



# YOUR GUIDE TO FOSTER CARE

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11-18 years



Northamptonshire  
Children's Trust



# **YOUNG PERSON'S GUIDE TO FOSTER CARE**

If you have this guide, you must be moving to a foster family. We hope this guide will help you understand what is happening.

We think that it is important that you have a Young People's Guide to Foster Care to help explain everything that you may need to know. Your Foster Carer and Social Worker will explain its contents to you.

## **YOUR GUIDE INCLUDES:**

**WHAT THE FOSTERING SERVICE  
SETS OUT TO DO FOR CHILDREN  
AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

**WHAT YOU CAN  
EXPECT FROM YOUR  
SOCIAL WORKER**

**WHAT YOU CAN  
EXPECT FROM YOUR  
FOSTER CARER**

**WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT  
FROM THE SUPERVISING  
SOCIAL WORKER**

**HAVING YOUR SAY**

**MOVING ON**

**YOUR NAME:**

**NAME:**

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**MY FOSTER CARER IS:**

**NAME:**

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**MY SOCIAL WORKER IS:**

**NAME:**

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**TELEPHONE:**

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**It is their job to visit me, make sure I am well  
looked after, talk to me about the plans for me,  
listen to me, arrange contact with my family and  
help with other things.**



# **MY SUPERVISING SOCIAL WORKER IS:**

**NAME:**

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**TELEPHONE:**

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**It is their job to help support my Foster Carers and make sure they are looking after me well. When they visit they will also want to talk with me to see how I am getting on.**

# **MY INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER (IRO) IS:**

**NAME:**

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**TELEPHONE:**

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**It is their job to chair my Review, to check that I am well looked after. They will also want to know how I am feeling and will make sure that everyone knows my views.**

## MY ADVOCATE IS:

**NAME:**

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It is their job to help to put my views forward and to speak up for me. An Advocate can help to get problems sorted out and will let people know how I am feeling so that things can be changed.

## MY INDEPENDENT VISITOR IS:

**NAME:**

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They do not work for the Trust, they are independent and will volunteer to come and visit me and become my friend. They will take me out to different places that I like going to.

## MY NURSE IS:

**NAME:**

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They will see me every year and check that I am healthy.

## MY VIRTUAL HEAD IS:

**NAME:**

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They will make sure I'm supported to do well at school.

## MY PERSONAL ADVISOR IS:

**NAME:**

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They will offer advice and support to make sure I'm ready to live independently.

# WHAT DOES BEING IN CARE MEAN?

If you are a child or young person in need, Children's Social Care will help to make sure you are looked after properly. **Usually, this means helping you while you live with your parents but sometimes this is not enough and so social services will feel you should live somewhere else.**

The actual decision for a child to come into care is often made by the courts but sometimes it is an agreement between parents and children's social care. Some young people aged over 16 years ask to become looked after.

**Being in care is also called being 'looked after' because you are legally being looked after by your local authority.**



# WHY AM I IN CARE?

Children and young people come into care for different reasons. For example:

- Because your family found it difficult to cope.
- You were at risk of some sort of harm.
- You have become separated from your family.
- Your family are unwell.
- Because you are unable to continue to live with your family and have been deemed to be homeless.

It can be a combination of reasons and your Social Worker should explain to you why you are in care.





# WHERE WILL I LIVE?

Where you live will depend on what is right for you and the type of care you are in.

**These are the main types of care:**



## FOSTER CARE

This means you live in a home with a specially trained person called a foster carer. They might have children already and they will look after you like a member of their own family. Foster care can last a short time while plans about your future are being made, or it can be for longer.



## KINSHIP CARE

This is where you live with someone who already knows you, like a relative or a friend. They will have training and support to make sure you are looked after properly.



## RESPITE CARE

This means that you go to a residential home or foster care only for a set amount of time on a regular basis, for example two nights every month.

# WILL I EVER GO HOME?

A safe and loving family home is the best place for any child to grow up in. **However, sometimes a lot needs to happen before it is right for you to go back to your own family.**

We will work hard to enable you to live with your family and if you can't live with your parents then social workers will look at whether you can live with friends or other family.

