate feelings indicated by their fond responses, for a CYPLA, consistent with findings elsewhere (Lausten & Frederiksen, 2016; Lynes & Sitoe, 2019). The concept of professional love has been documented in foster carer-CYPLA relationships (Blackburn & Matchett, 2022; Lausten & Frederiksen, 2016; Lynes & Sitoe, 2019), these findings suggest it can also manifest between school staff and CYPLA. This is promising, as a lack of love or affection can lead to feelings of insecurity and negative consequences for CYP (Bowlby, 1979; Stroebe & Archer, 2013). Additionally, foster carers considered CYPLA to be a part of their family, consistent with previous research (Clarkson et al., 2017). These findings are reassuring as CYPLA consider adults promoting their sense of belonging to be important (Pinto & Luke, 2022). However, contrasting research has suggested that love and belonging is not a universal feature of these relationships (Boddy, 2019; Colbridge et al., 2017; Côté & Clément, 2022; Evans, 2020; Schofield, 2002; Sprecher et al., 2021). This variability in affectionate feelings is explained by CYPLA relationships operating on a spectrum from parental to painful (Sprecher et al., 2021). These findings highlight the potential for professional love, affection and belonging.

The adults in this study believed their affectionate feelings were reciprocated. CYPLA did not explicitly express their feelings towards or received from adults. Previous quantitative studies imply that the majority of CYP in foster care feel loved by their carers (Lausten & Frederiksen, 2016). In this research it is possible that CYPLA did not feel comfortable talking about this topic. Alternatively, they may not consider love or affection to be part of either adult's role, particularly if these features were not prioritised with their previous relationships, as reported in prior studies (Côté & Clément, 2022). However, consistent with other research,

(Driscoll, 2011, 2013; Harker et al., 2003, 2004), CYPLA did reflect on remembering significant adults as they grow up, which could suggest affectionate feelings are reciprocated.

5.3.4. Physical Contact

Physical contact serves a bidirectional role in nurturing closeness within the relationships of CYPLA. Adult participants expressed feeling comfortable providing such contact to show affection, which is readily available and led by the child's verbal or non-verbal cues, consistent with previous research (Eßer, 2018; Sprecher et al., 2021; L. Warwick, 2017). While participants provided physical contact for the CYPLA, they also acknowledged its role in fostering a sense of closeness for themselves, with one foster carer frequently citing feeling stressed when not attuned to the CYPLA. There is limited research on the use of physical contact with CYPLA, however research has demonstrated a stress reduction effect on parents (Barnett, 2005) which these findings lend support to.

Adult participants agreed physical contact was essential and demonstrated implicit knowledge of the impact of physical contact on development, emotional regulation and relationships (Ainsworth, 1989; Barnett, 2005; L. Warwick, 2017), drawn from their personal and professional experiences. Adult participants also believed physical contact modelled and taught appropriate touch and consent, consistent with prior research (Rees & Pithouse, 2008). Participants were mindful of rejecting or imposing physical contact on a CYPLA due to their traumatic experiences, which is advisable (Luckow, 2020). Although participants were reflective, they did not overthink or actively worry about providing physical contact. This concurs with findings that the use of physical contact isn't conscious, infrequent or reluctant (Rees & Pithouse, 2008). These insights are reassuring as CYPLA may seek physical restraint

when their need for physical contact is not met (Steckley, 2018), emphasising the crucial role of adults in meeting this fundamental need.

5.3.5. Trust

The presence of togetherness, emotional comfort, physical and non-physical affection cultivates trust, aligning with prior research (Clarkson et al., 2017). Trust is an essential and prevalent feature of close relationships for CYPLA (Selwyn, Briheim-Crookall, et al., 2017; Selwyn, Wood, et al., 2017). CYPLA referred to mutual trust, echoing previous research (Selwyn, Wood, et al., 2017). Adults shared the idea of earning trust, by being consistent and reliable over time, aligning with previous research (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1979; Clarkson et al., 2017; Langley, 2019). Consistency provides stability and security to bond (Langley, 2019). Adults believed the CYPLA had developed confidence in their availability, as they would seek them out for support, indicating adults provide a secure base to return to when they require protection or emotional regulation (Woodhouse et al., 2020). These findings highlight the need for consistent and reliable adults.

5.3.6. Personal Growth

Experiencing close relationships, as described, leads to personal development for CYPLA, serving as a vessel for learning. Close relationships enabled CYPLA to attend school and receive support for their education, with adults motivating and engaging them with learning. Positive relationships have been consistently reported to influence educational outcomes (S. Jackson et al., 2005; S. Jackson & Ajayi, 2007; S. Jackson & Cameron, 2012; S. Jackson & Martin, 1998; Jaramillo & Kothari, 2021; Sugden, 2013). Adults empower CYPLA to believe in themselves and feel able to accept the support offered (Harker et al., 2003, 2004). In addition, all participant groups believed the relationship facilitated the development of

emotional literacy and wellbeing, consistent with previous research (Bombèr & Hughes, 2013; Houston, 2010). CYPLA expressed that significant adults could teach them ways to manage their feelings and improve their mood. Similarly, adults helped CYPLA label emotions and coregulate, developing their regulation skills (Schofield, 2002). Participants also noted that close relationships enabled CYPLA to share their past experiences and ask questions. Importantly, previous research has suggested that experiencing trusting and loving relationships can help CYPLA process and overcome trauma (Schofield, 2002; Sprecher et al., 2021; Winter, 2015) and reduces the likelihood that early attachment experiences will be replicated in future relationships (Langley, 2019). Findings from this research suggest close relationships foster learning, emotional wellbeing, and processing of trauma.

Additionally, adults shared that the relationship developed the CYPLA's identity and self-esteem, contrary to previous findings that appraisal support is lacking (Singer et al., 2013). Participants believed the relationship provided CYPLA with a safe space to accept praise, explore and express who they are, consistent with other findings (Houston, 2010; Macleod et al., 2021). This aligns with attachment theory and UPR, consistent and accepting adults help build positive self-worth (Bowlby, 1979; Rogers, 1957). Participants also noted that the relationship enabled CYPLA to develop their values and life skills, supported by research that relationships with teachers can support CYPLA to improve their advocacy skills (Macleod et al., 2021; Sugden, 2013). Greater self-belief is likely to lead to CYPLA having greater aspirations for themselves and to promote long term education, health and wellbeing outcomes (Sprecher et al., 2021; Winter, 2015). Therefore, close relationships have an important role in shaping a CYPLA's positive sense of self.

5.4. RQ2: What are the factors influencing the closeness of these relationships?

This research has identified individual and systemic factors that shape close relationships between CYPLA and adults. Across all participant groups, there was recognition of the influence of adult factors and birth family contact. Additionally, adult participants also highlighted child-related factors alongside systemic influences, including school culture, bureaucracy, ambiguity and apprehension within social and education services.

5.4.1. Child factors

Adult participants highlighted child-related factors influencing the closeness of their relationships with CYPLA. There was a perception that young or female CYPLA are easier to become close to, the relationships are instinctive and maternal. A systematic review indicates babies and infants are more likely to have stable placements (Rock et al., 2015). However, findings from foster carers suggest feelings of love are not influenced by age or gender of the CYPLA (Lausten & Frederiksen, 2016). Participants also discussed age differences impacting physical contact, with one foster carer expressing uncertainty about adhering to age or development stage-related expectations. Physical contact was more socially acceptable with younger children and inappropriate physical contact was subtly redirected toward age-appropriate displays. Physical contact is negotiated between the adult and CYPLA based on their needs, preferences and societal norms, using strategies to limit intimacy if needed, consistent with previous findings (Luckow, 2020; L. Warwick, 2017). While child-related factors may influence the ease of relational development, close relationships can result. This carries implications for older CYPLA entering new placements and their continued access to close relationships and physical contact.

Additionally, adult participants cited the previous adverse experiences and attachment difficulties of CYPLA as influencing the development of close relationships with appropriate touch, consistent with findings from prior research (Brewin & Statham, 2011; Selwyn, Wood, et al., 2017; Winter, 2015). Participants often described CYPLA having difficulty trusting others, and a tendency to reject relational efforts by spoiling a positive experience as a defence mechanism, aligning with existing literature indicating that CYPLA may not feel deserving of adult affection (Brewin & Statham, 2011; Hopkins, 2000; Howe & Fearnley, 2003; Sprecher et al., 2021). Moreover, participants noted instances of indiscriminate friendly behaviour and developmentally inappropriate physical contact, which made foster carers feel uncomfortable and concerned, as previously reported (Bennett et al., 2009; Hodges & Tizard, 1989; O'Connor et al., 2000). CYPLA may indiscriminately seek love and closeness while also rejecting adult affection due to their previous experiences. However, despite these challenges, adult participants felt that they had established a close relationship with the CYPLA. Therefore, as concluded by Sprecher and colleagues (2021), early adversity is a hurdle to overcome for future relationships. The findings from this research suggest that overcoming this hurdle is possible.

The SEN of the CYPLA were also discussed as influencing factors. Most participants indicated that the CYPLA they supported had learning, language, social or emotional challenges, concurring with data showing the high prevalence of SEN among CYPLA (Ford et al., 2007). Specifically, emotional regulation difficulties and challenging behaviours were commonly mentioned within this sample, understood by adults in the context of the CYPLA's traumatic experiences (Glaser, 2000). The complexity of the CYPLA's needs and additional support required could threaten the adult's sense of competency, leading them to question or blame themselves during challenging times. This is consistent with previous research on placement breakdown (Pinto & Luke, 2022; Rock et al., 2015; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014).

Adults may respond to CYPLA's rejecting behaviour and emotional challenges by rejecting (Langley, 2019) or detaching from them (Edwards, 2016) to protect themselves and their sense of self. Despite some adults internalising the challenges they faced with CYPLA, the individuals within this study did not reject or detach from CYPLA. Instead, they appeared determined and celebrated small successes, which may also protect the adults' sense of self, contributing to successful close relationships.

CYPLA reflected on the importance of their birth family for their wellbeing. Furthermore, adults shared that family contact could evoke difficult emotions for CYPLA, including loss or guilt over building other relationships, and anger or disappointment if the relationship with their birth family was strained or inconsistent. These findings are consistent with existing literature (Langley, 2019; Winter, 2015). These difficult feelings could lead to CYPLA becoming dysregulated in school and at home, which could impact their relationships with other adults, in line with previous research on placement instability (Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). Adults also expressed challenges in maintaining consistency around family contact, as the parenting practices of birth family could differ, impacting their ability to provide stability and sense of belonging. Family contact and promises from birth parents could undermine the relationship between CYPLA and their foster carers, making CYPLA wish to return home or disregard the foster carers' authority, echoing findings in previous research (Langley, 2019; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). Some participants suggested that in certain circumstances social workers should refrain from encouraging family contact, aligning with previous research where foster carers noted an improvement in their bond with the CYPLA once contact was reduced (Langley, 2019). Regardless of the challenges, adults emphasised the importance of respecting and maintaining a relationship with the birth family, in line with the wishes of CYPLA (Pinto & Luke, 2022). This approach could help CYPLA reconcile conflicting feelings by perceiving

adults as a unified team with clear roles and trust other adults if their trusted adult approved of them, consistent with previous research (Sprecher et al., 2021; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). Therefore, evidence linking family contact and relationships or placement stability is inconsistent (Rock et al., 2015), which likely reflects the unique circumstances of each CYPLA. However, navigating multiple complex family systems can lead to difficult emotions and challenge CYPLA's relationships with adults. It appears that addressing the ambiguity and loyalty issues (e.g. by working as a team, clarifying the adult's role, reducing family contact) can have a positive impact on their relational capacity.

5.4.2. Microsystem

All participants shared adult characteristics that foster closeness. CYPLA desired adults to be genuinely kind and generous with their time and resources, and capable of prioritising and responding to their needs sensitively. This finding aligns with previous views of CYPLA (Baldry & Kemmis, 1998; Macleod et al., 2021; Pinto & Luke, 2022) and the notion of UPR (Rogers, 1957). CYPLA were also able to recall individuals who displayed these traits. While this is a positive finding, other research with CYPLA has revealed that adults could be more understanding and nurturing (Goddard, 2000; Honey et al., 2011), suggesting that not all CYPLA experience caring adults.

