



**TÜSLA**  
An Ghníomhaireacht um  
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach  
Child and Family Agency



# TIME BANDITS

Bringing Kids  
Together - BKT

# INTRODUCTION

BKT appears to be the first Tusla groupwork format that brings together foster children and children who foster developed from the TARA Project. BKT is an example of how inclusive practice is strengthened and traditional separation between children in care and their families is reduced. BKT emphasizes the value of relational, and family inclusive practice.

## AIMS



To provide opportunities to strengthen relationships between children in care and the birth children of foster carers.



To improve outcomes for both children and families through the application of trauma-informed principles.



To create opportunities for children to express their feelings, feel heard, and develop supportive peer relationships.



To support foster carers by addressing gaps in service provision for their children.



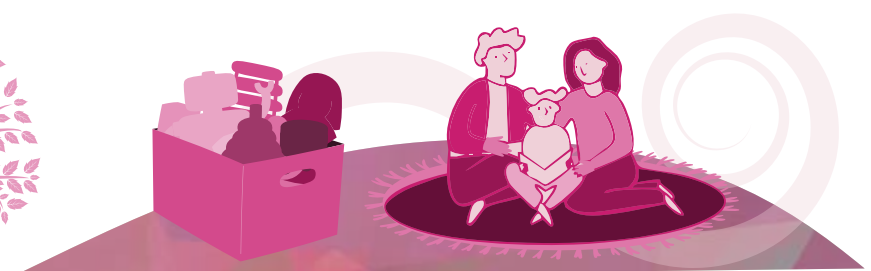
To reassure foster carers that their children are recognised and valued within fostering services.



To support children in developing more positive perceptions of social workers and to encourage open and trusting communication.

