


YOUNG PERSON'S GUIDE TO FOSTERCARE



A Young Person's guide to Foster Care



"This guide has been made by children and young people in foster care with the support from NYAS. We hope it helps you when you come into foster care."



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Introduction to foster care

Children and young people who are unable to live at home sometimes have to live with a foster family. Foster care is when children and young people live with and are cared for by people who are not their parents.

Foster carers have been specially trained to look after you and keep you safe. Fostering families come in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes you might live with a family member like a grandparent or an aunt or uncle or a friend who is a foster carer and this is called 'Kinship' foster care.

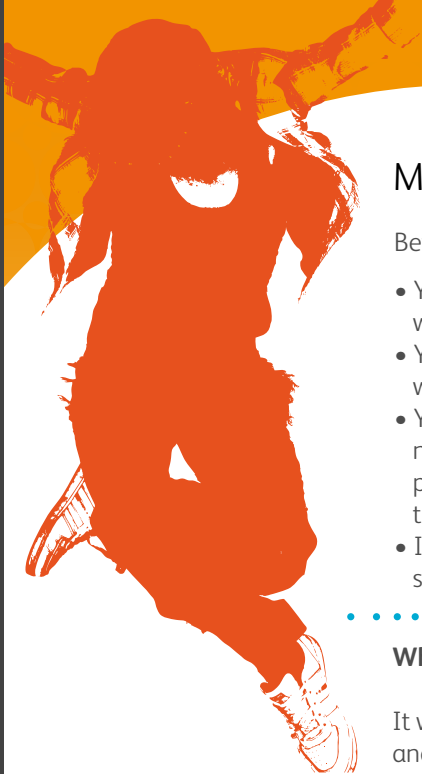
There are different types of foster care and this can be short-term or long term, depending on your circumstance and your needs.

You might stay with your foster family for a short time, maybe for a few weeks or a few months or you may need a permanent home with your foster family as you are unable to return to your birth family. Your social worker will talk to you about your plan.

Social workers will work with your parents and foster carers to make decisions about what happens to you. They should remember your wishes and feelings when making decisions about you.

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Moving into foster care

Before you come into foster care:

- You should also have a say on where you would like to live.
- Your social worker should try to meet your wishes and feelings.
- You should visit your new home and meet your new foster family. Sometimes this is not always possible if the decision is made that you need to leave home quickly.
- If you are not comfortable, you must tell your social worker.

Where will I live?

It will depend on your personal circumstance and needs. But you will most likely live with another family in their home. Sometimes you might live with your own family members, like grandparents or aunts and uncles. You will live somewhere where you will hopefully be happy and most importantly safe.

If I have brothers or sisters will I live with them?

Your social worker will do his/her very best to place all of you together in one foster home. Sometimes this is not possible. However, your foster carer and social worker should promote family life by making sure that you still get to see your brothers and sisters, as long as it is safe for you and your wellbeing.

"I WAS CONFUSED ABOUT WHY I CAME INTO CARE, BUT MY SOCIAL WORKER SAT DOWN AND TALKED TO ME. I FEEL SAFE NOW."

"MY FOSTER CARERS WERE REALLY NICE, THEY DIDN'T ASK ME LOTS OF QUESTIONS. THEY JUST LET ME TALK WHEN I WAS READY."



"WHEN I WENT TO SCHOOL I THOUGHT EVERYONE ELSE KNEW I WAS IN CARE. BUT NO ONE KNEW ANYTHING. I DIDN'T WANT ANYONE TO KNOW MY BUSINESS."

"I DIDN'T HAVE POCKET MONEY WHEN I WAS AT HOME AND MY FAMILY COULDN'T AFFORD TO PAY FOR SCHOOL TRIPS. IT WAS NICE TO BE ABLE TO HAVE MY OWN POCKET MONEY AND GO ON SCHOOL TRIPS."

"WHEN I CAME INTO FOSTER CARE I FELT EXHAUSTED AND SAD. I THOUGHT THAT I WOULDN'T SEE MY FAMILY EVER AGAIN, MY SOCIAL WORKER THEN TOLD ME ALL ABOUT CONTACT AND I FELT A BIT BETTER."



Did you know?

You have a right to express your wishes and feelings in all matters affecting you? (Article 12 of the UNCRC)

Moving into foster care

Contact with family

Visiting family is known as 'Contact'. The law states that you have a right to contact with family and people who are important to you as long as this is in your best interests. However, if it's not safe for you to have contact with certain people your social worker will talk about this to you. Contact usually takes place after school and can be in the community or at the Contact Centre.

Will I see my friends?