Adult participants also reflected on their own traits, emphasising being nurturing and resilient, consistent with existing literature (Goodall, 2014; Pinto & Luke, 2022; Whitehouse, 2014). Both CYPLA and adult participants believed that adults should provide physical contact to CYPLA when desired. Adults had a personal preference and comfortability with physical contact, which varies between individuals (Eßer, 2018; Luckow, 2020). They also took a trauma-informed and child-centred approach, which has been identified as crucial for relational

practice (Sprecher et al., 2021). They made efforts to understand and respond to CYPLA's needs, which is important for building relationships with CYPLA (Goodall, 2014; Sprecher et al., 2021; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). Adult participants frequently described their approach as firm with clear boundaries and flexibility when necessary, aligning with prior research (Macleod et al., 2021; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). They valued and prioritised relationships for CYPLA, a practice not always observed (Goddard, 2000; Harker et al., 2003, 2004; Winter, 2015). Similarly, the adults valued education and maintained aspirations for CYPLA, countering the prevalent low expectations placed on CYPLA (Goddard, 2000; Harker et al., 2003, 2004; Winter, 2015). Their deep personal motivation and commitment was evident, which is vital (Boesley, 2021; Wilson & Evetts, 2006). These findings highlight the variability in relational experiences and a need for additional training for all adults supporting CYPLA.

Adult participants acknowledged the emotional experience of investing in and supporting CYPLA. They shared feelings of sadness and distress for the child's circumstances and early experiences, consistent with previous research (Edwards, 2016; Waterman, 2020). Aligning with prior findings (Goodall, 2014), participants expressed frustration when feeling helpless, and emotional difficulty when preparing a CYPLA for transition. Adults also experienced difficult feelings when they were struggling to connect and understand the CYPLA and their behaviours, leading to self-doubt and blame. These findings have been previously reported (Allen & Vostanis, 2005; Donachy, 2017, 2017). Notably, participants were not apprehensive about connecting with CYPLA who have experienced significant trauma, contrary to some findings (Donachy, 2017). Adults within this research believed their emotional investment and connection with the CYPLA led to difficult emotions for themselves, but also enables close relationships.

On the other hand, adult participants reported positive emotions and rewarding experiences, concurring with previous research with teachers (Goodall, 2014). Participants were motivated by the challenges they faced and remained committed to building close relationships. This contrasts with previous research suggesting that emotional challenges can create distance, as adults decrease interpersonal touch, adopt a more professional stance or detach from the CYPLA (Edwards, 2016; Sprecher et al., 2021; L. Warwick, 2017), potentially exacerbating CYPLA's feelings of loss (Winter, 2015). Participants were not nervous about the prospect of a close relationship with a CYPLA or deterred by difficult emotions. Instead, they remained dedicated, defying expectations of distancing behaviours observed in previous research. This resilience is important and may reflect the experienced nature of this participant group, as they had all supported many CYPLA successfully.

5.4.3. Mesosystem

Adult participants acknowledged the reciprocal impact of characteristics, emotions and experiences between themselves and the CYPLA, shaping the relationship, concurring with previous discussions (Sargent & O'Brien, 2004). They emphasised the importance of the matching process within fostering in creating successful relationships and placements, aligning with previous research exploring placement breakdown (Donachy, 2017). Foster carers believed they were well matched with the CYPLA in their care. These insights highlight the role of compatibility in fostering close relationships with adults and CYPLA, moving away from attributing responsibility to individuals.

5.4.3. Exosystem

Considering school settings, adults highlighted the variation in the success and availability of support for CYPLA. They noted a lack of awareness and knowledge within

school communities, leading to stereotyping, gossiping and a hesitance to form relationships with CYPLA. It is imperative for schools to enhance their awareness of the needs of CYPLA, supported by current and previous findings (Boesley, 2021). There were instances of effective support and provision for CYPLA, positively impacting on their education and relationships. However, challenges persisted, such as shortages of time, funding, and experienced staff, preventing the implementation of early intervention. The reported increase in pressure and expectations on schools to address complex needs without increasing funding or training opportunities (Boesley, 2021) could contribute to these challenges. These systemic barriers highlight the urgent need for comprehensive resources for schools to ensure the success of CYPLA and their relationships.

Linked to supporting CYPLA, adults reflected on the ongoing challenge of addressing their needs while avoiding making CYPLA feel different. They recognised CYPLA required additional support, echoing sentiments from Goodall (2014), describing CYPLA as vulnerable and fragile. Participants acknowledged that their relationships with CYPLA differed from those with their peers. They were conscious of CYPLA feeling different and wanting to be treated the same as other CYP, which CYPLA have previously shared (Goddard, 2000). School staff demonstrated a contradiction of developing CYPLA's self-esteem and identity while concealing their care identity from others, and managing "doing enough and doing too much" (Goodall, 2014). These findings emphasise the need for an individualised approach, involving CYPLA in decision-making and allowing them control and ownership over their care status, relationships, and education provision.

School staff reflected on the impact of school culture and the significance of working within a setting that values relationships. While some individuals reported being afforded time,

space and understanding to build relationships with CYPLA, others felt misunderstood or judged for their practice. This echoes previous research suggesting varying levels of empathy for CYPLA, recognition or understanding of the important role of adults supporting them (Boesley, 2021), including others who are critical of colleagues who are close with CYPLA (Ellis, 2012). Although explicit policies could support settings in valuing relationships, previous findings suggest that settings often fail to provide the time and space necessary for relationship-building (Macleod et al., 2021). A cultural shift within educational environments is needed to ensure relationships are consistently valued.

Furthermore, foster carers provided insights into how school culture influences the wellbeing and relationships of CYPLA. They shared that CYPLA may face challenges in school without support. CYPLA manage themselves and their emotions throughout the day and release built-up feelings upon returning home, posing a challenge for foster carers in managing subsequent behaviour and emotions. It may also negatively impact their relationships in school due to the effort required to manage themselves. This phenomenon of impression management in challenging situations, commonly observed among autistic CYP who engage in masking of their traits and emotions, has been noted to deplete emotional resources and impair self-regulation later on (Vohs et al., 2005). While impression management is not a novel finding, its specific implications for CYPLA and their relationships is. Previous research suggests that school staff can alleviate strain on foster carers by being available and supportive (Goodall, 2014). Fostering an inclusive and supportive school culture can reduce impression management, by enabling CYP to be themselves and supporting their individual needs, minimising strain on relationships.

As previously discussed, adults experience emotional challenges, but often lack time or space for reflective practices. This mirrors previous trends, and is associated with negative implications for adult wellbeing and relational decision-making (Donachy, 2017; Greig et al., 2008). However, foster carers did cite support groups, forums, and training as beneficial, while school staff felt supported by colleagues and external professionals, consistent with previous findings (Boesley, 2021; Edwards, 2016). Interestingly, foster carers and school staff did not refer to social support as useful, contrary to previous research (Boesley, 2021; Sinclair et al., 2004). Participants may not have perceived social support to be directly relevant to their role. Despite the benefits of supervision, only one member of school staff had experienced it, highlighting a gap in support avenues that could help individuals manage emotional challenges (Edwards, 2016; Waterman, 2020). Adults shared variable experiences of support from social workers, with some adults exploring their worries and gaining helpful advice, and others not feeling social workers are communicative, available, or helpful. This variability is also reflected in previous research (Blackburn & Matchett, 2022; Boesley, 2021; Lynes & Sitoe, 2019; Pinto & Luke, 2022; Taylor & McQuillan, 2014). Negative experiences with social workers were attributed to systemic barriers, such as high caseloads or lack of experience, rather than individual commitment, which concurs with existing literature (Boesley, 2021). Given the emotional stress faced by these adults and their responsibility for a vulnerable group, the available support may be insufficient, which can have an adverse impact of CYPLA and their relationships.

Adults further discussed systemic barriers in local services. Adults expressed their frustration with waiting times and high thresholds for children's mental health services, which is common (Boesley, 2021). They also highlighted bureaucratic obstacles, including lengthy paperwork, use of jargon and a high turnover of professionals, which hinders meaningful

relational practice, aligning with prior accounts (Goodall, 2014). However, participants did reflect positively on funding available for CYPLA, contrasting previous research from DTs who struggling with funding negotiations due to scrutiny and the justification required (Boesley, 2021). Discrepancies in funding between LAs may reflect differences in perspectives. There was a view that local children's services are excessively bureaucratic, leaving little room for relational approaches and well-considered placement moves (DfE, 2023a). One participant deemed frequent placement moves the most detrimental process. However, adults noted that prioritising relationships led to thoroughly considered placements, well-matched adults with CYPLA and the preservation of sibling bonds. These findings highlight the importance of relational practices, above bureaucracy, in improving the relationships for CYPLA.

5.4.4. Macrosystem

Adult participants perceived a sense of caution towards closeness from the wider social and education systems. While they did express love and affection and use physical contact, they felt these practices were not encouraged and, at times, actively discouraged, indicating that love is taboo within care (Evans, 2020). Participants attributed this caution to a fear of false allegations, and believed CYPLA's experiences of trauma increased the likelihood of such allegations. One participant recounted supporting a CYPLA with significant trauma and volatile behaviour, being cautious and selective with physical contact for this CYPLA. This provides further evidence that this narrative can influence practice (Blackburn & Matchett, 2022; Carr, 2005; Rees & Pithouse, 2008). Foster carers also alluded to an increased risk of false allegations towards male carers, which has been noted in previous research (Rees & Pithouse, 2008). Within social and education systems a fear of false allegations exists, which may vary based on child and adult traits, resulting in a culture of suspicion towards closeness.

Furthermore, adults perceived caution stemming from a systemic fear that closeness would cause exacerbated distress when CYPLA transitioned. Participants did acknowledge that it could be very challenging for themselves when a CYPLA move schools or placement, consistent with previous research (Ellis, 2012; Ellis & Curtis, 2021). While they could perceive adverse effects of a close relationship, they refrained from distancing measures to protect themselves or allowing this to become a barrier, contrary to previous findings (Ellis, 2012; Ellis & Curtis, 2021; Goldstein et al., 1984; Goodall, 2014; Winter, 2015). Instead, they described a delicate balance between establishing closeness, as it is beneficial, and avoiding CYPLA experiencing a profound loss again, by preparing the CYPLA for transition. Individuals must navigate fear of loss and distress within social and education systems by valuing the benefits of close relationships and preparing for difficult transitions.

In discussing mitigating the risk of false accusations and distress, participants shared details of recommended practices. Adults believed the advice is important but often disagreed, opting for a more nurturing and realistic approach. This aligns with previous research (Pinto & Luke, 2022; Sprecher et al., 2021) and highlights the tension between following strict guidelines and prioritising nurturing relationships. CYPLA within this study did not address the guidance around their care, previous research suggests CYPLA value adults prioritising emotional closeness over adherence to guidelines (Pinto & Luke, 2022; Sprecher et al., 2021; L. Warwick, 2017), providing support to the approach taken by adults in this study. The measures taken to minimise risk of allegations and loss place boundaries on the relationships, which can create distance, and may not be feasible in practice.

School staff and foster carers grappled with the ambiguity surrounding relationships with CYPLA and their individual responsibility. Foster carers struggled with defining their role

as a parent or a professional, which has implications for the variability in practice. This reflects the debate within the literature. Some foster carers viewed their dual roles as complementary, benefitting from training opportunities (Schofield et al., 2013). Other foster carers felt conflicted, describing the relationships as unnatural due to the parental caregiving within the context of rules and payment (Ellis, 2012; Ellis & Curtis, 2021). Previous research suggests that professional boundaries can create distance and threaten physical affection and love (Blackburn & Matchett, 2022; Ellis, 2012; Ellis & Curtis, 2021; Kirton, 2001, 2022; Pickin et al., 2011). However, foster carers expressed a desire for less professionalisation to reconcile the conflict, advocating for more natural, familial-like relationships to be accepted. It appears the foster carers within this study aligned themselves more strongly with the parental role, which may have protected the relationships from the distancing effects of professionalisation.

Similarly, school staff faced uncertainty regarding the boundary between a close relationship and unprofessionalism, echoing previous finding on the metaphorical 'line' (Carr, 2005). Some school staff members believed they assume a caregiving role, while others perceived their role as distinctly different from that of a carer. The former group viewed closeness and physical contact as integral to their role, whereas the latter considered it to be beyond their responsibilities. The difference could be attributed to their position within the school, those in leadership positions with less direct contact with CYPLA held the latter view. This concurs with Carr (2005) who suggested the 'line' varies with professional judgement and experiences. Despite the potential for ambiguity to instil caution in teachers (Carr, 2005), adults within this research successfully navigated this ambiguity to feel confident in building close relationships with CYPLA. They found individualised resolution and practice, likely influenced by their interpretation of their role and professionalism (Carr, 2005; Kirton, 2001, 2022). While these findings offer comfort, individuals should not be burdened with this

responsibility. This confusing and cautious culture likely serves as a significant barrier for others, contributing to the reality that not all CYPLA experience close relationships.

5.5. RQ3: How can EPs support close relationships between adults and primary school-aged CYPLA?

The findings from this study indicate that EPs can support close relationships between adults and CYPLA via their existing and potential future ways of working. Given their multifaceted roles and interventions across various levels of complex systems (Scottish Executive, 2002), they possess the knowledge and capacity to support individuals, groups, and systems in nurturing these relationships effectively.