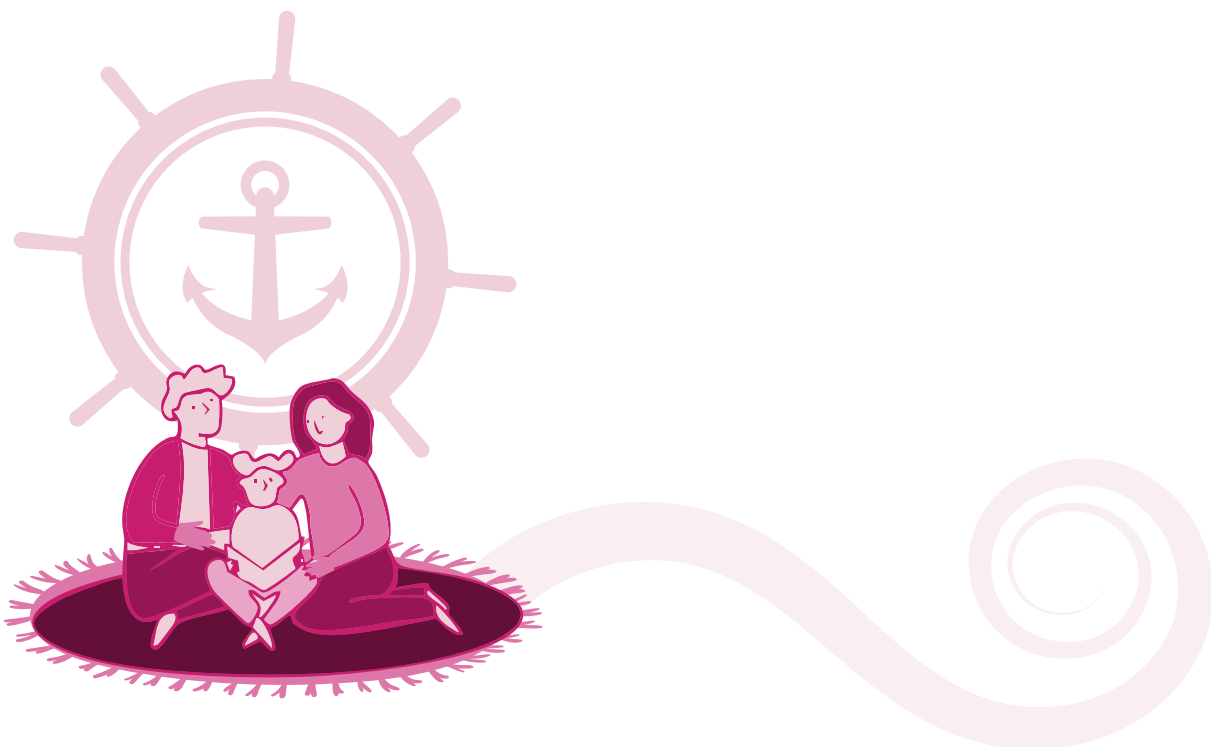
## OBJECTIVES

The objective of BKT is to provide a safe space for all children linked with fostering to meet and socialise with other children in similar situations. The objective is to provide them with a supportive environment to express themselves with children who can understand where they are coming from.



# EVIDENCE AND RATIONALE

- Before BKT, little structured support existed for children in foster families. Evidence shows that strained relationships between foster children and the children who foster can lead to placement disruptions. Consultation with foster carers revealed that they would prefer a group that included both foster children and children who foster, to promote positive family dynamics and stable foster placements.
- BKT is unique in combining foster children and children who foster in one group. It uses an inclusive and child-centred approach grounded in rights-based participation. The children's feedback actively shapes the design of the next sessions and creative outputs demonstrate the children's ownership of their involvement.
- Children have named that they really enjoy the BKT events, one participant stated "everyone is the same" highlighting that there is no difference if you are fostered or a child who fosters. Another participant named that he "gets to see all [his] friends".



# TARA PROJECT TOOLS AND RESOURCES USED

Training and knowledge from the below resources were utilised in development of BKT:

- TUSLA Child & Youth Participation Training  
[https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla\\_-\\_Toolkit\\_\(web\\_version\).pdf](https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla_-_Toolkit_(web_version).pdf)
- The Lundy Model (Article 12 of UNCRC)  
<https://bera-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1080/01411920701657033>
- Practice of trauma-informed care: Lotty, M. (2023). TARA Practice Model (Trauma, Attachment, Resilience into Action). Zenodo. Available at:  
<https://zenodo.org/records/11395102>
- The thermometer of regulation for emotional check-ins: Lotty, M. (2024). The Thermometer of Regulation. Zenodo. Available at:  
<https://zenodo.org/records/11394136>
- Iceberg model to explore behaviours and underlying feelings: Lotty, M. (2024). Understanding the Drivers of Behaviour: Trauma-informed Practice Tool. Zenodo. Available at: <https://zenodo.org/records/11395217>
- A toolkit of regulation and breathing practices to support safe transitions: Lotty, M. (2025). TARA - Build Mentalising Tool. Zenodo. Available at:  
<https://zenodo.org/records/15474987>
- Lotty, M. (2025). Exploring What is Old and What is New about Trauma-informed Care: Implications for Child Welfare Practice'. Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies, 190. <https://doi.org/10.21427/qzsp-aw09>
- O'Donoghue, M. (2025). TARA - Regulating Activities. Zenodo. Available at:  
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15344885>
- O'Donoghue, M. (2025). TARA - Toolkit of Regulation. Zenodo. Available at:  
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15344911>
- O'Donoghue, M. (2025). TARA - Embodiment & Breathing Practices. Zenodo. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15344934>
- O'Donoghue, M. (2025). TARA - Mindfulness Practices. Zenodo. Available at:  
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15344963>
- The staff involved use trauma-informed language (our words matter, window of tolerance, and body sensations): O'Donoghue, M. (2025). TARA - Our Language Reconsidered. Zenodo. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15344784>
- O'Donoghue, M. (2025). TARA - Bodily Sensations Vocabulary Tool. Zenodo. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15344826>
- O'Donoghue, M. (2025). TARA - Feelings & Emotions Vocabulary Tool. Zenodo. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15344872>