Some young people in care go back to their family very quickly, some take longer and others stay in foster care until they are an adult. It might seem unfair and like you are being punished, but remember that it is not your fault and that you deserve to have a safe and happy childhood.



# WILL I SEE MY FAMILY?

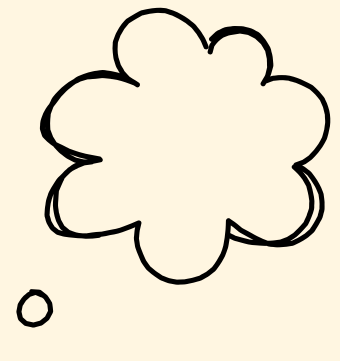
**Every young person's situation is different, and the amount of contact you have with your family depends on your circumstances.**



Contact arrangements are decided by your Social Worker or the courts and they must take into account your wishes when making these arrangements. You might feel desperate to see your parents, siblings, pets or anyone else who is special to you. You might not want to see your family, and it's okay to feel that way.

Family time arrangements are decided between your family and your social worker or by the court and they must take into account your wishes when making these arrangements. You might feel desperate to see your parents, siblings, pets or anyone else who is special to you. You might not want to see your family, and it's okay to feel that way.

You can tell your foster carer or social worker of anyone that you would or wouldn't like to see.



# WHAT IS BEING IN CARE LIKE?

Living in foster care might feel very strange at first. The way your Foster Carer does things might be different from what you are used to – they might eat different foods and watch different TV programmes.

**Here are some of the things that it might be useful to know about:**



## RULES

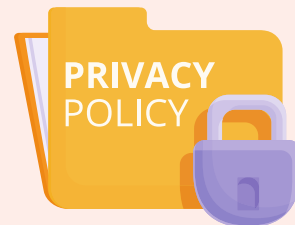
**When living in foster care, there will be rules that you need to follow.**

These will be around things like being respectful, going to bed on time or helping around the house. Rules help you to develop skills for later in life and feel safe and secure.



## POCKET MONEY

**You will get some pocket money each week where the amount is dependant on your age.** Some extra money might be available to make sure you can still do the things you like; such as going to activities and clubs you are involved with.



## PRIVACY

**You have the right to use a phone to contact your Social Worker, IRO or Advocate. You should have your own room, although young children might share, and a safe place to keep your stuff.** Your carers and the adults working with you must not share information about you with anyone who doesn't need to know.



## CLOTHES

**Your carers have money for buying clothes for you,** but you should have a say in what clothes they buy.



# SCHOOL

When you come into care **your Social Worker will try to make sure that you stay in the same school.** However, sometimes this is not possible, because for example you have moved too far away. If you have been moved to a different school and do not know why, ask your Social Worker or Foster Carer and they will explain it to you. Your carers will help make sure you have everything you need for school and can get there every day.



All schools must have a **Designated Teacher who is trained to understand the needs of children in care.** They are there to make sure there's nothing in the way of you getting the education you need. **There is also a team called the Virtual School.** They work with schools, children and young people, Social Workers and Foster Carers to give any support, advice and guidance around your education.



Working together, your Social Worker, Foster Carer, Designated Teacher, the Virtual School and you will put together a Personal Education Plan (PEP) which sets out everything you need, to help you do as well as possible with your learning. There will be a PEP meeting each term which you are invited to attend.

# HEALTH

**Children and young people in care get special help with their health** because if you have had problems at home or have moved around a lot, some of your health needs may not have been met.

For example, you may have missed important vaccinations, not have been to a dentist for a while or missed talks about sexual education at school.

**It is important that you know that there are people who you can talk to about any health concerns you may have.**

They will treat you with respect and not embarrass you.



When you first come into care **you will have an Initial Health Assessment, carried out by a doctor or specially trained nurse.** It might involve listening to your chest but it won't involve any intimate examinations.

**There will be a Health Plan which sets out any actions needed to make sure your health needs are met.** You will then have a Review Health Assessment once a year.

# SOCIAL WORKERS

**A Social Worker is a professional trained to help children and their families when they are going through difficulties.**

Every child and young person in care has a Social Worker until they are 18 years old or leave care. Some of the things they do for you are:

- **Listen to you:** they have a phone just for their work and should give you the number.
- **Explain things to you** so you understand what's going on.
- **Talk to other professionals** to make sure everybody is working together for you.
- **Make sure you have contact** with your family and friends, as long as it's safe.
- **Visit you regularly** and make sure that you have everything you need.
- **Create your Care Plan,** which sets out everything you need and plans for your future.
- **Keep records** about what happens in your life.