5.5.1. Current Practice

Adult participants consistently expressed positive views on current EP practices and their impact on CYPLA. Individual statutory or school directed assessments were commonly referenced, aligning with previous research (Norwich et al., 2010; Samul, 2021). EHCPs were deemed beneficial in ensuring ongoing support and funding for CYPLA, often facilitated by a key adult, fostering close school relationships, and reducing school-related challenges and tension, further enabling relationships to thrive. Furthermore, adults reflected on EP's valuing their views and considering the whole child and context during meetings. This concurs with previous research suggesting consultation is widely used and received positively when supporting CYPLA (Boesley, 2021; Francis et al., 2017; Norwich et al., 2010; Shaw et al., 2021; Whitehouse, 2014). In addition, participants believed EPs can build rapport with CYPLA and adults, within a small amount of time. This research acknowledges the limited direct work EPs currently have with CYPLA (Samul, 2021), however stakeholders believed EPs manage within the constraints. Additionally, school systems work, such as attachment and trauma-

informed training, were cited as a valuable source of EP input. This concurs with previous findings that these opportunities are relevant, necessary and efficient uses of EP time (Dent & Cameron, 2003; Honey et al., 2011; S. Jackson, 2010; Norwich et al., 2010; Shaw et al., 2021). The findings suggest that EPs currently facilitate a supportive environment and relationships for CYPLA via individual case work and whole school training.

The findings also shed light on the specialist roles of some EPs. Participants reflected that having an EP commissioned by the VST increased access for CYPLA. This was beneficial, which contrasts previous research which suggests having specialist EPs in other teams and link EPs can lead to confusion and division (Bradbury, 2006; Norwich et al., 2010; Samul, 2021). This difference in findings is likely to reflect referral processes and communication between teams that is specific to each LA. Additionally, participants expressed that EPs could attend review meetings, provide DT and foster carer training sessions, and contribute alongside other professionals (Norwich et al., 2010). This research suggest that EPs support wider systems to foster relationships for CYPLA.

5.5.2. Future Practice

Participants proposed creative and realistic ideas for future EP practice, suggesting expansion into areas less commonly filled by EPs but deemed highly applicable. They frequently emphasised the importance of being attuned to CYPLA to build close relationships, therefore therapeutic intervention such as Video Interaction Guidance could be relevant. Therapeutic interventions are useful to supporting attachment difficulties both in school and at home (Billinge, 1992; Francis et al., 2017). Interestingly, therapeutic work was not commonly associated with EPs, rather a gap EPs could fill. This concurs with other research which suggests therapeutic intervention are underutilised by EPs (Samul, 2021). EPs could provide

therapeutic support to CYPLA and their supporting adults to enable close relationships to develop and reduce the burden on children's mental health services.

Adults expressed a desire for EPs to provide preventative whole-school approaches. While individual assessments and case work were considered useful in supporting CYPLA, participants recognised that excessive focus on these can impede systemic preventative work. For example, ongoing training towards becoming a trauma-informed school could reduce the demand for individual casework in the long term (Shaw et al., 2021). Furthermore, participants voiced a need for EPs to be present within MDT, uniquely applying psychology, highlighting key contextual issues and trauma informed thinking from the initial assessment of the child on entry into care. Despite repeated suggestions (Boesley, 2021; Norwich et al., 2010), this aspect has not yet been integrated into everyday practice as EPs working within specialist teams is newly established (R. Warwick, 2021). Therefore, EPs collaborating within MDT may be an emerging aspect of the role relating to CYPLA, which would be highly valuable.

The suggestions for future practice were primarily centred on the home and school context and did not extend to wider systems. For instance, participants did not mention EPs supporting other professionals, which is a small but important aspect of the role (Dent & Cameron, 2003; Honey et al., 2011; S. Jackson, 2010; Norwich et al., 2010). Foster carers and school staff were reflecting on their own context, without considering EPs contribution in developing school or LA relational policy, reflecting previous research that such work is valuable but underutilised (Boesley, 2021). Furthermore, participants did not associate EPs with providing support for adults working with CYPLA, despite expressing a need for reflective spaces and positive experiences of supervision in the past. This gap reflects previous findings that there is a need for adults to have reflective spaces but EPs are not well utilised for

such work despite being well placed (Boesley, 2021; Edwards, 2016). These findings indicate some challenges to EPs engaging in varied work with CYPLA, which are explored below.

5.5.3. Challenges

There was a need for increased EP time, given the recognised value. It was acknowledged that EPs are stretched, resulting in limited time allocated to schools. Increasing EP time would not only facilitate the continuation of current support, but also afford stakeholders the opportunity to contract preventive work. Time constraints have consistently been identified as a pertinent factor affecting the scope and diversity of EP involvement with CYPLA (Billinge, 1992; Cameron, 2017; Edwards, 2016; Francis et al., 2017; Honey et al., 2011; Norwich et al., 2010; Samul, 2021), which this research corroborates. Time is a challenge that the EP profession faces generally, coupled with a shortage of EPs (Lyonette et al., 2019). Given the increasing number of CYPLA who are a highly vulnerable, (DfE, 2023a) they are likely to be impacted disproportionally.

Additionally, the research highlighted a need for greater awareness and visibility of EPs and their work with CYPLA, a concern previously noted within the professional networks and the profession itself (Samul, 2021). While participants acknowledged EPs involvement in supporting social, emotional, and mental health needs, they predominantly associated EPs with individual assessments, EHCPs and learning needs. This suggests a lack of awareness regarding the support EPs can offer or a limited exposure to the diverse range of work EPs engage in. This may stem from the historical evolution of the EP role, transitioning from cognitive assessment to consultation, and working directly with children, teachers, and families in school settings. The evolving EP role, shaped by the profession's strengths and the needs of CYP (Leadbetter & Arnold, 2013), provide hope for future developments. Limited time and

awareness of the EP role has implications for CYPLA's access to EP support but also hampers the profession's growth and development, narrowing the scope of practice and opportunities for cost-effective preventative interventions.

5.6. Summary of Implications

Table 6 presents a summary of practical implications across various levels of CYPLA's ecosystem. This was derived from the researchers' reflections of data collected from CYPLA, school members and foster carers aimed at enhancing relational capacity within the system. While the implications are primarily applicable to the LA from which the data was collected, they offer valuable insights for informing practice and policy more widely.

Table 6

Summary of implications for practice, by each level of the CYPLA's ecosystem.

Level	Group	Implications
Micro system	School staff & foster carers	• Implement trauma-informed, relational approaches in daily interactions with CYPLA (e.g. clear boundaries, unconditional positive regard, flexibility). • Dedicate time and space for relational activities with CYPLA. • Model and promote appropriate physical contact, bodily consent, expressing affection and emotions. • Allocate a team of key adults for CYPLA.

	• Ensure access to basic equipment and resources, and a calm school environment to support CYPLA's learning and wellbeing.
	• Create opportunities for CYPLA to experience success and maintain high aspirations.
	• Deliver quality first teaching with multi-sensory, engaging, and personalised learning approaches.
	• Offer therapeutic (e.g. cognitive behavioural therapy, emotional regulation strategies, play therapy, counselling) and social support (e.g. developing social skills, understanding of relationships).
	• Seek the views of CYPLA regularly to inform decision-making.
	• Provide support for school staff working closely with CYPLA (e.g. peer support, supervision).
EPs	• Increase awareness of the evolving EP role and create opportunities to work with CYPLA within schools, support services, charities, and LA teams.
	• Offer therapeutic interventions tailored to the individual needs of CYPLA.
	• Support staff and foster carer wellbeing using reflective spaces, supervision, training etc.
	• Ensure that CYPLA views are captured, and their relationships are considered in practice and research.

Meso system	School staff & foster carers	• Foster collaboration with foster carers and birth families, where appropriate.
		• Identify a key staff member as the point of contact and provide clarity on frequency of contact to key adults (including sharing positive feedback).
		• Facilitate information sharing amongst staff around CYPLA's history, changing context and approaches for support following communications with foster carers and birth family.
		• Seek and value parent and foster carer views on personal education plans.
		• Implement proactive strategies in school to minimise distress expressed at home (e.g. regulating activities).
		• Share information on child's preferences for physical contact and address any concerns relating to physical contact.
	EPs	• Challenge and address harmful views/practices (e.g. behaviour management) by reframing beliefs to shift negative narratives.
		• Provide guidance on relational activities and regulation strategies.
		• Facilitate communication and information sharing between school and key adults to reach a shared

		understanding of CYPLA's strengths, needs and strategies for support.
		• Raise awareness of CYPLA and their needs in schools.
		• Advocate for CYPLA, their foster carers and families to ensure they are involved in decision-making.
Exo system	Schools	• Provide comprehensive whole staff training on trauma, loss, physical contact, and relational practice.
		• Develop and implement a trauma-informed and relational approach to behaviour management, and develop accompanying policies.
		• Use of physical contact to be clearly addressed in school policy.
		• Reflect on and address barriers to effective relationships and use these to inform practice, including the presence of stigma and 'othering' practices.
		• Create a PSHE curriculum that celebrates family diversity, including foster care.
		• Update bullying/discrimination policies to include issues relating specifically to being looked after.
		• Allocate additional time and resources for the DT, DSL, and key adults of CYPLA.
	EPs	• Increase offer of therapeutic work to schools.
		• Advocate for CYPLA at a policy level.

		• Continue to communicate the need for increased funding for EP training.
		• Encourage schools to adopt relational, trauma-informed approaches to understanding and supporting CYPLA's needs.
		• Provide training for school staff and foster carers on trauma, physical contact, relational approaches, inclusion, supporting CYPLA education and wellbeing, and techniques to elicit children's views.
		• Offer regular supervision sessions for school staff, social workers, and other professionals.
		• Support foster carers through support groups, training, supervision etc.
Macro system	Professionals, LA & Government	• Introduce a mandatory module on trauma and relational practice during initial teacher and foster carer training.
		• Include topics such as being looked after/care, physical contact, and consent in national PSHE curriculum.
		• National guidance for school behaviour policies to promote relational approaches to understanding and supporting CYP's behaviour.
		• VST to share information with schools around how they can support them and provide more opportunities to training and networking.

	• Ofsted school assessment criteria to be more relationship and wellbeing focused.
	• Increase therapeutic and EP access for CYPLA.
	• Consider making being looked after a protected characteristic.
	• Allocate more funding to early intervention for vulnerable families, to reduce the number of CYP entering care.
	• Allocate more funding to children's social care services, to increase social workers' ability to communicate and build relationships with families and ensure consistency.
	• Streamline bureaucratic process and reduce the use of professional jargon.
	• Placement decisions to be carefully considered, with relationships placed at centre to minimise the disruption of attachments, and ensure placements are stable.
	• Policies to reflect importance of using physical contact and provide clearer guidance on use which is applicable to real life and acknowledges the challenges, informed by foster carers and CYPLA views.
	• Clearer guidance on the role of foster carers.
EPs	• Advocate at policy level for CYPLA.

- Push for educational reform and against potential harmful education and social care practices.

- Challenge inaccurate and harmful views about care.

- Promote valuable contribution of EPs within the field of relational practice, and CYPLA, foster carer and school staff wellbeing.

5.7. Key Implications for EPs

This research holds significant implications for EP practice in the UK, considering their role in supporting CYP and their families within the various systems. Table 7 outlines the implications for EPs across the core functions of their role within the ecosystem of CYPLA: training, consultation, assessment, intervention, and research (Scottish Executive, 2002). These implications are drawn from the researcher's reflections of the data.

Table 7

The implications for EPs in relation to the core functions of EP's roles across the levels of CYPLA's ecosystem.

	CYP & Families	School	LA
Training	• Therapeutic caregiving courses. • Supporting emotion regulation and literacy courses.	• Attachment, trauma-informed and relational approaches (including physical contact). • Addressing stigma and misconceptions of care and promoting inclusive practices. • Staff well-being support (e.g. supervision, reflective spaces). • Quality first teaching for CYPLA. • Supporting emotion regulation and literacy training.	• Collaborating with VST on their DT and foster carer training and events. • Providing training for other teams (e.g. social care, youth offending service, occupational therapy, advisory teachers) and health colleagues on trauma-informed and relational approaches and gathering views.

Consultation	• Celebration of CYP's strengths and shifting narratives around CYPLA's needs and behaviour. • Problem-solving concerns. • Bridging the relationship between birth and foster family.	• Celebration of individual CYPLA's strengths, appraisal of provision and problem-solving concerns. • Exploring relational approaches and provision. • Shifting narratives around CYPLA's needs and behaviour. • Fostering communication between school and carers/parents. • Developing policies and processes (e.g. identification of needs, provision mapping).	• Contributing psychological perspective to MDT meetings. • Consultation and drop ins for other team members. • Developing special interest groups.