Your social worker and foster family should support you so that you can keep in touch with your friends from school, if you move away and are not able to see them anymore.



Health

You have a right to access good quality healthcare and be treated with dignity and respect at all times.

Your foster carers will need to make sure you have a doctor or dentist to support you when you are ill. You will also have a medical once a year to make sure you are well and being looked after properly whilst in care.



Going to school

Your education is important.

Your foster carers will support you in going to school. Sometimes you may need to move schools if you are placed far away from your old school.

Your school will have a designated looked after child teacher. This teacher will be aware of your circumstances and support you if you need it.

Your foster carer and teachers in your new school should support you as much as possible to help you settle in your new school.

You can also ask to see the school counsellor. They will support you emotionally.

Pocket money!

Your foster carers should give you pocket money each week for your own use. Your foster carers will buy you clothes, shoes and any equipment for school or other activities. Your foster carer should also open up a bank account for you and help you save some money for a rainy day.

Looked After Child Review Meetings

A review meeting is to look at if your needs are being met. You should have a review meeting within the first four weeks of going into care, then you should have one three months after this and then at least every six months. You have the right to ask for a review meeting at anytime though.

You should be involved in your reviews as it is your care plan. If you are old enough and you'd like to go, you can attend your review meetings. Your social worker has to ensure that Social Services hear your wishes and feelings. You can ask an advocate to help you speak out.

Your reviews are chaired by an Independent Review Officer (IRO). It's their job to make sure you are able to speak up and put your views across. They will also make sure that everyone is doing what they said they would do at the last review and also what's in the care plan.

If you choose not to go to the meeting you might want to fill out a booklet instead or if you want you can speak to the independent reviewing officer before the meeting.

Remember - It's your right to have a review of your care plan, and to have your wishes and feelings taken into account when adults are making decisions about your life.

Rules and having a say

Your foster carers and social workers will have some ground rules in place whilst you are looked after. You should have an input in the rules and come to an agreement. These rules are to keep you safe from harm and to make sure things run smoothly. For example, keeping safe online or what time you should be home and what you and your foster carers expect from each other, e.g. respecting each other's personal space. All rules should support your rights as a child/young person and must be fair and reasonable.

What are my rights?

All children and young people have rights. These rights are what the government says you are entitled to, to make sure you're treated fairly and that you receive a good standard of care.

The UNCRC is the United Nations Conventions of the Rights of a Child. All children and young people have rights including all of your friends in school. This means that people should be working towards making sure your rights are supported. You, as a looked after child and young person, also have rights under the Social services and Wellbeing Wales Act 2014.

If you feel that you are being treated unfairly you can ask for an advocate to help you. The advocate will speak on your behalf and will help you get heard. To find out more about the support available, visit: www.nyas.net or telephone: 08088081001.

In summary:

- You have a right to an education.
- You have a right to be heard and have a say about issues affecting you.
- You have a right to confidentiality – People should keep information about you private unless you or someone else were being harmed or may come to harm. If information needs to be passed on, you should be made aware and told the reasons why it needs to be shared.
- You have a right to be treated in a non-discriminatory way.
- You have a right to practice your religion.
- You have a right to family life and to have contact as long as it is safe for you.
- You have the right to have your care plan reviewed.
- You have a right to be protected from violence, abuse and neglect.
- You have a right to have your identity, religious and cultural needs met.



What if I am unhappy with the care I receive?

It can be very hard moving into a new family and some children and young people can feel upset about leaving their own family and everything can feel different and strange. But remember that there are lots of people here to help you.

If you're feeling unhappy about anything at all, it's really important that you let your social worker know. If you feel that you cannot speak with your social worker, you can talk to someone you trust, like a teacher or you can speak to an advocate.

An advocate is someone who is independent from social services. They listen to what you have to say and help you get something stopped, started or changed when you are unhappy about something. They also tell you about your rights and can support you at your review meetings. If you can't get problems sorted out, they can also help you to make a complaint to the Children's Complaints Officer.

You can also speak to the Complaints Officer on 029 2087 325 or ask to speak to advocate who can help you make a complaint or help you with anything that is worrying you.



Leaving foster care

Before you reach 18, your social worker will talk to you about the plan for you to leave care and the support you need to prepare for this. It is very important that you discuss your options with your social worker, personal advisor or independent advocate.

If you are settled, you might be able to continue living with your foster family under the 'When I am Ready Scheme' until you are 21, if you, your foster carer and social worker think that this is the right decision for you. This could be extended to 25 if you are in education or training.

We have also created a flyer about the scheme, which explains the process in more detail.

You can keep in touch with your foster family when you leave care.