# ADVOCATE

**An Advocate helps children and young people express their wishes and feelings so they have a say in what happens in their life.**

Unlike a Social Worker, an Advocate doesn't make the important decisions about you, like where you will live and go to school. They are just there to listen to you and help get your point of view across to other people.

They can be particularly useful by going to meetings with you and speaking on your behalf. An Advocate will support you if you want to make a complaint. You can have an Advocate for as long as you are supported by the Leaving Care Team.



# INDEPENDENT VISITOR

**An Independent Visitor is a volunteer who will spend time with just you on a regular basis.**

They are someone that you can talk to, get along with and ask for advice. You could even ask your Independent Visitor to support you in your meetings. Before you start to see your Independent Visitor, we will make sure they are good, safe people.

We try to find someone who has lots in common with you such as hobbies and interests. All young people in care have the right to an Independent Visitor up to the age of 21.



**If you would like an Advocate or an Independent Visitor, you can get in touch using our online form at:**  
**<http://bit.ly/2WOpk2l>**



# PEOPLE INVOLVED IN YOUR CARE

## INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER (IRO)

Every looked after child or young person will have an IRO. They talk to everyone involved in supporting you to make sure that good progress is being made with your Care Plan and that you are safe and well cared for. They set up your review meetings and make sure you can get involved in them. They are called 'independent' because they are not part of your Social Worker's team. This means they work from the outside to make sure all the professionals are doing what they are supposed to, for you.

## VIRTUAL SCHOOL EDUCATION OFFICER

This is the person who works with your school and social worker to monitor your education. They will help your school to put things in to place to support you to make progress.

## SUPERVISING SOCIAL WORKER

This is your Foster Carer's Social Worker. They help make sure your carer has everything they need to look after you properly.

## PARTICIPATION WORKER

These work in the Participation Team in the Children's Trust. They offer advice and activities for children in care and those leaving care. They run the Children in Care Council and the Care Leavers Council.

## PERSONAL ADVISER (PA)

When you are around 16 years old, you will get a Personal Adviser. They are there to help you as you become an adult and more able to look after yourself. They will be there for you at least until you are 21, or 25 if you still need them. You will have a social worker until you are 18, so for a while there will be a crossover where you have both. There is a lot of support you will get as a young person who is leaving care and this is set out in our separate guide.

# WHAT IS A REVIEW MEETING?

Every child and young person has a review meeting which is run by your Independent Reviewing Officer. The meetings are very important as they are there to make sure that you have everything you need and that your Care Plan is correct. After all, you change as you grow older and your Care Plan will need to change with you.

## HOW OFTEN DO REVIEWS HAPPEN?

The first one happens within 20 days of you coming into care. Then there is one within 3 months after that, then every six months. They can be more often if needed.

## WHERE DO THEY TAKE PLACE?

Your Social Worker will organise a venue for the review to take place and they will let you know where it is. You can tell your IRO or Social Worker where you would like it or where you would rather avoid, and they will do their best to meet your wishes.

## WHO WILL BE THERE?

The Independent Reviewing Officer and Social Worker will be there, along with other adults who are important in your life. This will include for example your parents, your foster carers, someone from your school.

## WHAT DOES THE MEETING COVER?

Things like your education, your health, and leisure activities, seeing your family and friends, plans for your future and how you are feeling.

## CAN I TAKE PART?

Yes, this is your review and you have the right to attend and take part. It's really important and useful for the Independent Reviewing Officer to know how you are feeling and what you want to happen in future. There are lots of different ways to take part. You can attend and speak for yourself, or an Advocate or Independent Visitor could come with you, or you could send a text to your IRO, it's up to you. If you like, you can just attend a part of the meeting.

# REPORTS

There are many reports created when you are in care. It may seem like an awful lot, but they help the different professionals to know what you need and what decisions have been made.

The professionals in your life will only share information about you with other people when it is necessary, and they will only share the details that are relevant. Similarly, you won't get to know details about other people if you don't need to know it, so you might receive partial rather than full reports sometimes. The Children's Trust takes these issues extremely seriously.