Assessment	• Trauma-informed and contextualised formulations developed and shared with carers, parents and CYPLA.	• Support schools to assess CYPLA's needs over time and provide relevant provision.	• Ensure LA monitoring of home/school moves for CYPLA.
	• Recommend provision to highlight the importance of relationships.	• Encourage schools to reflect on their relational processes.	• EPS monitoring and prioritising of referrals for CYPLA.
	• Gathering the views of CYPLA and families.	• Providing guidance on using auditing tools (e.g. whole school trauma-informed practices).	• Contributing to MDT assessments (e.g. upon entry to care).
	• Reflecting CYPLA needs in context of their experiences.	• Encourage schools to assess how they support staff wellbeing.	
	• Contributing psychological advice for EHC needs assessments.		
	• Using person centred approaches (e.g. Planning		

	Alternative Tomorrows with Hope).		
Intervention	• Signpost CYPLA and their families to mental health support/ family support services. • Individual/ group therapeutic support. • Facilitate parent support groups within schools and the community. • Facilitate CYPLA support groups and advocacy groups within the community.	• Develop relational behaviour policies. • Signpost school staff to mental health support services. • Facilitate reflective practice with school staff (e.g. supervision, Circle of Adults, Solution Circles). • Help schools embed staff wellbeing support structures into their day. • Support with nurture groups and ELSA sessions, adapted to consider CYPLA needs.	• EPs providing preventative work in LA wide projects (e.g. emotion coaching training & developing emotional literacy interventions). • Working groups within LA to consider challenges around physical contact.

	• Promote adult-child relationships through tools (e.g. Video Interaction Guidance).		
Research	• Consider and reflect on recruitment issues. • Forming participatory groups for CYPLA.	• Action research with school staff to understand how they could build relationships with CYPLA.	• Action research into how the education system could better support CYPLA's relationships.

5.8. Strengths and Limitations of the Research

5.8.1. Strengths

Utilising a qualitative approach alongside child-friendly PCP tools was beneficial for delving into the nuanced experiences of individuals. This approach amplified the voices often neglected in research, particularly those of younger CYPLA. By employing these methods, the study captured the views of young CYPLA regarding relationships and physical contact with significant adults, which is even rarer. A deliberate choice was made to maintain a clear distinction between the themes of CYPLA and adult participants, to privilege their perspective. Using a qualitative approach and Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development as a theoretical framework, also enabled a comprehensive exploration of the current literature, and contextual and systemic factors impacting CYPLA and their relationships, beyond individual-level considerations. Being responsive to the context, of existing research and social context of the research setting, is a characteristic of good qualitative research (Yardley, 2000). While previous research has identified systemic factors influencing relationships, this study provides a cohesive understanding of their collective influence. The research extends the current knowledge base by providing a detailed examination of both individual and systemic factors relevant to close relationships among CYPLA. These findings are particularly pertinent given the increasing recognition of being looked after as a protected characteristic by several LAs, prompting a broader discussion on the needs and experiences of CYPLA across different contexts.

Incorporating diverse participant groups, including school staff from varying roles, foster carers and CYPLA, enriches the depth and breadth of the collected data. Adopting a multi-informant approach facilitated the triangulation of individual perspectives, enhancing the validity of the findings by identifying robust commonalities in experiences and mitigating

potential biases. This approach also enabled the researcher to appreciate the differing viewpoints within and between each participant group. By acknowledging these individual differences, the study was able to develop a comprehensive understanding of the topic, capturing shared experiences and distinctive insights across stakeholders.

This research also demonstrated commitment and rigour, according to the criteria outlined by Yardley (2005), by presenting a clear rationale for the methodological choices made and conducting robust data collection and analysis. The researcher engaged deeply with the data, conducting in-depth interviews, and a detailed analysis of the data using RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2006), gaining a comprehensive understanding of the views of CYPLA and adult participants. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, the researcher practiced reflexivity, using a research journal and supervision, to confront and reduce biases, which is a feature of good qualitative research (Yardley, 2015). This commitment to reflexivity enhanced the credibility of the findings. The researcher's coding was examined by colleagues for accuracy and alignment of the codes with data, and the themes/subthemes were reviewed with supervisors to validate their fidelity in capturing the essence of the data. Peer debriefing sessions with fellow trainee EPs were also conducted to challenge and refine the researcher's interpretations, further strengthening the credibility of the research. Throughout the study, transparency and coherence was maintained with an audit trail documenting the researchers' thoughts and decision-making and providing detailed examples of transcripts, coding and coding frameworks (Yardley, 2000). This transparency facilitated methodological rigor and accountability.

The findings offer a wealth of insight specific into a single LA. This deliberate focus allowed a thorough and detailed exploration of one context. The gathered information holds

the potential to serve as a valuable resource for the LA, offering opportunities to acknowledge successful practices and critically reflect on existing systems, practices, and processes. It is anticipated that these findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of this community and enhance the effectiveness of service provision. Throughout the research journey, there has been meaningful engagement and support from teams within the LA, emphasising a collaborative partnership aimed at improving outcomes for the community. This partnership is poised to yield further benefits during the dissemination phase. By engaging and working closely with stakeholders within the LA, these insights have the potential to be translated into actions and enhance the impact of the research. The research makes a meaningful contribution to the field of educational psychology and has practical significance for the LA it was conducted in, and relevance for wider LAs (Yardley, 2000).

The researcher's dual position as a researcher and a trainee EP within the LA proved to be advantageous throughout the study. Practitioner psychologists can bridge the gap between theory and practice, to identify highly relevant research issues and plausible methodologies. This position also facilitated careful consideration of ethical concerns, particularly given the vulnerability of CYPLA, and mitigation strategies. Being embedded within the LA environment facilitated the recruitment of participants, by utilising professional networks. The researcher's competency as a practitioner was valuable in building rapport with participants, with adult participants likening their interview experience to a therapeutic interaction. Moreover, the researcher's reflective and reflexive practice skills enhanced the data collection and analysis process, ensuring rigor in the findings. The researcher has experience and understanding of the educational and care systems, coupled with psychological knowledge, which allowed for assiduous interpretations of the findings and formulation of practical

implications. The researcher is well-positioned to effectively disseminate the findings within relevant fields and among professionals, thereby maximising its impact and utility.

5.8.2. Limitations

One potential limitation to consider is the extent to which the findings accurately represent the participants views, as data collection can be influenced by many factors. Given the qualitative nature of the study, verifying individual perspectives can be challenging. CYPLA may not have felt comfortable sharing their views, especially when interviewed in their foster placements. The presence of significant adults as gatekeepers to the project might have created pressure for CYPLA to provide socially desirable responses. The researcher took measures to minimise potential barriers to open expression, including conducting interviews in private spaces within the home and emphasising the parameters of confidentiality. Additionally, variation in participant engagement was observed, with some CYPLA being significantly more talkative than others. The researcher reflected on the utility of multiple visits to build rapport with those who were more reserved, however due to time constraints and concern for CYPLA experiencing fleeting input from professionals, additional visits were not possible. The researcher was flexible in allowing additional time when possible. Furthermore, CYPLA might have encountered difficulties in understanding the questions or articulating their thoughts on abstract topics. To mitigate this, the researcher ensured that the language and tasks used were age appropriate and accessible, and employed various strategies such as re-phrasing questions and allowing ample time for processing the question.

Another potential limitation pertains to the sample composition. Recruitment, especially of CYPLA, was challenging due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the vulnerability of the population. The resulting sample, particularly of CYPLA, is small.

Furthermore, there was limited diversity among the participants, the CYPLA were male and attending mainstream schools, and school staff and foster carers were female. Recruitment bias may have influenced the sample, as individuals with positive relational experiences may have been more inclined to participate. While the adults within the sample provided valuable perspectives on the care and education systems, most reported positive relationships with CYPLA (one foster carer did share difficulties in supporting CYPLA). Regardless, caution should be exercised when generalising the findings to CYPLA, school staff and foster carers. It should be noted that the aim of this research was not to represent the views of these groups comprehensively but rather to capture unique experiences.

5.9. Future Research

Recruiting CYPLA was challenging, and subsequently the CYPLA gathered were aged 10 and 11 (the upper end of the desired age range). Recruitment from this population necessitated engaging gatekeepers, who displayed reluctance in discussing the project with CYPLA. Reasons behind this hesitance varied, some gatekeepers expressed concerns about upsetting the children, the social worker disapproving and doubting the ability of CYPLA to participate due to SEN. There continues to be a significant gap in the literature relating to the voice of young CYPLA, partly attributable to these barriers. Exploring these barriers in-depth with gatekeepers and co-constructing strategies to overcome them would be hugely beneficial in ensuring the inclusion of CYPLA in research. For instance, as mentioned, longer term involvement may be needed for some CYPLA to participate. Alternatively, if introducing another adult into CYPLA's lives is inappropriate, key adults could gather the views of CYPLA, with training and supervision. Future research could unpick these barriers, offering valuable insight and recommendations to overcome these challenges and ensure meaningful participation of CYPLA.

This research acknowledges a potential skew in the sample, as adults who have had close relationships with CYPLA may be more willing to share their experiences. While this is valuable, it is also beneficial to explore cases where relationships have not been successful and the factors contributing to these outcomes, complementing the findings from this research. Furthermore, the sample focuses on primary school-aged CYPLA. Participants noted that the age of CYPLA could impact their ability to become close to them. Exploring the same topic for secondary school-aged CYPLA and their adults would provide a comparative analysis, shedding light on whether the potential for close relationships persists and identify facilitators and barriers in this stage. Such comparative findings would enrich the understanding gained from the present study.

An interesting finding emerged from this research concerning adult gender differences in use of physical contact within foster care settings. Female foster carers mentioned feeling more comfortable using physical contact with CYPLA in comparison to their male partners or male carers generally. All adult participants in this research were female, and a male foster carer initially expressed interest in participating, but later withdrew without stating a specific reason, which could suggest that female foster carers and school staff are more willing to discuss this topic. This raises questions about whether gender differences exist in foster carer-CYPLA relationships, the nature of these differences, their impact on male carers and CYPLA. Therefore, future research should recruit and interview male fosters carers to explore these questions. Such investigations could offer valuable insights into gender influences within foster care relationships and inform practices to support male carers and CYPLA.

5.10. Concluding Comments

This research explored the perspectives of CYPLA, foster carers and school staff on the nature of close relationships and physical contact, and the factors influencing them. Understanding these dynamics is crucial, as close relationships can serve as protective factors against negative life outcomes for CYPLA. Furthermore, the study explored the role of EPs in supporting the relationships of CYPLA, aiming to ensure equitable access to EP services and timely support.

This research project is the first to triangulate the view of younger CYPLA, foster carers and school staff regarding these topics. The findings contribute to existing knowledge by suggesting that while close relationships with physical contact may not be universal among CYPLA, they are attainable despite challenges posed by cautious, bureaucratic, and underfunded systems. The cultivation of such relationships can be attributed to the dedication and understanding of individual adults, coupled with the resilience of CYPLA. The study also presents novel findings regarding the impact of school culture on the impression management of CYPLA and their relationships. Moreover, this research found that EPs are highly valued by school communities in supporting CYPLA, despite being underutilised due to funding constraints and lack of role awareness.

While there were predominately similar accounts between participant groups, there were unique contributions from CYPLA regarding the significance of adult's being able to provide material resources. There were also overwhelmingly similar accounts within each participant group, with most participants reflecting on positive experiences of close relationships. However, there were a few individuals who openly shared their struggles in connecting with some CYPLA.

Overall, the findings highlight a need for additional funding and systemic cultural shifts within education and social care systems. Furthermore, there are implications for EP practice, including the necessity for collaboration with professionals and policy makers to adopt trauma-formed and relational approaches to improve relationships and outcomes for CYPLA.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Search Strategy

An initial exploratory search of the literature for the purpose of this report included accessing the following databases: British Education Index (EBSCO), ERIC (EBSCO, Proquest), Child Development and Adolescence Studies, Adoption and Fostering and Google Scholar. The following search terms were used: 'looked after children' OR 'children in care' OR 'foster care' OR 'out of home care' OR 'residential care' AND 'attachment' OR 'relationships with professionals' OR 'relationships with teachers' OR 'relationships with carers'.

Only peer reviewed journals, and articles published since 2000 within the UK were considered. This decision was made due to the importance of context within this research topic and potential for differing care and education policy and practice across different countries. A few international studies have been included, as the research was highly relevant, innovative, and unique, and to omit them would have resulted in mispresenting the research landscape. In these instances, the country of publication has been stated and the application of the findings have been discussed with caution.

