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Whose risk? The mobile phone, risk and the Looked After Child

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Context

- Interviews with social work practitioners working for a Independent Fostering agency about Looked After Children and their use of mobile phones and social media
- The interviews revealed that the social work practitioners were able to easily identify risks but not the benefits of associated with mobile phones and their use by Looked After Children



Context

- The interview extract is concerned with a young teenage girl who absconded from her placement for seemingly no apparent reason.



Benefits and risks associated with the mobile phone

- communication via mobile phones fulfils both emotional and functional needs (Bond, 2010);
- communication via mobile phones enables ongoing connectedness to social networks of friends, family and acquaintances (Jamieson, 2013)
- the mobile phone supports multifaceted relationships that sees a greater disconnect between members of an individual's social network (Bond, 2010)



Benefits and risks associated with the mobile phone

- Mobile phones enable young people to control their communication with others by turning their devices off, ignoring texts or claiming that their battery died (Weisskirch, 2009)
- Texting for adolescents is equated with social ease and offers a level of privacy that is seen as equal to that of a letter (Kaseniemi and Rautiainen, 2002)
- Adolescents view their mobile phones as 'keys to safety', seeing them as useful in situations that are either threatening or harmful (Devitt and Roker, 2009)



Benefits and risks associated with the mobile phone

- Adolescents are subject to surveillance and control via their mobile phones i.e. parents and care givers are able to access the adolescent's spatial location



Challenge for social work practitioners

- A lack of awareness regarding the social network of the Looked After Child
- Ongoing social and emotional connectedness with birth parent(s) and relatives that cannot be easily monitored or controlled
- The nature, level and frequency of communication Looked After Children have with different members of their social network



Possible solutions

- Ecomap (Hartman, 1995) which identifies the strength of familial relationships
- Social network map recognises the informal social network(s) that surrounds a Looked After Child, and helps identify those individuals that may be able to provide support and counteract stress, as well those who do the entire opposite
- Social work practitioners developing meaningful relationships with adolescents (Winter, 2011)
- Provide Looked After Children with the opportunities to make decision about matters that affect their lives



Possible solutions

- Possible solutions supported by:
 - United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Articles 3 and 12)
 - Review of child protection by Munro (2010 and 2011) which highlighted the need for the child protection system to be more child centred

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