## CARE PLAN

This is an important plan which sets out what your individual needs are and how they will be met, and the plans for your future. Your Social Worker is responsible for making sure your Care Plan is right and gets done.

## IRO SUMMARY & REPORT / CIC REVIEW

These reports are records of what happens at your Review Meeting. If you have shared your views with the meeting, then they will be recorded here and you can have a copy sent to you.

## CHILD AND FAMILY ASSESSMENT

This is a report completed by your Social Worker before your Review Meeting. It looks at your needs and circumstances and is used by the adults working with you to create your Care Plan. Your views are an important part of the assessment.

## HEALTH PLAN

Every child and young person coming into care has an Initial Health Assessment when they first come into care, and then a further assessment every year. The Assessment is carried out by a doctor or nurse and is there to find out if you have any health issues and make sure they are dealt with. Any actions needed are set out in the Health Plan.

## PATHWAY PLAN

This is different from your Care Plan because it is only created when you are around 16 years old, and it looks at your future in much more detail. It will change as your needs and wishes change. It will include things like where you are going to live, details about the people who will help you, and how you can access work, training or education. It will include a backup plan in case things don't work out as expected.

## HEALTH PASSPORT

When you are around 18 years old, you will be given a Health Passport to help you have a good understanding of your health needs and history. It is a document showing things like illnesses you had as a child, what vaccinations you have had, and any issues such as allergies. It will be useful when you are registering with a doctor's surgery.

## PERSONAL EDUCATION PLAN (PEP)

This sets out everything that needs to happen in order for you to do as well as you can in your education. You will have the chance to contribute to the plan. Part of the Virtual School's role is to make sure that all PEPs are of a good standard.

# GROUPS

**Yes, there are two main groups which meet regularly for young people in care or leaving care. They have a big impact on shaping the services for all young people in care and they are a lot of fun.**

## **CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL**

A group for young people between 12 and 16 who are in care.

## **CARE LEAVERS COUNCIL**

The group for young people aged 16 to 25 who are entering adulthood.

## **VIRTUAL SCHOOL PARTICIPATION**

A range of fun activities that take place during the school holidays.

**There are other groups you could join that are not just for children in care such as:**

## **SHOOTING STARS**

A group of young people from Northamptonshire between the ages of 13 to 25 years that have SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities). It meets monthly.

## **NORTHAMPTON YOUTH FORUM**

Elects representatives to speak on behalf of young people in Northampton.

## **YOUNG HEALTHWATCH**

For young people who would like to make a difference for young people in health and social care.

**If you would like to know more about any of these groups, go to the website at:**

[Get Involved](#)



# WHAT DO I DO IF SOMETHING HAS GONE WRONG?

Being in care is not always easy. There will be a lot of adults trying to help you, but even then, things can go wrong. You might feel that you are not being listened to or involved in decisions, or you are confused about what is going on, or that you are not allowed to see your family or friends.

**You can get help with any of your problems by speaking to your:**

**SOCIAL WORKER**  
**FOSTER CARER**  
**PERSONAL ADVISER**  
**IRO**  
**TEACHER**

If you are still not happy you can make a complaint. Your Social Worker, Personal Adviser or Advocate can help you do so. We will take your complaint seriously and will do our very best to be fair, to respond to you properly and learn from our mistakes.

**The Complaints and Compliments Team are based at:**

One Angel Square  
Angel Street  
Northampton  
NN1 1ED

Telephone: 0300 126 1000

An organisation called OFSTED Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills checks the work of fostering agencies which your Foster Carer and their Supervising Social Worker are a part of.

If you want to contact The Chief Inspector of Ofsted you can do so through their website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk) or phone 0300 123 1231

The Ofsted address is Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD



**If you are unhappy with any part of living with your foster carers,  
please tell your social worker.**

**Here are some of the other organisations that can also help you to do this:**

[www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)

[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted)

[rights4children.org.uk](http://rights4children.org.uk)

[www.westnorthants.gov.uk/your-council/comments-compliments-and-complaints](http://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/your-council/comments-compliments-and-complaints)

[mindofmyown.org.uk/](http://mindofmyown.org.uk/)



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