Additional searches were also conducted to access literature within a specific area of focus (e.g., 'looked after children' AND 'love' OR 'physical contact', 'looked after children' AND 'placement breakdown').

Pertinent statistics and legislated were retrieved via the GOV.UK website. In addition to systematic search, a snowballing strategy was also used, to access relevant material from articles reference lists, and signposting from research supervisors.

Appendix B: Research Poster

Appendix C: Teacher & Foster Carer Information Sheet & Consent Form

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Building Relationships with Children in Care
Information Sheet for Teachers & Foster Carers

What is the research and why is it important?
Positive relationships with children in care can be protective for them against negative outcomes later in life. However, there can be challenges to building and maintaining relationships with children and young people in care. I would like to talk to teachers and foster carers working with primary school-aged children in care to hear about their experiences building relationships with these young people.

This research is being conducted by a student at the Institute of Education, University College London. The institute have expertise in education and social science research. This research is being supervised by Professor Vivian Hill and Professor Claire Cameron. The project has ethical approval from the Department of Psychology and Human Development, which means that the panel agree that the researcher has carefully considered the risks and benefits of the research.

Who is carrying out the research?
My name is Baylee Peters, I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist, on the Doctorate in Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology at the Institute of Education University College London. I have previously worked closely with young people in care, and I am passionate about improving outcomes for these young people and understanding how professionals can best support them.

What will you be asked to do?
You will be asked to take part in an interview, which will last around 60 minutes. You will be asked questions about your role, responsibilities, and relationship with children in care.

As the interview is semi-structured, additional questions may be asked based on the topics that arise. However, you do not have to answer any questions you are not comfortable with, and you can pause or end the interview at any time.

The Process.
1. If you are a teacher or foster carer with at least 1 years' experience working with primary school aged children and in care and you would like to take part in the research, please sign and return the corresponding consent form to me via email (baylee.peters.14@ucl.ac.uk).
2. I will contact you to answer any questions you may have and arrange a time and place for the interview.
3. The interview will take place and is expected to last 60 minutes.

4. Once the research project has completed, I will send a research briefing to you and explain the findings.

What will happen to the information you provide?
All data will be anonymised, and every effort made to ensure that yourself or anyone you refer to can't be identified. The interview will be audio recorded, and transcribed. These transcriptions will be stored separately from any contact details or personal information provided on the consent forms, which will be stored securely and not shared with anyone. The interviews will be confidential; this means that I won't be able to share what you tell me with others. If you disclose any information which suggests you or others are at risk of significant harm, then I will need to pass this information on to an appropriate professional. The information given will be the basis of a report, which will be shared with others. The participants will not be able to be identified within the report.

Data Protection Privacy Notice
The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found in our 'general' privacy notice: for participants in research studies, click here.

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices.

The lawful basis that will be used to process your personal data is: 'public task' and 'research purposes' will be the lawful basis for processing special category data.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this and
will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me by email (baylee.peters.14@ucl.ac.uk). If you would like to take part, please sign, and return the consent forms to me. Please note that you can change your mind and withdraw from the study at any time.

Building Relationships with Children in Care
Consent Form

Name of researcher: Baylee Peters

If you would like to take part in this study, please complete this consent form by ticking each item, as appropriate, and return to the research team via the contact details below:

1) I have read and understood the attached information sheet. □
2) I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask any questions about the project, and have had these questions adequately answered. □
3) I understand my role in the project. □
4) I understand that I am are free to ask the researcher any questions about the study at any time. □
5) I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I will only be invited to the interview if I have agreed to participate. □
6) I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and my data will not be used. □
7) I understand that the interview is confidential, and that the information shared by myself will not be shared. □
8) I understand that if I disclose any information which suggests myself or others are at risk of significant harm, this will be passed onto an appropriate professional. □
9) I understand the interview will be audio recorded, and that recordings will be kept secure and destroyed at the end of the project. I know that all data will be kept under the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). □
10) I understand that the information gathered in this project will be used to form the basis of a report, which may include quotes from myself, and that the findings may be used in future reports and presentations. □
11) I understand that my name or any others will not be used in any report, publication, or presentation, and that every effort will be made to protect my confidentiality. □

Name:………………………………………………………………....…..…………………

Signature: …………………………………………....…………….. Date: …………...……

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me by email (baylee.peters.14@ucl.ac.uk). Please note that you can change your mind and withdraw from the study at any time.

Appendix D: Child Information Sheet & Consent Forms

Institute of Education
UCL

Building Relationships with Adults
Information Sheet

Hi, my name is Baylee Peters, I am training to be an Educational Psychologist. I work with children to help them in school and at home. I would like to learn more about how adults can help children who are in care.

I would like to talk to you about your relationship with your teacher and foster carer. I will also be talking to teachers and foster carers.

If you would like to talk to me:
- We will meet somewhere you feel comfortable, for example your school.
- We will play some games and talk for around 30 minutes.
- I will record our meeting on a voice recorder.
- I will ask you about your teacher and foster carer, and your relationship with them.
- You can skip any questions you do not want to answer.
- We can stop at any time.
- What you tell me is **confidential** so it is **private between you and me**, but if you tell me anything which makes me think you or anybody else are in danger, I will need to tell somebody.

After our meeting:
- I will type up the recording of our meeting, then delete the recording.
- I will write a report about what I have found out from all the people I have met with.
- My report will be shared with others.
- I will not use your real name, and the people reading my report will not know that it is you.
- I will send you and your foster carer a short report about what I found.

What next?
- If you have any questions, please talk to your foster carer, and ask them to email me (baylee.peters.14@ucl.ac.uk).
- You and your foster carer can complete the forms below and ask your foster carer to send it to me.
- I will email your carer to arrange a time to meet.
- **You can change your mind at any time.**

Institute of Education

UCL

The Process

Read this information sheet and discuss with your carer.

Decide if you would like to take part.

If you do not want to take part, no worries.

If you want to take part, complete the consent forms and email to Baylee.

Baylee will contact you and your carer to chat and answer any questions.

The interview will take place.

Baylee will type up the discussion.

Baylee will send you a report of the project when it is finished.

Institute of Education

**Building Relationships with Adults
Guardian Consent Form**

Name of researcher: Baylee Peters

If you are happy for the child to take part in this study, please complete this consent form by ticking each item, as appropriate, and return both consent forms to the research team via the contact details below:

1) I have read and understood the attached information sheet. ☐
2) I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask any questions about the project and the young person's involvement, and have had these questions adequately answered. ☐
3) I understand the child's role in the project. ☐
4) I understand that the child and I are free to ask the researcher any questions about the study at any time. ☐
5) I understand that the child's participation is voluntary, and the focus group will only be conducted if they have agreed to participate. ☐
6) I understand that the child is free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and their data will not be used. ☐
7) I understand that the interview with the child is confidential and that the information the child shares will not be shared with me. ☐
8) I understand that if the child discloses any information which suggests he/she or others are at risk of significant harm, this will be passed onto an appropriate adult/professional. ☐
9) I understand the interview with the child will be audio recorded, and that recordings will be kept secure and destroyed at the end of the project. I know that all data will be kept under the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). ☐
10) I understand that the information gathered in this project will be used to form the basis of a report, which may include quotes from the young person, and that the findings may be used in future reports and presentations. ☐
11) I understand that the child's name will not be used in any report, publication, or presentation, and that every effort will be made to protect their confidentiality. ☐

Name:…………………………………………………………………..…..…………………

Signature: …………………………………………..….…………. Date: …………...……

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me by email (baylee.peters.14@ucl.ac.uk).

Appendix E: Teacher Interview Schedule

Teacher Interview Schedule

Introduction
- Introduce self, supervisors, project.
- Explain procedure and interview.
- Recap confidentiality.
- Ensure they have signed consent form.
- Demographic information collected (duration as a teacher, additional roles & training opportunities, number of primary aged CYPLA supported, age, gender).
- Ask if they have any questions.

Defining & Developing Closeness
I would like to talk about the children in care that you taught (either now or in the past). It might help to take a moment now to think of a child in care that you feel you got along well with.

1. Could you describe this relationship to me…
   What did this relationship look like?
   What words would best describe this relationship?
   Would you consider this a close relationship? Why is that?
   Did this relationship differ to one you have with a child who is not in care?
   What actions, words, behaviour, or activities make this a close relationship?

2. How did this relationship become close (or word used to describe the relationship)?
   How did the relationship develop?
   What actions, behaviours or activities develop the relationship?
   Is this different or the same as with other children who are not in care?

3. Can you give an example of a time when you felt close to the child?
   What happened…
   How did this make you feel?
   How do you think the child felt? What makes you say this? (e.g., child's body language/actions, something the child said…)

4. We know from research that teachers can find it difficult to use physical touch with children in care. What are your thoughts around these findings?
   What is your experience of this?
   Have you always thought this way?

5. If a child in care you teach fell over and hurt themselves, how would you feel putting a plaster on their knee and giving them a hug to comfort them?
   Tell me more…
   Is there any reason you might feel that way?
   Is this different or the same as with a child not in care?

Help Closeness

6. From your experience as a teacher, have you found anything that helps to establish and build close relationships with children in care?

Is there anything about yourself?

Is there anything about the individual child?

Is there anything related to your school/school system?

Is there anything the wider systems (e.g., the local authority)?

Has there been any changes over time?

Hinder Closeness

7. For your experience as a teacher, have you found anything that hinders the development of close relationships with children in care?

Is there anything about yourself?

Is there anything about the individual child?

Is there anything about school?

Is there anything the wider systems (e.g., the local authority, policies/legislation)?

EPs, Policy & Practice

8. As you may be aware, there are many pieces of legislation and policy which aim to support the development, wellbeing, and education of children in care. Are there any specific pieces of guidance or legislation that guide your practice in building relationships with children in care?

Are these helpful? How so?

Do you have any concerns regarding policy, legislation or guidance?

9. What, if any, changes would you like to see in policy or practice relating to children in care?

Is there anything policy makers should do differently?

Is there anything you think professionals should do differently?

Is there anything you would like to do differently? What would help you to do this?

10. Educational psychologists support children, young people, their families, and schools to promote the wellbeing and education of children and young people. What do you know about the role of EP's?

Have you had any contact or experience with EPs? If so, how did you find this?

In context of child in care?

11. What, if any, role do you think educational psychologist could have in supporting teacher – child in care relationships?

Could they support the child? Yourself? Your family?

Could they support school staff?

Is there any support you think would be helpful?

Closing thoughts

12. Is there anything we have missed in our conversation that you feel is important to tell me about?

Debrief

- Check in with how they are feeling and how they found the interview.
- Ask if they have any questions.
- Enquire as to who they would be able to speak to about issues raised if needed.
- Advise who to speak to if they feel they need to discuss issues further.
- Encourage to share project with colleagues.

Appendix F: Foster Carer Interview Schedule

Foster Carer Interview Schedule

Introduction
- Introduce self, supervisors, project.
- Explain procedure and interview.
- Recap confidentiality.
- Ensure they have signed consent form.
- Ask if they have any questions.
- Demographic information collected (duration as a foster carer, number of primary aged CYPLA fostered, fostering couple, age, gender).

Defining & Developing Closeness
I would like to talk about the primary school aged children that you have fostered (either now or in the past). If you could think about one primary school aged child you feel you got along well with.

1. Could you describe this relationship to me...
What did this relationship look like?
What words would best describe this relationship?
Would you consider this a close relationship? Why is that?
What actions, words, behaviour, or activities make this a close relationship?

2. How did this relationship become close (or word used to describe the relationship)?
How did the relationship develop?
What actions, words, behaviours, or activities develop the relationship?

3. Can you give an example of a time when you felt close to a child?
What happened...
How did this make you feel?
How do you think the child felt? What makes you say this? (e.g., child's body language/actions, something the child said...)

4. We know from research that foster carers can find it difficult to use physical touch with children in care. What are your thoughts around these findings?
What is your experience of this?
Have you always thought this way?
Does your partner share the same perspective?

5. If a child you foster fell over and hurt themselves, how would you feel putting a plaster on their knee and giving them a hug to comfort them?
Tell me more...
Is there any reason you might feel that way?

Help Closeness
6. From your experience as a foster carer, have you found anything that helps to build a close relationship with a child?

Is there anything about yourself or your partner?
Is there anything about the individual child?
Is there anything in the social care system?
Is there anything the wider systems (e.g., the local authority)?
Has there been any changes over time?

Hinder Closeness

7. From your experience as a foster carer, have you found anything that gets in the way of building a close relationship with a child?

Is there anything about yourself?
Is there anything about the individual child?
Is there anything the social care?
Is there anything the wider systems (e.g., the local authority)?

EPs, Policy & Practice

8. As you may be aware, there are many pieces of legislation and policy which aim to support the development, wellbeing, and education of children in care. Are there any specific pieces of guidance or legislation that influences how you build relationships?

