



# Young people's guide to fostering and being looked after



achieving  
for children

## Background information

This booklet is to help you understand what being looked after means and what foster care is.

This may be a difficult time for you, but we want you to know that we want the best for you. We will do everything we can to help you be happy, healthy and safe. We will always listen to you, and to what you tell us about how you're feeling and what you want. There is some information at the back of this booklet about what to do if you are not happy.

## About us

We are a company called Achieving for Children and we run an independent fostering agency (IFA), delivering fostering services in Kingston, Richmond and Windsor and Maidenhead. Our mission is to provide brilliant fostering services, like finding and recruiting new foster carers and supporting foster carers, so that the children and young people who are fostered are happy, healthy and safe.

## What does being looked after mean?

Being looked after is where you don't live with your own family.

Sometimes it is with:

- a friend or a relative
- a home where other children and young people live

But most often with

- a family you do not know

You may live away from your family for a short time, be looked after by someone else only at weekends, or you may stay with them until you are an adult.

It all depends on what is needed to make sure you are safe, happy and well cared for.

Your carers will treat you with dignity and respect and will want you to do the same to them. It may take a little time to get used to your carers and their house rules, and all carers will have their own way of doing things. Your carer knows that at first this may be strange for you and take time to get used to.

## **What does foster care mean?**

If you live with another family, this is called foster care.

## **Who are foster carers?**

Foster carers are people who look after children and young people in the foster carers' homes, when the child or young person is unable to live with their family.

Foster carers are ordinary people who care about children and young people and want to help make sure they are safe.

All foster carers are different. Some have one adult in the family, some have two. They may or may not have children of their own. Foster carers may live in a house or a flat. They may have pets.

All foster carers, their families and their homes have been carefully checked to make sure that they can offer you a safe place to live.

We will do its best to find you a foster carer who has a similar background to you, who will be able to look after you and make sure that you have everything you need.

When you are looked after, your foster carer will care for you as if you were part of their family. They will look after you until you are able to return home or until other longer term plans are made.

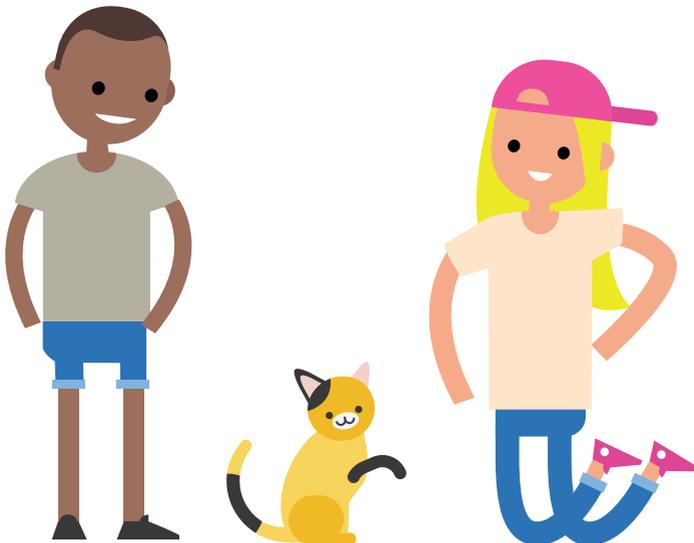
You will be able to talk to your foster carer about how you are feeling. They will understand how upsetting it can be living away from your family and friends.

Your foster carer will get to know you and help you do the things you like, and if you want something that is very important to you, they will do their best to help you. Your foster carer will help you with hobbies or leisure interests, so let them know what you like to do and they will make sure you can get to do all the things you enjoy.

## What is residential care?

Residential care is where you live in a children's home rather than with a foster family. This usually means that there will be more children and more adults where you live. You may live in a children's home because of particular needs you have.

To make sure your needs are properly met, children's homes have a key worker or link worker system who have particular responsibility for you. Achieving for Children will always do its best to ensure that you live in the best place to support your development.



## What we want for you

We want to make sure you have everything you need, which includes the following things.

- Positive relationships
- Where you live is safe and you get everything you need
- You do really well in your education
- You know who you are and where you're from (your identity)
- You are listened to and involved when important decisions have to be made about your life
- You have the support you need to move into adulthood
- You have people around you who you can talk to and make sure you feel good about life
- You are fit and healthy
- You know the people who will support you in your life

You will be shown everything you need to know about your new home. You will get to know who else lives in the home, what the rules are within the house and people will make sure you are OK. You can talk to your foster carer or person responsible for you where you live if you are not sure of something.

## What is a social worker?

All children we look after have their own social worker who is responsible for making sure that they are well cared for.