# TOOLS USED IN PREPARATION AND FACILITATION OF BKT GROUP SESSIONS

- Online resources such as <https://www.crayola.com/free-coloring-pages> were used to source colouring activities.
- Party bags were prepared for participants, containing a drink, crisps, chocolate and jellies.
- Prize bags included a range of gender-neutral and age-appropriate items.
- Depending on the theme of each event, online searches (e.g., Google) were used to identify suitable themed games and activities. Examples included “Pin the Tail on the Rabbit” for Easter and the “Toilet Paper Mummy Wrap” for Halloween.
- Themed decorations were purchased from local stores, such as crepe paper carrots for Easter and ghost balloons for Halloween.
- Staff creativity was utilised to design and create materials required for activities. Examples included creating newspaper headline challenges using cut-out words or building imaginative “families” from images of animals, shapes and objects.
- Sessions were held in a child-friendly, centrally located venue that is recognised as an established safe space.



# KEY LEARNING AND REFLECTIONS

- Communicating with the young people who attend the group to plan future sessions is essential, it ensures that activities remain engaging and enjoyable. Young people themselves are best placed to suggest games and activities that reflect their interests and preferences.
- It is important to ensure that facilities can accommodate a wide range of needs. At times, children may feel overwhelmed and require access to a quieter area where they can take time to regulate. A designated safe and calm space should therefore be available for this purpose.
- The group recognised the importance of including a regulation activity at the end of each session to help children settle and re-centre before returning home.
- It was identified that a group of older children particularly enjoyed the opportunity to meet, chat and build relationships with peers. As a result, a sub-group was created to allow this age group to meet separately from the younger children and to work together on a shared group project.
- From a sustainability perspective, efforts were made to purchase decorations and resources that could be reused for future events. However, party bags and prize bags require replacement for each event, which carries an ongoing financial cost.
- Ongoing reflection with the young people, foster carers and practitioners should be utilised as a method of assessing the impact of the group on placement stability.
- Opportunities for reflective practice and training should be incorporated to support practitioners in building confidence and developing their use of TARA tools within BKT group sessions.



# CONSIDERATIONS FOR ADAPTATION

BKT can be adapted to facilitate a wide range of group sessions for children and young people linked with Tusla.

Workers should consult with the families they support in order to identify where the greatest need exists. For example, this may include children in the community known to Tusla, children in relative care, children in foster care, children in residential care, or the birth children of foster carers. Groups may also be facilitated with a mix of children from different backgrounds or with children from a specific cohort, depending on the identified need.

BKT can also be adapted to suit a variety of age groups. Consultation with the young people involved is the most effective way to understand their interests and preferences.

- Workers should consider whether the group will consist of mixed ages or a specific age group.
- With younger groups, the focus may be on socialisation, emotional regulation and play.
- With older groups, the focus may shift towards inclusion, relationship-building and completing a shared group project.
- The level of difficulty of games and activities can be adjusted to suit the developmental stage of the participants.
- The contents of treat bags and prize bags can also be adapted to be age-appropriate.

BKT can also be adapted to meet a variety of additional needs. Again, consultation with the young people involved is key to ensuring the group is inclusive and supportive.

- Where the group includes children with physical or intellectual disabilities, activities and games can be adapted to ensure full participation.
- Where children have sensory needs, the environment can be adjusted to minimise sensory overload. Quiet or safe spaces can also be incorporated to allow children to take time out and regulate if required.

# PRACTICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR BKT

## Foundations (Approx. 3 Months)

- Identify a core group of workers to support the development of BKT.
- Appoint a project manager to oversee planning and implementation.
- Consult with Tusla professionals from other regions to gather learning and examples of best practice.
- Engage in consultation with families and children to identify their needs and priorities.
- Identify the target participants (e.g. circumstances, age range, gender, and number of participants).
- Select the theme, date, and intended aim or outcome of the event.

## Preparation (Minimum 1 Month)

- Obtain approval for funding and associated costs.
- Book the venue and arrange catering if required.
- Draft an agenda and running order for the day.
- Organise decorations and resources required for games and activities.
- Circulate invitations to identified participants.
- Determine the number of staff required for the event and allocate roles and responsibilities.

## Facilitation (Day of Event)

- Ensure staff arrive early to assist with preparation and set-up.
- Staff should present as approachable and welcoming to participants and families.