Are these helpful? How so?
Do you have any concerns regarding policy, legislation or guidance?

9. What, if any, changes would you like to see in policy or practice regarding relationships with children?

Is there anything policy makers should do differently?
Is there anything you think professionals should do differently?
Is there anything you would like to do differently? What would help you to do this?

10. Educational psychologists support children, young people, their families, and schools to promote the wellbeing and education of children and young people. What do you know about the role of EP's?

Have you had any contact or experience with EPs? If so, how did you find this?

11. What, if any, role do you think educational psychologist could have in supporting foster carers and their relationships?

Could they support the child? Yourself? Your family?
Could they support school staff?
Is there any support you think would be helpful?

Closing thoughts

12. Is there anything we have missed in our conversation that you feel is important to tell me about?

Debrief

- Check in with how they are feeling and how they found the interview.
- Ask if they have any questions.
- Enquire as to who they would be able to speak to about issues raised if needed.

- Advise who to speak to if they feel they need to discuss issues further.
- Encourage to share project with colleagues.

Appendix G: Child Interview Schedule

Child Interview Schedule

Introduction

- Ensure they have signed consent form.
- Demographic information collected from carer (age, gender, number of carers, duration in care).
- Introduce self and project.
- Explain procedure and interview.
- Recap confidentiality.
- Ask if they have any questions.
- Warm up game/activity

Non-Ideal Teacher/*Foster Carer*

I would like to know what the worst and the best teachers/carers would be like for you, so I can see how this could be better for children. Would you like to draw, and I can do the writing? Or you can tell me what to draw for you?

1. First think about the kind of teacher/carer you would not like to have. This is not a real person, but someone from your imagination. What kind of person is this? How would you describe this person you wouldn't like to have as a teacher/carer?

2. Every teacher has a desk: what would a teacher like this have on and in their desk? What does their desk look like and what is in and on it?
   What would a carer like this have in their home? Can you draw their home and what is in and on it?

3. What is this teacher/carer like with other adults? What do they say? What might they do?

4. How does a teacher like this teaches their class? How does a teacher like this help their students learn?
   How does a carer like this looks after their foster children? How does a carer like this help their foster children?

5. Everyone has a bad day someday. What would a teacher/carer like this be like on a bad day? How would you know this teacher/carer is having a bad day?

6. What would this teacher do during break time? What they are like at break time?
   What would this carer do while their foster children are at school? What are they like when the children are at school?

7. How would a teacher like this get on with their students? What do they say and do?
   How would a carer like this get on with their foster children? What do they say and do?

8. What is the most notable thing about this teacher/carer? What would you almost always notice about this teacher/carer? What would children always remember about them?

Ideal teacher/*foster carer*
Now let's have a look at the kind of teacher/carer you would like to have. Think about what they might be like. Again, this isn't a real person, but it could be made up of bits of people you have met, or it could be from your imagination.\

Alternative Activities
1. Therapeutic treasure desk of sentence completion and feelings cards – Karen Treisman
   I would like to know what can be good and bad about teachers/carers for you, so I can see how this could be better for children. Let's look at these cards and think about teachers/carers. Which one shall we talk about first?

   Example cards:
   - Things that bug me are..
   - The things which are important to me are…
   - I smile when…
   - I'm happiest and feel good when…
   - A (blank) day is when…. (e.g. good, bad, scary)
   - My (blank) make me feel (e.g. family, friends, teachers)
   - I think my (blank) should… (e.g. teacher, carer, social worker)
   - The thing I really need is…
   - The thing I would change is…
   - I wish I…
   - I wish my…
   - If I ruled the world, I would…
   - My home is….

2. Personal Values card Sort (Miller et al., 2001) – I would like to think about what a teacher/carer should be or what a teacher/carer should give you. Here are some ideas on these cards, or you can make up your own. Let's sort these into most important and least important to you.

   Example cards:
   - Accepting
   - Adventurous
   - Authoritative
   - Caring
   - Comforting
   - Committed
   - Compassionate
   - Creative
   - Dependable
   - Family
   - Flexible
   - Forgiving
   - Friendship
   - Fun
   - Generous
   - Genuine
   - Helpful
   - Honesty

- Hope
- Funny
- Independence
- Affection
- Knowledgeable
- Loving
- Nurturing
- Open

- Passionate
- Responsibility
- Safety
- Accepting
- Stability
- Tolerance
- Inclusive
- Other value

Closing thoughts
- Is there anything we have missed in our conversation about teachers/foster carers that you want to add?

Debrief
- Game
- Check in with how they are feeling after the interview.
- Ask if they have any questions.
- Enquire as to who they would be able to speak to about issues raised if needed.
- Advise who to speak to if they feel they need to discuss issues further.

Appendix H: Extract from CYPLA Transcript

Interviewer:

Okay. So what does he, What is he like? What does he say? What does he do for you?

Bradley:

He teaches us like every teacher teaches them. A good teacher. Yeah. Oh, yeah, he puts points, like, up on the board. You have to get 50. So you can on a Friday, you can go out and have 50 minutes for free without anybody.

Interview:

Oh, do you like that time?

Bradley:

Yeah. We never got to have it. Because we only have 49. And my class is not behaving.

Interviewer:

Not yet. Anyway, there's still time.

Bradley:

Yeah, but there's only one day left to get one, then we are not coming back to school. Okay. Um, that took us like a few months to get that.

Interviewer:

Oh so you've been working very hard towards that. Okay, and what might he's what sort of things does he say that make him a good teacher? How might he help you?

Bradley:

Like if we're stuck on something. Yeah, he like helps us. But imagine if I got stuck in maths, I never got stuck because I'm the best in my class. And in the whole school, but not from the teacher, just the students. And I'm only 10. Yeah, but if somebody got stuck in maths. They say apparently that is hard. Okay, if they get stuck, he helps them, he writes up on the board. And I don't even know how to explain.

Interviewer:

That's all right. So you think he writes it up on the board?

Bradley:

Yeah. And he helps you do that and do that one. Part by part.

Interviewer:

Part by part? Okay. And what about if you were upset?

Bradley:

If you were upset, he like he'll talk to you. And sometimes, he let people picks our raffle for free when they're upset. Or move with their name up, oh, give them house points.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Bradley:

And when he's not around, and somebody's upset, the teacher would just tell them to go sit outside and calm down. Let's say if the student doesn't listen to them because they're upset. They move their name down twice.

Interviewer:

Oh, I see. And do you think he's a good teacher when someone's upset?

Bradley:

Yes. Yeah. He helps people.

Interviewer:

Yeah. Okay. So this teacher, What is he like with other adults, other teachers? What's he like to them?

Bradley:

The same to us the same.

Interviewer:

Yeah. And what's that like?

Bradley :

Not exactly the same. Like, when it's break or lunchtime, he gets coffee with them, and drinks and sit and watch is the children play.

Interviewer:

Okay. Yeah. Do you think they're friends?

Bradley:

Yeah. And sometimes it that he plays Foursquare with you. Do you know what Foursquare is?

Appendix I: Extract from Foster Carer Transcript

Interviewer:

And is there any sort of words that you would use to kind of describe your relationship with this child?

A:

Oh, that's interesting. I'd say positive, quite bubbly. Uh, yeah. Positive, bubbly. And that's why I would say nurturing and caring for their primarily obviously they're emotional wellbeing because you know, if that's not forefront and nothing else happens really.

Interviewer:

Umm yeah. And would you have considered that relationship a close one?

A:

Yeah, yeah. I like to think that actually most of them have been closed. Yeah, they've been. I was gonna say there are certain neurodiversity is where actually it it's difficult to get close to a young person because of their neurodiversity. Then it might not. It might not be.

Interviewer:

What makes it kind of a close relationship? Is there any sort of behaviour or activities that kind of make it a closer relationship?

A:

Yeah, it just engaging in activities together, a lot of play, I think that play is paramount really.

I think that play is just been the best, but that you know it's play, educational play and I found that is really good for bonding and I am trained as a therapeutic carer as well. So I'm employ a lot of therapeutic caring methods. I praise strong boundaries.

Interviewer:

And we might have touched on this a little bit already, but how did that relationship get to a point where it was close, how did it develop?

A:

One of the things that I do, this is a trade secret, but one of the things that I use as a foster carer to bond quite quickly with children. It's taking them swimming. It in itself is exhilarating for the child and it's fun and they actually feel physically protected and cared for, cause you are holding them, and if they can't swim they are very, very dependent on you and that helps build a very close trust bond very quickly. Not to mention the fact, I know this sounds a little odd, but you know you're in your swimwear and you're kind of showering together and get ready together and that kind of thing.

Interviewer:

Yeah, that's really interesting. Thank you for sharing that.

A:

And those that we've just had for like a weekend or something. Yeah, swimming's definitely been a really good one. And the other thing is cooking, you know, usually making fresh pasta because it's like play dough. There's lots of rolling it. The product you get, to chat about lots of things and I found that those two things are something that not all foster carers do. So there.

Interviewer:

That's really interesting. Thank you. My next question which you sort of may have already answered as well, is could you think of a specific time when you felt close to this child or a different child?

A:

Oh yeah, definitely. Ohh, you know, especially reading stories, that's very bonding. I find within myself anyway, but sharing books with children and I get very excited about how cool it is reading, but it's such an escape it that when children are traumatised and going through very difficult things, I think reading is just one of the best. One child, I remember, he said. A it's like going on holiday. I can't believe I never did this before.

Appendix J: Extract from School Staff Members Transcript

Interviewer:

And is there anything about yourself or about the individual child that influences how close that relationship can be?

Sh:

I think a lot of it is time. How much? How willing a teacher or an adult is. How willing they are to dedicate themselves to that child because you do have to put in extra time. You have to put in extra time to get to know them to get to find out their likes, their dislikes, prepare resources in your planning, even the communication, we had a little girl start here last year who's looked after. So she started on a reduced timetable, while we put an adult in place because she's got an EHCP.

Interviewer:

Mm-hmm.

Sh:

But actually I spent quite a lot of time, with emails backwards and forwards to her foster carer to talk about those things and even when she started, a couple of emails a week. How she settle in, how are you finding things. For some staff they would find that difficult to manage or you know there may well be teachers that would not be as willing to go that extra mile. And I do think when you do have children that are looked after, you do have to.

Interviewer:

Umm.

Sh:

I think, and I'm not saying that here, but I think some teachers who have worked with previously in my career, I think some teachers don't realise some of the horrific experiences these children have gone through and they're not a burden.

Interviewer:

Umm.

Sh:

They are actually coping with a huge amount and even if those experiences happened early on in life, they're still coping with those years down the line and there are still things that are ongoing. And yeah, I think it is having that understanding, trying to put yourself, which is impossible really, but trying to put yourself in their shoes.

Interviewer:

And anything about the child that influences how close you can get in that relationship?

Sh:

I think trust, you know, in terms of with building that relationship of trust and the little girl we had last year was not really, she wasn't very chatty at first, so she was very, very quiet and withdrawn. She kept everything close to her chest. So she didn't really open up very easily. She has now, but that took time to get to know her. So we had to think carefully about how we did that. Obviously with the little boy that I said about, I had him in reception.

Interviewer:

Umm.

Sh:

For him, it was about me putting in that time to get to understand his speech and work out how we were gonna communicate. Yeah. And with the little girl that I said I had in reception and year one, parents had mental health needs and with her it was her actual relationship of trust.

Interviewer:

Umm. Mm-hmm.

Sh:

She trusted me more than anyone, but I then had that time, particularly the end of year one, when I had to start letting go to prepare her for the next year. There was a lot your kind of juggling with as well for feelings for you and for the child. And you know, a lot of that those transition times obviously are important.

Interviewer:

Mm-hmm.

Sh:

And yeah so I think it's how much generally a child is willing to trust you, how much they're willing to open up to you and because certain children might be so closed they don't want to tell you what they like, what they dislike. They might have just shut off to everybody.

Appendix K: Reflexive Thematic Analysis Process

Stage of analysis	Actions completed	Purpose
Familiarisation with the data	- Transcription of audio recordings by researcher. - Reading and re-reading transcripts, listening to audio recording, making notes of any initial thoughts and ideas.	- To become familiar with interview data and understanding the meanings behind it. - Thinking reflexively about own assumptions and reduce the potential for research bias.
Generating initial codes	- An inductive process of identifying and labelling relevant codes by incidence for each group of participants (starting with CYPLA, followed by foster carers and school staff members). - Highlighting key incidence in text which are considered important and may be used as quotes.	- Identifying areas of interest. - Creating codes which are rooted in the narratives of the participations as opposed to the researcher's interpretations. - Ensuring the creation of clear, relevant, and concise codes without omitting important data.