A social worker is someone who is trained to help children and families through difficult times. Their job is to make sure you are safe, settled and well. They will explain things to you and help you to understand what is going on.

It's their job to make sure that everything possible is being done to help you achieve your best while we care for you.

We will make sure that your health needs are being met, that you go to the right school or college, and you are being encouraged to do the best you can there.

Your social worker will visit you to check that you are OK. They will ask you how things are going and tell you about any plans that affect you. Your social worker will also work with your family to try and make it possible for you to return home.

# Going to live with a foster family

## What happens when I go to live with a foster family?

Before you go to live with a foster family, you will have a placement meeting. At that meeting, lots of things about you will be shared with your foster carers to help them look after you, like the food you like, any medicines you have to take and information about your school.

Your social worker will take you to meet your new foster family. You will be shown around the house. It may feel all a bit strange and different to start with, but your foster family will help you settle in. Like any house there will be rules about things like doing your homework, watching TV, staying up late, times for you to be in by, and what time dinner is.

It might take a little while to get used to the rules but you will adapt and become more comfortable. You will be able to talk to your foster carer and share your day, they will make sure that you have nice food and clean clothes to wear.

## What will I have in my foster home?

You will have:

- A cosy bed
- Space to put your things
- Toiletries such as shampoo and soap
- Space to meet your social worker, advocate or solicitor
- Pocket money
- Celebration for your birthday and religious festivals
- Fair and respectful parenting
- Someone to listen to your feelings and hopes and be interested in you
- Support to stay in touch with friends and family
- Help with your education and training if you need it

## Can I bring my own things?

You can bring your own clothes and other personal belongings with you when you come into care. Your social worker will make sure that you have a proper bag or suitcase to move things. If you're not sure about bringing something then ask! It is a good idea to let your foster carer know if you have anything that is valuable or really special so that they can help you look after it.

## My wellbeing

### Your life story

Your foster carer and social worker will encourage you to understand your own life story. This could be your own special book, about you, your family, what has happened to you and all the important things about you. You can put photos and drawings in the book and write about anyone and anything that you want to remember. This book is your keepsake because it is about you and will help you to understand why things happened.

### Your care plan

Your care plan is a written down information saying how you should be cared for and what your future plans are. The plan may be that you will live with your family, or it may be for you to live temporarily or permanently with a foster family. Your social worker will give you a copy of your care plan.

Your care plan is updated at review meetings with you, your parents, foster carers and your social worker so you can all talk about how things are going. Review meetings will happen after about four weeks, then three months later and then, if everything is going well, every six months.

The meetings are run by an independent reviewing officer. It is their job it is to make sure that you, and everyone else. Have the chance to say what you think. You can always ask someone else to give your views if you don't feel comfortable saying it yourself.

## Can I see my family?

This is a very important question, but the answer is not the same for everyone. Your social worker will talk to you and your family about arrangements for you to see each other. We understand that you want to know what plans are being made and will try to find out what is happening as soon as possible.

Living with a foster family does not necessarily mean that you won't see your family. You may have contact with your parents, grandparents or extended family. Visits, phonecalls, emails and letters are all different ways you may be able to keep in touch. Your foster family will help you keep to any arrangements that are made to keep in touch with your family.

It may not always be the best thing for you to visit your family frequently or you may not want to see certain people. Your social worker will talk to you about what is happening and will always listen you what you say about how you're feeling and what you want.

## Can I see my friends?

Your foster carer will do their best to help you stay in touch with your friends, and make new ones. It will be important for you to agree with your foster carer when you are going to see them. They will want to talk to their parents if you are thinking of staying overnight with a friend. Your friend's parents will want to talk to your foster carer if you invite the friend to stay overnight with you. It may be that you stay at the school or college you already go to. If you can't stay there, then your social worker will work out which one is best for you to go to. If you don't go to school or college at the moment or haven't been for a while, you may feel a bit nervous. The person who is caring for you can help you with this. Remember it isn't just about lessons, it can be a great place to meet new friends and try new activities.

We want to make sure that you do the best you can so that you can achieve your potential. To do this we create a personal education plan which helps you, and us, think about your future and where you want to get to. At your school or college you will also have a designated teacher who is there to give you support to make sure you are on track with achieving your goals.

## **What about school or college?**

It may be that you stay at the school or college you already go to. If you can't stay there, then your social worker will talk to you and help work out which one is best for you to go to. If you don't go to school or college at the moment or haven't been for a while, you may feel a bit nervous. The person who is caring for you can help you with this. Remember it isn't just about lessons, it can be a great place to meet new friends and try new activities.

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## **What happens with my health?**

Your health is very important and so to make sure you stay healthy we have a doctor and a nurse who you will meet and will make sure your health needs are met. If you become unwell they will make sure you are cared for so that you can recover, and they will also ensure that you are growing up as you should. The doctor and nurse will also be able to give you information and advice about different areas regarding your health.