- Provide adequate space for parents or guardians who wish to remain present during the session.
- Begin the session with emotional regulation check-ins.
- Introduce group games and activities throughout the session.
- Monitor engagement levels and the effectiveness of activities.
- Facilitate opportunities to gather children's views and feedback.
- Conclude the session with a closing activity followed by clean-up.
- Conduct a brief check-in with staff following the event.

## Reflection (Approximately 1 Month Post-Event)

- The core group of workers should meet to review and reflect on the event.
- Identify what worked well and areas for improvement in relation to the concept, aims, preparation and facilitation.
- Arrange for thank-you cards to be sent to attendees.

## Materials:

- Decorations
- Party bags
- Prize bags
- Resources for games and activities
- Attendance record
- Printed agenda for staff
- Name stickers
- Speakers and music source (e.g. Spotify)
- Cleaning supplies

## Optional Items

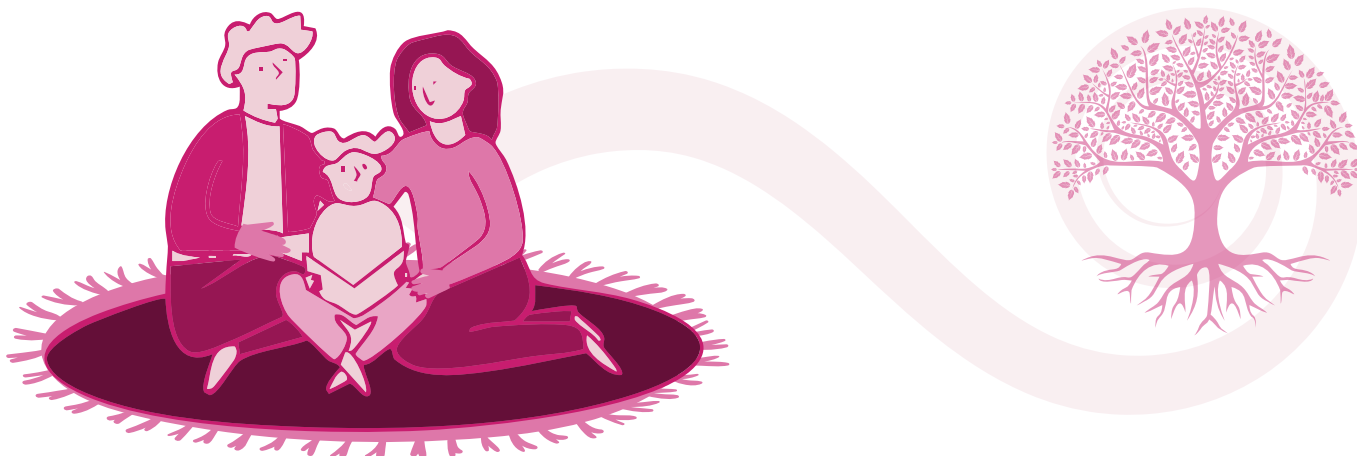
- Food and drink
- Projector or screen

# SUMMARY

BKT highlights the importance of providing structured, supportive opportunities for children connected with fostering within Tusla services. Group-based initiatives such as BKT create opportunities for children to build peer relationships, develop a sense of belonging and share experiences with others who may have similar life circumstances. These opportunities can support emotional wellbeing and strengthen social connections.

BKT is designed to be flexible and adaptable so that it can respond to the identified needs of the children and families Tusla works with. Consultation with children, carers and professionals ensures that activities remain relevant, engaging and inclusive. This collaborative approach also supports children to feel heard and valued in the planning of activities that affect them.

Providing a safe and supportive environment for children to socialise is particularly important for children who may have experienced disruption, loss or change. Trauma-informed approaches emphasise the importance of environments that promote safety, trust and supportive relationships for children involved in child welfare services. By creating opportunities for connection, positive peer interaction and shared experiences, BKT aims to promote wellbeing and contribute to greater stability within foster placements.



## Acknowledgements

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Design and illustration by Becky Hatchett [www.beckyhatchett.me](http://www.beckyhatchett.me)

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