	• Codes reviewed by researcher and discussed with research supervisors and fellow trainee EPs.	
	• Refining of codes and deleting duplicate or overlapping codes where appropriate.	
Searching for themes	• Codes clustered together to create a mapping of patterns in the data for each group of participants.	• Comparison of participant data sets to provide a holistic overview of the data.
	• Codebooks containing information regarding who/how many participants were featured in the code were referred to, although salient codes were not dismissed if few participants featured (particularly for CYPLA).	• Finding meaning relevant to the RQs.
	• Comparison of themes between groups of participants to identify similarities and differences across groups.	
	• Subthemes and themes were combined for foster carers and	

	school staff members due to significant overlap.	
	• Unique subthemes for an individual group were kept and highlighted.	
	• CYPLA themes and subthemes kept separate from adult themes (despite overlap) to honour CYPLA's voice.	
	• Significant groups of codes formed initial themes and subthemes.	
Reviewing and revising themes	• Checking whether the themes align with the codes and that they are distinct from one another.	• Ensuring there is data to support each theme and subtheme.
	• Discussing themes and subthemes with supervisors and colleagues.	• Exploring how each theme/subtheme can be used to create a holistic picture.
	• Reviewing data extracts related to themes.	• Ensuring the themes are appropriate given the
	• Re-reading the entirety of the data relevant to each theme.	context of the entire dataset and that they are reflective of the narratives of the participant populations.

Defining & naming themes	• Developing theme definitions and selecting a theme name which has conceptual clarity. • Reviewing and revising names in collaboration with fellow trainee EPs and research supervisors.	• To illustrate the meaning of the themes with clarity. • Ensuring the theme names capture the central concept and represent realised themes as opposed to descriptive summaries.
Interpretation & producing the report	• Analytic narrative is embedded within compelling data extracts. • Quotes chosen which succinctly and accurately reflect the subtheme, with effort made to ensure a balance in representing participants. • Themes provide the organising framework for the analysis. • Creation of a thematic map to visually present the information. • Illustrative examples of data within findings (e.g. quotes).	• Demonstrate the breadth within each theme and ensuring the voices of the participants are heard. • Ensuring the overall narrative can be clearly understood.

Appendix L: Example of Coding CYPLA Transcript

Transcript	Code
Interviewer Okay. And what's this teacher like? What do you think he's like with other teachers?	
Bradley: He's kind with other teachers, but not to students.	Non-ideal teacher treats adults & CYP differently
Interviewer: Oh. And what would he do at break and lunchtime?	
Bradley: He was just sit in class and talk to the teachers, like nothing happened, like he never shouted at students.	Non-ideal teacher hides unkindness Non-ideal teacher shouts
Interviewer: Oh, so he pretends he doesn't? Okay, and are the teachers his friends?	

Bradley:

Yeah. Yeah. But they don't know that he's very mean to the students.

Non-ideal teacher hides unkindness

Interviewer:

I see.

Bradley:

Because no other teacher is like that.

Non-ideal teacher hides unkindness

Non-ideal teacher is only unkind teacher

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Bradley:

Not a single one. Except for him

Non-ideal teacher is only unkind teacher

Interviewer:

Yeah. And when you go off, or should we do him on a bad day? If he's having a bad day? What would he be like?

Bradley:

He just seats at the desk and keeps telling you off for nothing.

Non-ideal teacher shouts

Non-ideal teacher is unfair

Interviewer:

Earlier you spoke about games, what about

this one?

Bradley:

No. No. Doesn't even let us out. When it's	Non-ideal teacher doesn't value play
break for lunch. When it's break, he doesn't	
let us go out. Just watch Newsround.	

Interviewer:

Okay

Bradley:

Because he Oh, because he's strict. And	Non-ideal teacher is strict
when it's lunchtime, he makes us wait in the	Non-ideal teacher doesn't value play
class.	

Interviewer:

Yeah

Bradley:

| And watch Newsround | Non-ideal teacher doesn't value play |

Interviewer:

Oh, news round?

Bradley:

But he doesn't let us go out for a long time.　　Non-ideal teacher doesn't value play

Interviewer:

Okay.

Bradley:

And he's, like when our teachers or our 　　Non-ideal teacher hides unkindness

parents are near him. He acts kind.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Bradley:

Or teachers.

Appendix M: Example of Coding Foster Carer Transcript

Transcript	Code
Interviewer:	
Umm yeah. Was there anything else that helps or makes it more challenging before we move on?	
J:	
Umm contact can be a challenge. We actually swapped contact this for next week cause it they should have had it this week, but they would have missed out on a party that they had been invited to and because it wasn't local. I spoke to their social worker and just said would it be possible to swap so they didn't even think about contact this weekend, but they've got it next week. Now I know that. They'll have some contact from some family, but whether mum will turn up, I don't know. But it's when she turns up and makes promises to them. And tell somethings. So, on the last time they actually saw her, they hadn't seen her for six months. That challenges because you get all the bad behaviour then.	Family contact can be difficult Family contact can be difficult Inconsistent family contact Unkept promises Inconsistent family contact Inconsistent family contact leads to challenging behaviour

Interviewer

Umm.

J:

So, for the last few weeks is not been too
bad. I think the kids fight, but they can go   Conflicting relationships
hammer and tongs at one another. She's
quite sneaky in some of her actions, but if   Unkept promises
mum makes a promise or say something,
she's not sure she wants to believe Mum.   Not trusting birth mum

Interviewer:

Umm.

J:

So, Mum told her that I'd cancelled contact
when she turned up and she was told   Conflicting relationships
contacted been cancelled by me and I said to
her. I said look, I'm not allowed to cancel
contact and I've got no intention of
cancelling contact. You know, I want you to   Respecting the birth family
see your mom.

Interviewer:

Umm.

J:

Your dad, whatever. I'm not worried and I'm   Respecting the birth family
quite happy to take you. Umm. And she

thought about that, but she didn't know if   Conflicting relationships
she should believe me or believe Mom. And

because that can draw little rifts. If Mum

promises to bring her jewellery, I'll bring   Unkept promises

her tablet that she used to have. She's got no   Inconsistent family contact

intention. Now, Mum's promised to bring

her a teddy because she lost her teddy bear

when we went away in in July, and she lost

it on the train. Whether that turns up or not.

Interviewer:

Umm.

J:

I don't know, but for the oldest one, she'll be

down again and she's go, oh, it's alright. I'm   Family contact can be difficult

always let down and it's not alright. Uh. And   Inconsistent family contact

that's why I won't make promises. You

know, if we're going to do something I've   Need consistency/reliability

got, I'll just go right. I've got a surprise for

you today, but you have to be good. I'm not going to do it if you're not, if you're not being good, I'm not doing it. OK. And I've got to say on the whole, yeah, they may fight a little bit when we go out. But on the whole, they're usually pretty good going out. And then they have an amazing time. Umm. And sometimes you'll get. What? What's the surprise?

Shared activities/experiences

Appendix N: Example of Coding School Staff Member Transcript

Transcript	Codes
Interviewer:	
Yes, or several, maybe sometimes helpful to draw on them. So, could you kind of describe to me what your relationship was like with that child?	
So:	
Yeah, I would say this child in particular, joined us and didn't start with us in reception. And I feel if anything straight away, I was the one who did the initial visit with her and the foster carer. So, I felt there initially was then a straight away, that bond where I was sort of the person that she'd seen first, introduced her to the teacher. And I would say it was a positive relationship in terms of she was able to open up after a while as to why she, what brought her to be in in care and speak to me about, but how she felt about that.	Making home visits Person to introduce child to school Perceiving a positive relationship Feeling able to talk
Interviewer:	
Mm-hmm.	

So:

And, but I would say in a more general way in terms of looked after children, I quite often find you can get where the children will, there's a bit of a barrier in a lack of trust because for them, not to speak broadly, but for them I think sometimes they think that people leave. So I think they can have a bit of a barrier up of opening up and fully getting to know someone especially as well I feel in a school it can be quite hard because placements can end and then they change schools, so sometimes there can almost a bit of armour on because they think well I need to protect myself and not get too close to anyone because I could be leaving, but yeah, the child in question, I'd say it's a good relationship, where if perhaps there's been a friendship, she would share it with myself, she's sort of come and speak to.

Difficulty trusting

Difficulty trusting is a barrier

Frequent placement moves has negative impact on CYP

Difficulty trusting

Protecting self

Previous loss impact closeness

Seeking adult to talk

Interviewer:

Yeah. And would you categorise it as a close relationship? Is that something you would describe it as?

So:

Yeah, I would say there has been a close relationship, yes, yeah.	Perceiving a close relationship

Interviewer:

And what kind of things make you feel that it was close? Were there any sort of actions or behaviours that that gave you that indication that you were quite close?

So:

I think in terms of, there be been an issue at break or lunch, they maybe come and choose to come and speak to me because I think there's a lot of children in the classroom as soon as you start speaking to the teacher. The other children might start listening. Natural curiosity. I think feeling listened to, I feel, was her biggest, once she feels that things have been heard. I think sometimes in an environment at lunchtime,	Seeking adult to talk Providing time and space to talk Listening

when obviously it's lunchtime staff, they don't know her as well as the teacher or myself. So, they can be a, you know, a misunderstanding. And if she feels things haven't been handled correctly, she just needs that spoken about.	Knowing the CYP Needs to talk
Interviewer: Umm.	

Appendix O: Example of Codes & Data Extracts Within Each CYPLA Theme

Themes	Subtheme	Examples of codes	Examples Data Extracts
Kindness is key	Genuine kindness	Carer is generous	"When we're in school they get us stuff for Christmas" (Ibrahim, aged 10)
		Carer is kind	
		Teacher is polite	"On a bad day? They will still be kind" (Ibrahim, aged 10)
		Teacher uses physical contact	"Polite and considerate of you" (Bradley, aged 11)
			"He does high fives, fist bumps, fist bumps, and he pets you (gesture on head) Because he's tall" (Bradley, aged 11)
	Calm and understanding approach	Carer knows the child	"It means that she knows that you're actually sick" (Ibrahim, aged 10)
		Non-ideal teacher is not attentive to needs	"So basically, when we try to put a hand up to ask him something he does, he ignores us" (Ibrahim, aged 10)
		Non-ideal carer shouts	
		Non-ideal teacher shouts at children	"He was shouting at her and send her out into another class and timeout" (Ibrahim, aged 10)

	Fairness builds trust	No trust in relationship with non ideal teacher	"If somebody passes the test the maths test? He won't believe that. Then you give us a zero" (Ibrahim, aged 10)
		Teacher is flexible	"Not give me any detentions, unless they need to" (Ibrahim, aged 11)
		Non-ideal teacher is strict	"They are strict and bossy" (Ibrahim, aged 11)
	Togetherness	Teacher spends free time with children	"At break, sometimes he plays Foursquare with you" (Bradley, aged 10)
		Frequent contact with teacher	"Because I see him every single day" (Bradley, aged 10)
		Non-ideal teacher doesn't value play	"Doesn't even let us out. When it's break or lunch, doesn't let us go out. Just watch Newsround" (Bradley, aged 10)
		Shared activities with carer	"I like to walk the dog together" (Ibrahim, aged 11)
Support to connect	Providing for the child	Carers can provide for child	"They are rich, because, like I need money" (Bradley, aged 10)
		Teacher is well equipped	"I like having the back garden. And the football goals" (Bradley, aged 10)
		Carer outside space	
		School is big	"There are a lot of buildings and space" (Ibrahim, aged 11)

	Motivate & help to learn	Teacher helps when stuck on classwork	"They are helpful with the work" (Ibrahim, aged 11)
		Teacher adheres to reward system	"When you behave. You get a raffle ticket. And when you get one, you get one put in the pot. The more you have the better chance you have to get some prizes" (Bradley, aged 10)
		Teaching style is exciting	"They teach in a way that's quite exciting" (Ibrahim, aged 11)
	Emotional comfort	Teacher carer should make you feel happy	"They should make you feel happy" (Ibrahim, aged 11)
		Teacher will talk to you if upset	"If your upset he'll talk to you" (Bradley, aged 10)
	Lasting impression	Will remember good teacher	"I will remember basically everything about him" (Bradley, aged 10)
		Won't remember non-ideal teacher	"I won't even remember him" (Bradley, aged 10)
Family support & strain	Family brings happiness	Family contact important for wellbeing	"[I feel happy…] when I see my dad" (Ibrahim, aged 11)
			"[I smile when…] I see my mum" (Ibrahim, aged 11)
			"[Things which are important to me are…] my family" (Ibrahim, aged 11)
	Family brings conflict	Family conflict	"He [my brother] bugs me" (Ibrahim, aged 11)

"He went into my room without my permission. He keeps taking stuff and ruining my bed" (Ibrahim, aged 11).

