# "I Want to Access My Files

## A Guide for Children & Young People

Gloucestershire
COUNTY COUNCIL

## Can I read my Children's Services file?

Children's Services are required to record everything they do with both you and your family. Your file will include records of meetings, reports for court, letters, notes taken about any work your social worker did. If you have been involved with Children's Services for a long time, your file might be very large.

It's quite normal for you to want to know what's in your file. But it is also a big decision. For this reason, there is a clear procedure that needs to be followed to make sure that everything is done properly.

You can ask to see what's written about you from the worker supporting you at anytime. Social Workers and other professionals are encouraged to share what they write about you on an ongoing basis and seek your views about what they're writing which should also be captured in your reports.

## What am I looking for?

Before requesting access to your records, we recommend that you spend some time thinking carefully about what you want to get from looking at your records. Is there a particular question you're trying to answer, or an experience you're trying to make sense of, or do you just want to see it all?

If you still have a worker that you relate to then it might be helpful spending some time with them talking about this.

## How do I ask to see my files?

You can request access to information held about you either verbally (in person or by phone), or in writing. If you have a Social Worker, Leaving Care Worker or a Personal Advisor then you can ask them to do it on your behalf or to help you to do it.

If you are doing it yourself, you must provide your name, address, date of birth, and details of the information you are requesting. You will also be asked to provide proof of identification, or you can ask your worker e.g. a copy of your birth certificate, passport or driving license.

There is an online form that you can access via Gloucestershire County Council website by clicking here (Your Information Rights), or you can email your request to managemyrequests@gloucestershire.gov.uk, phone us on 01452 324000.

## What age can I ask to see my files?

The law says that you can request access to your own information when you are 13 years old. If you are under 13 and/or not able to fully understand the process your parents or other person with parental responsibility can access your information on your behalf.

However, you can ask to see what's written about you from the worker/s supporting you at anytime. Social Workers and other professionals are encouraged to share what they write about you on an ongoing basis and seek your views about what they're writing which should also be captured in your reports. This good practice should prevent the need for you to formally request to see your records.

## How long will it take?

The law allows for 1 calendar month once you have shared your identification documents. The timescales may need to be extended if there is a lot of info about you. The Information Management Team will try to keep you updated on the progress of your request and inform you of any delays that may occur. If they do not hold the information you have requested they will inform you as soon as possible.

## Do I have to pay to see my files?

No, as required by GDPR (the law relating to data protection) there is no charge for access to personal information

## How will I receive the information?

You can choose whether you receive the information via email, or in paper. If you have requested paper copies, you can either receive this information through the post or you can arrange to come to the Council's main reception at Shire Hall in Gloucester to pick it up.

## Will I be able to see all the information on my file?

You may not be able to see information written about other people like your brothers, sisters, other young people or family members unless they agree to the information being in there. This is called third party information.

## What if I think the information is wrong?

You have a right to request that the council corrects any data we hold about you that you feel is factually incorrect. If you think any information recorded about you is wrong, you should tell the council straight away by contacting the Information Management Team (IMT) on the details above, or by asking someone to support you to do so.

## Is there support available for me to access my files?

It is a big decision to ask to see your files, so it's important that you discuss it with people who are closest to you or can help you make sense of the records e.g. your Social Worker or Personal Advisor (PA). You may want to ask someone to be with you while you read the file, because it's impossible to know how you will feel and the impact it will have on you. If your worker doesn't respond to your request to support you to access your files you can ask the Team Manager or use the Mind of My Own App.

You don't have to talk to your Social Worker or PA before requesting your files, but it might be a good idea as there can be many things in your file that you don't understand and they can help explain. Also you may want to ask questions about what happened and why certain decisions were taken about you if it's not clear and they can help answer these questions. IMT are not able to answer these sorts of questions so its best if you speak to your Social Worker or PA before you make a request.

Quotes from care leavers who have accesses their records

> When I received my files I was nervous but excited. If I didn't have people around me when reading them, I would never have got through it.

Tabitha, Ambassador aged 21

> My advice would be make sure it's the right time for you, are you in a good place with a good support network around you? The other thing would be to ask for them to be printed out as they are much easier to read rather than an electronic copy on your phone.

Eliza, Ambassador aged 21.