

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHOICES

A guide to Section 17 & 20 homelessness support

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**Asking for support**

Asking for support can be difficult for many reasons, and it often varies depending on your situation. Here are some common reasons why people might find it hard to ask for support. People often worry that asking for support might make them seem weak, incapable, or less competent. This fear of being judged by others can make it hard to reach out, even when they really need support. Many people take pride in being self-sufficient and handling things on their own.

Why It's Important to overcome this:

* Getting Support:

No one can do everything alone and getting help can make a big difference in overcoming challenges.

* Strength in Vulnerability:

Asking for support isn’t a sign of weakness—it’s a sign of strength. It shows you understand your limits and are willing to reach out to grow and improve.

* Building Connections:

When you ask for help, you give others the opportunity to support you, which can strengthen relationships and build trust.

Recognising why it’s hard to ask for help is the first step. The next step is to challenge those barriers and remember that everyone needs help sometimes—it’s a natural and important part of being an adult.

We recognise the value of families and will work together. The package of support will be tailored to your needs, your circumstances, and consider the cause of your homelessness or threat of homelessness. For example, support might be provided by Strengthening Families, Action for Children to support your return to your family.

**Thinking about your next steps**

As you are presenting yourself as homeless a joint assessment will be completed between your local council and social care staff. During the joint assessment, Social Workers and Housing Options Officers will continue to explore the possibility of you returning to your family, your extended family or to friends.

Northamptonshire Children’s Trust and North and West Northamptonshire Councils must ensure that you are informed of what assistance may be available to you.

You are sometimes still referred to as a child even though we will always treat you as a young adult. You will hear professionals discussing a couple of options. These are designed to protect and support you, whether you're living at home, with another family, or moving on to live independently.

**Section 17: Child in Need** is about supporting you and your family to stay together and to make sure you have what you need to grow up safe and well. An option could be that you supported by Northamptonshire Children’s Trust as a Child in Need which comes under section 17 Children’s Act 1989: you may be provided with accommodation and support to prevent you from being homeless.

* Purpose: Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 is about providing help and support to children and families. It’s often referred to as the “Child in Need” section.
* Support Provided: This support can be things like accommodation help, social work support, or financial assistance. The goal is to keep you with your family, and the parents keep all their rights and responsibilities.

Voluntary: Getting help under Section 17 is voluntary, meaning that your family and the Childrens Trust and councils work together, but there’s no legal obligation to accept the help.

Support and accommodation needs will be assessed and identified with you.

• The most appropriate pathway around accommodation will be identified with you.

• A Support Worker will help you learn more about budgeting, getting into college/work, cooking, cleaning, shopping, living in the community etc

• If you are not working, you may be able to claim welfare benefits for financial support (to meet accommodation and other costs)

**Section 20: Voluntary Accommodation**

* Purpose: Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 is about ensuring that you have a safe place to live when your parents can’t provide this at the moment. This could be because your family are going through a tough time, or you might be in danger at home.
* Who It Applies To: This section is for situations where you may need to live somewhere else for a while, like with foster carers or in a supported placement
* Parental Rights: Under Section 20, parents still have full parental responsibility. They have the right to agree to or refuse the arrangement, and they can ask for you to be returned at any time. At 16 your voice and views are important to us, in this decision and you have the right to sign your own S.20 Agreement.
* Voluntary Agreement: Section 20 is voluntary. You, or your parents and the local authority agree on you living elsewhere temporarily. The local authority doesn’t have the power to force this, but it’s meant to keep you safe and in your best interests. This can be withdrawn by your or you parents at any time.

If you become “looked after”, Section 20, you will be allocated a social worker who will meet regularly with relevant family members and write a care plan, following this:

• Review meetings will be held at defined intervals (within 28 days, at 4 months and then every six months) and will include you and other professionals who might be supporting you with your pathway plan.

• Accommodation in a home to meet your needs, this could be foster care, a residential children’s home, or semi-independent accommodation.

• Weekly financial support (personal allowance) if assessed as a need, until you reach 18 years old (paid at the same rate as Income Support) Whilst you remain in our care.

As you evidence that you can live independently and confidently, long term housing solutions will be explored. If having made an informed choice regarding your options and you decided not to become looked after, you will be in ‘priority need’ under homelessness legislation and will be offered the interim accommodation duty of temporary accommodation.

Whatever you decide, the Childrens trust will continue to support you and your family.

* **Health and Wellbeing**: Facilitating access to physical and mental health services, including counselling and healthcare.
* **Life Skills Development**: Teaching essential life skills such as cooking, cleaning, time management, and navigating adult responsibilities.
* **Emotional Support and Mentorship**: Providing access to mentors or support networks to offer guidance, encouragement, and a sense of community.
* **Personal Development**: Supporting personal growth through opportunities for hobbies, interests, and personal goal setting.

**Support as a Care Leaver**

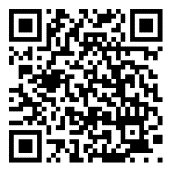
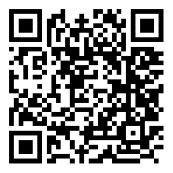
Who is a Care Leaver?

A care leaver is someone who has been in the care of the local authority, for 13 weeks or more, under the provision of a Care Order or Section 20 voluntary agreement and this has to be one day past their 16th birthday.

This support can include:

* Personal Adviser: You’ll have a personal adviser to help you make plans for your future.
* Pathway Plan: A plan that sets out what support you need as you move towards independence, like help with education, training, or housing.
* Accommodation: Help with finding a place to live, and sometimes even financial support for rent.
* Financial Help: The Childrens Trust might help with things like paying for education or other needs.
* Health and Well-being Support: Assistance with accessing healthcare, counselling, or other services to ensure your well-being.

For more detailed information regarding our local offer for Care leavers , visit this page <https://nctrust.co.uk/young-people/leaving-care/northamptonshire-care-leaver-local-offer/>

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**Care leaver classifications:**

**Looked after children**

Children and young people are deemed 'looked-after' if they have been provided with accommodation under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 for at least 24 hours. For the purposes of the Children Act, children and young people are:

**Eligible children**:

Young people in care for at least one day aged 16 and 17, and who have been looked after for (a total of) at least 13 weeks from the age of 14.

**Relevant children:**

Young people aged 16 or 17 who have already left care and were eligible children before leaving care.[7] For this definition, the child ceases to be a relevant child if they live continuously for six months or more with a parent or person with parental responsibility and are then a 'qualifying young person'

**Former relevant children**:

Young people aged 18 or over who have been eligible or relevant children

**Qualifying young people:**

Young people under the age of 21 who have spent at least one day in care or privately fostered while over the age of 16. Qualifying young people may not be entitled to full leaving care duties because they have not spent at least 13 weeks in care, because they are privately fostered rather than looked after by social services.

**The Leaving Care Service – Russell House**

We continue to offer our care leavers a service from Russell House. This is a drop in service with no appointment necessary and can be accessed at any time during business hours. Russell house also has shower and laundry facilities for care leavers and care experienced young people to make use of.

**Address**

Russell House  
Rickyard Road  
NN3 3QZ

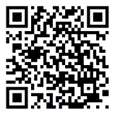
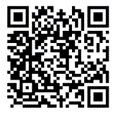
**Contact us**

Phone: 01604 526943/4

Email: [**LeavingCareTeamDuty@nctrust.co.uk**](mailto:LeavingCareTeamDuty@nctrust.co.uk)

**Opening hours**

Monday to Thursday: 9am to 5:30pm  
Friday: 9am to 5pm

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