

Learning journals: Notes for the support worker

Learning Journal requirements

- Learning journals are not a mandatory requirement for Starting Out training.
- Carers may choose to complete a learning journal if they prefer a more reflective style of learning.
- A carer's learning journal can be kept private or if they choose, or it can be shared with their foster and kinship care support worker as part of their carer journey.

Why a carer may want to keep a journal?

- Writing in a Journal can inhibit self-consciousness and is a less formal, less threatening way for carers to discuss issues in ways they may not do so in one-to-one situations.
- Journal entries can provide tangible evidence of mental processes. They make thoughts visible and concrete, giving a way to interact with, elaborate on, and expand ideas.
- Journals are tools for growth through reflection, as it is not enough just to observe and record experiences, but important to make meaning our experiences.

Kerka, 1996.

How should the carer use the Journal?

The Learning Journal is an opportunity for the carer to reflect on their role as a carer and look for opportunities for learning and skill development.

If a carer has chosen to share their journal with their support worker, arrangements should be made for a regular time to get together to review the journal learnings.

If you are completing the journal with the carer, explore situations with them that are related to the general topics. For example, explore with the carer any situations they wish to discuss related to a new care arrangement. Ask them how what they did, thought and how they felt before, during and after the care arrangement.

What is my role as the support worker with Journal?

Your role as a support worker is to support the carer in their carer journey whether they choose to complete or share a learning journal or not.

If a carer is completing a learning journal and wishes to share some or all of its contents, it is encouraged to focus particularly on the 'Reflection' section. The 'Reflection' section of the Journal is the most important part of the Journal, as it allows the carer to consider how they have responded to situations and provides an opportunity to learn from past experiences. Carers may struggle with the 'Reflection' section of the Journal, which is where your role as a support worker can help. It is your role to encourage the carer to articulate their strengths and weaknesses and, most importantly, what they have learnt from a situation.

Reflecting is a skill that needs to be developed with support and will take time.

In order to do this, ensure that you:

- use non-judgmental language.
- respect that it may be difficult for the carer to put their experiences into words and that they may be intimidated by the sharing process.

- encourage the carer and commend them when they have demonstrated their learnings and responded to a situation well; and
- take the time to build a relationship with the carer, which will encourage the carer to be open.

If you or the carer have any concerns about their response to a situation, you can use the Journal as an opportunity to discuss them together. This should allow for an open discussion about what could be done differently next time and any supports or opportunities for further learning or skill development to be identified. It is recognised that the role of a carer can be extremely stressful, and the goal of all work with carers is to identify any concerns as soon as possible in order to address and prevent any escalation.

Finally, the Learning Journal is a tool to allow for an open discussion between the carer and support worker about the carer's role. It is a tool, which alone cannot replace good practice and skills. Remember, often it is the journey itself that is important, rather than the end result.

Further reading on the use of Journals as a learning aid:

- Kerka, S. (1996). Journal writing and adult learning, ERIC Digest, 174. Retrieved 17 November 2022 from. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED399413.pdf>