Words you may come across whilst being in care:

LA - Local Authority (Where you are from or who is responsible for your care i.e. The City of Cardiff Council)

Accommodated - This means that your parents have agreed for you to go into care. They alone have parental responsibility for you and not Social Services.

Care Order - Young people are sometimes on a care order, which is made by a court (a family not criminal court). The court will make a care order where there are worries that a young person is being harmed or is at risk of significant harm. Both Social Services and your parents have to work together to make decisions about your life (they share parental responsibility for you). If you are on a temporary care order this is called a 'Interim' Care Order.

Special Guardianship Order (SGO) - An order means a child lives with carers who have parental responsibility for them and usually lasts until a child is 18. The child is no longer the responsibility of the Local Authority.

Parental Responsibility - Those with parental responsibility for you have the right to make decisions about the way you are brought up, if you are on a Care Order. Social Services will share parental responsibility with your parent(s).

Looked After Child Review meeting - A meeting that takes place to ensure that children and young people in care are getting the support they should be getting from Social Services and to make sure that everything is going ok in your life around things like placement, contact, school and your health.

PEP - Personal Education Plan

Social Worker - A social worker is someone is trained to work with children, young people and their families. You will have a social worker who will work with you, your family, your foster carers and other people to decide what is best for you whilst you are living in foster care. It is important for your social worker to listen to your wishes and feelings when making decisions about your life.



Words you may come across whilst being in care:

IRO - Independent Review Officer

Independent Visitor - volunteer who will visit you regularly and befriend you.

Complaints Officer - A person who works for Social Services who will listen to your concerns if there is something you are unhappy about in care and try and put things right for you.

Supervising Social Worker - Foster Carers own Social Worker. They are there to make sure that your carers are getting the help they need and that they are looking after you well.

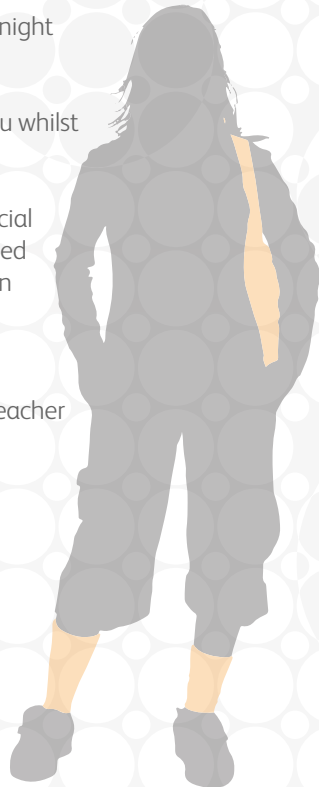
Contact - Social Services must support you to see your family. This could be face to face contact or through letters and phone calls. Sometimes you might have to have supervised contact which means that someone from Social Services will be with you when you see for your family. Sometimes it might not be in your best interests to have any contact, but a court must decide about this if Social Services want to stop you having contact.

Respite - Short stay foster care this maybe overnight or for a couple of days.

Personal Advisor - A person who works with you whilst leaving care.

Advocate - Someone that does not work for Social Services and is there to make sure you are listened to and have a say in decisions. The advocate can let you know your rights whilst living in care and when you leave care.

Designated Looked After Child Teacher - A teacher at school who supports you.



For more information and support whilst being in care, we have included a list of useful organisations that can help you.

Useful contacts

Cardiff Children's Service Looked After 0-14 Service
02920 871169

Cardiff Children's Services 14 plus team
02920 871168

Cardiff Fostering Team
02920 873797
www.fostercarecardiff.co.uk

Cardiff Emergency Duty Team
02920 788570

Children's Services Complaints Officer
029 2087 3251

NYAS

Independent advocacy service, which can help you get something stopped, started or changed. 0808 808 1001 Website www.nyas.net

Meic Cymru

Advocacy, information and advice helpline for children in Wales - available 24 hours a day 0808 80 23456 Website www.meiccymru.org

Childline

A free 24-hour advice helpline for children and young people. They are confidential, so won't tell anyone anything about you unless you are in danger.

0800 1111

Website www.childline.org.uk

Children's Commissioner for Wales

Championing the rights of children and young people in Wales

01792 765600 Website www.childcomwales.org.uk

CSSIW

An organisation called CSSIW checks the work of fostering agencies to improve childcare in Wales.

03007900126 Email cssiw@wales.gsi.gov.uk



This guide was created by looked after children and young people. Just one of the great things that we do within our group. We work on lots of different projects throughout the year helping other children and young people share their experiences and make sure they are heard.

If you would like to join our group, please ask your social worker for more information or call us on 029 2066 8956 to find out when and where our next meeting is being held!