## **Will I have my own bedroom?**

This depends on your age and circumstances. In most situations, you will have your own room. Sometimes, young people like to share a bedroom with their brother or sister.

## **What if my foster family is a different religion to me?**

Your foster carer will do all they can to make sure that you can attend your place of worship, keep up your customs, eat food that you are used to. Your social worker will try to put you in touch with people from your own community so that you don't feel cut off from your culture. They will also arrange for you to have a translator or an interpreter if you need one.

## **What is a supervising social worker?**

The supervising social worker oversees your foster carers. They will ask you what you think about the care you are getting.

## **Having my say**

### **What is a review meeting?**

A review is a meeting to see how you are getting on. Your parent(s), social worker and carer(s) will also be invited to the meeting. It is a chance to talk about what has been happening and what plans are being made for you while you are being looked after. Your first review meeting usually happens when you have been looked after for four weeks. There will be a second review meeting after three months and then every six months after that.

## What does my independent reviewing officer do?

Every child and young person who is looked after must have a named independent reviewing officer (IRO). It is their job to:

- chair your review meeting
- check that the plan is right for you
- make sure you have your say about what is happening
- make sure that everyone listens to what you have to say and considers it carefully when they are making decisions
- make sure everyone has their say
- check that everyone is keeping to their part of the plan
- check that there are clear plans for your future
- check that you know how to make a complaint
- check that you know how to request further support if it is needed, such as asking for an advocate (someone who can speak on your behalf)
- check if you need an interpreter or a translator

## Who are the Children in Care Council?

The Children in Care Council in Kingston and Richmond and Kick Back in Windsor and Maidenhead are groups of looked after children and young people and care leavers who meet regularly with social workers, service managers, local councillors and directors to represent the views of young people on the services delivered to you.

They need your help to make services better. If you are interested in joining the Children in Care Council or Kick Back talk to your social worker or foster carer.

## What help can I get if I am unhappy about something?

If you have any questions or are unhappy about something, you can usually ask your foster carers, your social worker or independent reviewing officer.

This can be about anything like keeping in touch with friends and family, getting pocket money, needing to see a doctor or a dentist, or going on holiday.

Sometimes we make mistakes or things go wrong. We want to talk to you about any worries or concerns you have and work with you to make things better. If this doesn't work, if you think that you are not being listened to and want to make sure that what you say is heard and acted upon, an independent advocate could help and we can arrange this. You can also contact Ofsted who are responsible for making sure we are doing what we should. Their contact details are in the 'useful contacts' section of this booklet.

The Viewpoint officer's role is to visit or contact you by phone or email to help you with completing the questionnaire. Your views are then sent to the independent reviewing officer and will be used in your review meeting to make sure that you are being listened to.

## Useful contacts

**The Voice Advocacy Service** is a confidential service that listens to what you have to say

Coram Voice, Gregory House, Coram Campus, 49 Mecklenburgh Square, London WC1N 2QA

**T:** 0808 800 5792

**E:** [info@coramvoice.org.uk](mailto:info@coramvoice.org.uk)

**W:** [www.coramvoice.org.uk](http://www.coramvoice.org.uk)

### **Help at Hand (Children's Commissioner)**

#### **Children's Commissioner for England**

Sanctuary Buildings  
20 Great Smith Street  
London SW1P 3BT

**Free phone** 0800 528 0731

**E:** [help.team@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:help.team@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk)

**W:** [www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/learn-more/help-at-hand](http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/learn-more/help-at-hand)

### **Child Line**

**Free phone** 0800 11 11

### **Ofsted**

You can also contact 'Ofsted'. It is an organisation set up to monitor and inspect all children's services in the country including fostering services and children's homes. If you have a complaint contact:

Piccadilly Gate, Store Street  
Manchester M1 2WD

**T:** 0303 123 1231,

**E:** [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

**NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children)**

**T:** 0808 800 5000. This helpline is open 24 hours a day.

### **Samaritans**

**T:** 116 123

## Other useful numbers

**AfC Children Looked After Team**

**T:** 020 8547 6904

**AfC Fostering Team**

**T:** 020 8547 6042

**AfC Quality Assurance Team**

**T:** 020 8891 7370

**Kingston:**

**Complaints and Information Access Officer**

**T:** 020 8547 4716

**Richmond:**

**Corporate Complaints and Access to Information Manager**

**T:** 020 8891 7937

You can write the names and phone numbers of people who will help to look after you below.

**My carers are...**

Their address is

Telephone number

**My social worker is...**

Email address

Telephone number

**My independent reviewing officer is...**

Email address

Telephone number