Appendix P: Example of Codes & Data Extract Within Each Adult Theme

Themes	Subthemes	Examples of Codes	Examples of Data Extracts
Nurturing the child & the relationship	Putting the child first	Being attuned to the child's needs Being child-centred Knowing the child Physical contact led by child Being trauma-informed	"I would have to be that person often kind of translating to other children what he was saying" (Shannon, school staff member) "There's not a lot of other things that you do, being as child-centred. It gives you that level of understanding" (Charlotte, foster carer) "For his LAC health review, in the first year, the nurse didn't understand a word he was saying, and she said to me, you understand what he's saying? I said, yeah, I understand about 90% of what he's saying" (Jacqueline, foster carer) "Would you like a cuddle? I'll ask them. Sometimes they say yes. Sometimes they say no, I say it's fine. Then we might do a fist pump" (Olivia, school staff member)

			"You've got children who already probably got low self-esteem, then falling behind in class. Quite often, not because of their academics, but just because they're dealing with all the other stuff. So, then they think they can't do the work" (Claire, school staff member)
Becoming a trusted person	Becoming a trusted person Firm boundaries are important Need consistency reliability Being there for the child Open communication		"They can trust somebody. Someday you become the person that they think. Oh yeah, they'll be there for me. I can go and talk to them" (Jacqueline, foster carer) "But I also had a lot of tough love for her. So, when she was misbehaving in school or at her foster carers. We would chat about it, and I would be hard enough but in a nice way" (Olivia, school staff member) "I'm going to be here tomorrow, we're going to do exactly the same tomorrow, you will come to school, and you will be safe here, building that up" (Rhea, school staff member)

			"I know that this must seem really weird for you, but I'm here. We'll do it together" (Amira, foster carer)
			"I think children need to feel like they're being heard. It's very much about making sure that you're listening" (Sophie, school staff member)
	Cultivating togetherness	Shared activities and experiences Build relationship over interests Shared play promotes bonding Time promotes close relationships	"Her helping me make the dinner and that worked really well. She loved doing that and it was really nice way to spend a bit of time together" (Claire, foster carer)
			"That first conversation with them, trying to find that natural, maybe a shared interest" (Sophie, school staff member)
			"They run and they throw themselves at you. And I'll just pretend to run off a bit and then say oh you got me. We do quite a bit of playing, I think that helps" (Jacqueline, foster carer)
			"We did build that relationship solely because we spent a lot of time together" (Rhea, school staff member)

	The vehicle for personal growth	Physical boundaries are important for bodily autonomy Supporting with learning Reflecting on behaviour Supporting child's emotional wellbeing	"I understand it from one level to get foster children to have autonomy over their bodies" (Amira, foster carer) "They were times when she may have been in the wrong but to guide her to see how she perhaps could have behaved differently in that situation" (Sophie, school staff member) "I always focus on their wellbeing as opposed to academic stuff. If the child's not in the right place to learn they're not going to see them in the right place" (Rhea, school staff member)
Navigating complex feelings & intersecting relationships	Reciprocal affection & containment	Physical contact is containing Fondness for child Child feels safe	"Once you've cuddled him and he will settle down, he's fine" (Jacqueline, foster carer) "She was having breakfast with me most mornings, which to be honest, by the end I really enjoyed" (Rhea, school staff member) "She's comfortable. She's secure in the relationship to act out like that and show all the anger" (Claire, foster carer) "It's like a mutual exchange of l hormones, isn't it? Is it must raise my oxytocin or whatever it is" (Amira, foster carer)

	An emotional journey	Rewarding experience	"He did [say I love you] quite often, but with the older one that very first time she actually said that it's like oh wow. I went oh wow and that was nice" (Jacqueline, foster carer)
		Relationship evokes difficult emotions	
		Unable to reach the child	"It made me feel quite fulfilled for doing this job" (Rhea, school staff member)
		Emotionally invested	
		No time or space for reflection	"When you had a difficult day or you've heard some difficult things, they're not pleasant things, that is hard" (Shannon, school staff member)
			"But there's so much going on emotionally that the real child is far away from me" (Claire, foster carer)
			"I do get emotionally invested and I think I'm quite an emotional person anyway" (Sophie, school staff member)
			"We don't always stop and actually reflect" (Sophie, school staff member)

	Interconnectedness of complex family systems	Family contact can be difficult	"She was shy and didn't wanna go over. Mum was not very good at interacting with them. She didn't really know what to do, which I wasn't expecting. So, she stayed, sat in the chair, and there was this painful awkwardness" (Charlotte, foster carer)
		Guilt over conflicting relationships	
		Different practices to birth family	
		Inconsistent family contact	
		Respecting birth family	"They used to suffer a fair bit of guilt, at first when we went to contact their behaviour, one of the lads particularly, could be erratic" (Charlotte, foster carer)
			"Mum will bring loads of gifts so then the work that [the foster carers] are doing to support school can then be undone" (Shannon, school staff member)
			"The last time they actually saw her they hadn't seen her for six months" (Jacqueline, foster carer)
			"I'll never down the families to them. Because you just lose any relationship you have, when you start downing their families" (Jacqueline, foster carer)
	Characteristics	Nurturing characteristics	"I have a lot of empathy" (Rhea, school staff member)

Intertwined person factors		Age influences physical contact Teacher/carer commitment Comfortable with physical contact	"I'm sitting with her on the sofa and I'm trying to get her to sit next to me and snuggle rather than being up of me because I don't think that, with the age and size she is, is appropriate" (Claire, foster carer) "The children they are our sole focus and that's what drives us every day" (Sophie, school staff member) "We have been very cuddly, very touchy feely with them" (Charlotte, foster carer)
	Experiences	Adult personal experience impacts practice Child's previous trauma impact relationship Child previous trauma linked to physical contact	"It follows on from what I've watched and what I've seen previously from my own mum" (Charlotte, foster carer) "As a foster carer, you've gotta be really careful and that's why it's so important to know a child's background as much as you can, because you've gotta be very attentive" (Amira, foster carer) "I can understand why other people would be worried and particularly when you have got children that have often had

			really difficult backgrounds or if there's been abuse" (Shannon, school staff member)
	Needs	Child has learning and language needs	"She's got quite significant special needs, and she was nonverbal until quite recently" (Claire, foster carer)
		Challenging behaviour	"He did sometimes lash out a little bit, not at adults, but he would throw things, or he stamp his feet and he used to growl sometimes" (Shannon, school staff member)
		Difficulty expressing regulating emotions	"He doesn't know how to regulate his emotions and will just have an outburst and just meltdown" (Jacqueline, foster carer)
Bridging the gap in children's services	Systemic barriers	Social care is stretched	"I understand they have got so much work, they're overloaded" (Shannon, school staff member)
		Lack of communication from social care	"Sometimes you feel the social workers, it's not a criticism, but sometimes it's a lack of communication that could be improved" (Charlotte, foster carer)
		Lengthy paperwork	
		Jargon is problematic	"The paperwork and things, there is a lot more of it now than they ever were" (Rhea, school staff member)

			"All the terminology, in front of the children as well. That definitely makes it harder" (Amira, foster carer)
	Effective relational decision making	Frequent placement moves has negative impact on child	"We already had her referred to CAMHS, but at the time CAMHS wouldn't touch her because she hadn't been in a settled environment because she obviously kept going all over the place" (Shannon, school staff member)
		Successful matching foster carer and child	"It worked out really well for all of us and it was a lovely match with these particular boys" (Charlotte, foster carer)
		Relationship develops naturally from young age	"Having had her so young, we naturally sort of developed that close relationship" (Claire, foster carer)
	Increasing EP time & awareness	EPs support with trauma informed practice	"I would like EPs to be doing sessions with the foster parents, understanding about trauma and things like that, and one essentially for school staff" (Rhea, school staff member)
		EPs are stretched	"I'm sure the amount of schools [the EP] has got, I'm sure if that was halved, it would be a lot easier, just how stretched [the EP] are" (Sophie, school staff member)
		EPs holistic understanding of CIC	
		More EP support needed	

			"She's got quite significant developmental delay and people naturally focus on that, and that is what the EHCP was based on. But [the EP] also managed to see beyond that to the fact that at some point this child is gonna have issues around her. Her very early experiences and you know the trauma and neglect and all the rest of it" (Claire, foster carer)
			"I think we would like [the EP] more in our life. We need [the EP] more in our life" (Olivia, school staff member)
The ripple effect of school culture	Competency in working with complex children	School community not understanding of CIC Negative stereotypes of CIC Challenges to implementing provision School provision support	"Sometimes I used to have to have difficult conversations with other parents because you would feel like you were having to defend his needs because they didn't quite understand" (Shannon, school staff member) "They expect foster children to stand out, like their clothes are not as pristine as the others" (Jacqueline, foster carer)

			"There does need to be that flexibility that schools are generally trying the best that they can to put support in place, but they just need that time to prepare" (Shannon, school staff member)
			"They get extra mentoring, a LAC mentor, a mental health champion who sees them once a week" (Charlotte, foster carer)
	Balancing supporting with othering	CIC have more complex needs Relationship different with CIC Children in care want to be like everyone else Try to avoid othering practices	"I'd love to spend one on one time with every child. Obviously due to the size of the school, that isn't possible at all times, so I think it's then due to the complex needs of some of those children in care" (Sophie, school staff member) "I'd always pay a little bit more attention to those children. You'd check up on them a little bit more. They had a little bit more extra praise" (Shannon, school staff member) "My observation of primary school children in care is that they wanna feel just like everyone else" (Amira, foster carer)

			"I never would, but some of their fears is that I'm gonna go into the class and say oh sorry your social worker is here" (Sophie, school staff member)
Undervaluing relationships	Justifying time spent building relationships Other staff not understanding the relationships School value relationships		"We have ELSA here at this school. So that's very much promoting relationships, so that makes it a lot easier to kind of justify your time" (Rhea, school staff member) "If teaching staff don't get it, or don't get attached to children, or they don't necessarily have such close bonds, if they don't put in that time, they can find it hard to understand why other staff might feel more emotional and like you can't kind of let it go" (Shannon, school staff member) "My last school was completely open to close relationships. Maybe I'm a one off, maybe I have been lucky" (Rhea, school staff member)
School to home tension	School experience influence relationships at home		"When he has a bad day at school, it does affect at home. When you work is repetitive all week and you come home on Friday,

		COVID closure reduced pressure on child	and you have a meltdown and it takes ages to calm down and then I get to solve it" (Jacqueline, foster carer) "But that stress, less pressure, I suppose, on children, isn't it? That time did help the relationship, then real life kicks back in" (Claire, foster carer)
Caution & confusion within social care & education	Fear of closeness	Difficult emotions when children move on Fear of causing more upset when child leaves Limit to physical contact Types of safe physical contact	"The end of year one, when I had to start letting go, to prepare her for the next year. There's a lot of your kind of juggling with as well feelings for you and for the child" (Shannon, school staff member) "If there's gonna be a new mum/dad on the scene, you've got to get them ready for that and that's actually really tough piece of work" (Amira, foster carer) "But in a reception class, it's in their instinct to get on your laps and things like that. We discouraged it" (Sophie, school staff member)

			"When she's having her story at bedtime, I'm sitting with her on the sofa and I'm trying to get her to sit next to me and snuggle rather than being up on me" (Claire, foster carer)
Blurry boundaries between professional closeness & distance	Parent in school Balancing physical contact and professionalism Unnatural relationship Difficult to limit child's physical contact		"But you're the parent in school, aren't you? You're putting their needs first" (Rhea, school staff member) "It's the balance of sometimes children can seek out affection but it's that remaining professional" (Sophie, school staff member) "It's a very unnatural relationship really because it is very odd and unless you've been a foster carer, I don't think you'd realise how odd it is" (Claire, foster carer) "I used to have to pick her up and carry her, but that was because she was in such a distress state" (Shannon, school staff member)
Developing confidence and autonomy	Rejecting advice Freedom in practice		"You've got to be a carer, when we first started out [they said] you're professional, blah blah blah" (Amira, foster carer) "They let my role evolve, they let me develop my role because they know my personality. My head teacher and my deputy head

who I worked so closely with, they let me be me and speak my

honest truth, they agree that I'll do it in a caring way, but they

know it's needed" (Olivia, school staff member)

Appendix Q: Ethical Approval

IOE.Doctorate In Educational Psychology

To: Peters, Baylee

Cc: Cameron, Claire; Hill, Vivian; Baines, Ed

Mon 14/08/2023 12:58

Dear Baylee,

I am pleased to inform you that your Ethics Application for your research project on the Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology, has been approved. If you have any further queries, please contact your supervisor directly.

Please note that if your proposed study and methodology changes markedly from what you have outlined in your ethics review application, you may need to complete and submit a new or revised application. Should this possibility arise, please discuss with your supervisor in the first instance before you proceed with a new/revised application.

Many thanks,
Linh