

Your guide to being in foster care



Useful Contact Information

OFSTED

0300 123 4666

General enquiries

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester

M1 2WD

Royal Greenwich Children's Complaints administrator

020 8921 2057

www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk

Children's Legal Centre

www.childrenslegalcentre.com

The National Youth Advocacy Service

0800 808 1001 [helpline]

0151 649 8700 [head office]

www.nyas.net

NSPCC Child Protection Helpline

0800 800 5000

www.nspcc.org.uk

Child Line

0800 1111

www.childline.org.uk

Coram Voice

Helpline:

0808 800 5792

Who Cares Trust

020 7251 3117

www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk

Children's Commissioner for England

Promotes and protects children's
rights in England

Sanctuary Buildings

20 Great Smith Street

London

SW1P 3BT

Youth Voice/CiCC

020 8921 6054

[www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/
info/200104/youth_support](http://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/info/200104/youth_support)

Hello, and welcome to foster care.

From the time you come to live in a foster home, the Fostering Service wants to make sure that you are safe and happy, well taken care of and living a healthy and fun life.

It can be hard at first to understand all the things that might happen now you are in foster care, but we want to give you some answers and make sure that we listen to all your questions and try our best to answer them.

This Children's Guide gives you information about:

- fostering
- the people involved in looking after you
- your rights and how to get your views heard
- what to do if you have questions or worries
- meetings and making plans for now and what may happen later.

What if I am not happy and want to let someone know.

There are times when things go wrong and you don't feel things are going well. We want to make sure we talk to you about any worries or concerns you may have. Once you have had a chance to tell us what you are not happy about we want to work together with you to try to solve any problems. If this does not work and you are still not happy, you have the right to make a complaint. You don't have to do this by yourself, you can ask your social worker or foster carer or any adult that you trust for help to sort out the problem.

If you would like to make a complaint you can speak to your foster carers, social workers or teachers. You can also contact our Complaints Manager on 020 8921 2057 and they can help you make your complaint.

Who needs to use this guide?

As soon as you come to a foster family then this booklet is for you. If you have just arrived, you may not know how long you will be staying. You may be feeling anxious and worried - and you probably have lots of questions about what is going to happen right now and also what is going to happen in the future. This guide will help to answer your questions and your foster carers will help explain it. We hope that by giving you this guide it will help you during your time in foster care. There is a lot of information written down, and you don't have to read it all at once.



What is fostering all about and who are the people involved?

Sometimes when children are not able to be looked after by their parents, they need to live somewhere else. Fostering is not a bad thing and does not mean that you are bad. You may know someone yourself who is living in foster care, but if not there are many famous people who also lived with a foster family when they were younger.

Foster Family

This is a family who cares for children by welcoming them to come to live in their home. The grown-ups in the home responsible for you are called foster carers. Foster carers are people who want to help look after children and they are very carefully chosen and trained to take the best care of children who come to live in their home. Living away from home is a big change and can make you feel worried. Your foster family will understand this and try to welcome you and make you feel as comfortable and relaxed as possible.

Fostering Service

The Royal Greenwich Fostering Service is responsible for finding the best foster carers for children and making sure they give the right care to you.

Supervising Social Worker (SSW)

This is the social worker from the Fostering Service who supports the foster carers and their family, helping them to be the best carers for any children they are looking after. Some young people like to describe the SSW as the Foster Carers Social Worker. They will introduce themselves to you; and say hello whenever they visit the foster carers and find you at home.

Social Worker

This is the person who will support you and sometimes members of your family. They should be able to answer your questions about why you are not living at home with your own family.

They will visit regularly, to see and talk to you. They can also let others know how you are feeling and what you may want to happen to you, including arranging for you to see your family.

Independent Reviewing Officer [IRO]

This is the person who is responsible for organising meetings called Reviews. It is their job to make sure that you are able to share your views and people listen to you. They also make sure that the Care Plan -the thinking about what happens to you - is the right and best plan for you.

Why do children come into Foster Care?

Sometimes when there are problems that families cannot sort out by themselves they may need help. A child or an adult may ask for help from a Social Worker because things are not going well at home. Parents might be feeling unwell or finding it difficult to manage things. Children may be unhappy about how they are being treated or may not feel safe. Social workers, teachers, neighbours or other people may be worried about how a child is being looked after at home. It may be one of these reasons why you are in foster care for now.

Finding the right placement for you

Royal Greenwich Fostering Service has a special team whose job it is to find children a safe and happy family to live with. Before they start looking for a family, your social worker will tell them everything they need to know about you so they can find the best foster family for you.

Planning for the future

All the important adults who are part of your life need to know what plans there are for now and when you are older. All the information is recorded on a form which is called a care plan. Your social worker and other people who care for you will ask you what you think should be in your plan. Your foster carer and social worker will make sure you are being looked after properly and will try to help you as much as they can and make sure you understand the care plan.

Having your say

How can I give my views about what I'd like to happen?

If you want to talk, your social worker and foster family are there to listen to you. They want to make sure your views are heard and that you feel that adults are listening. Often you will find your foster carer is the best one to talk to about things such as: what you like, what you don't like and whether there is anything else that could be done to make things better for you in the foster home?

What you are feeling and thinking is important to us too. Sometimes adults try to guess and they don't always get it right. If you are unhappy about something, it is really important that you let someone know who can help. You can speak to your social worker, foster carer, their supervising social worker, teacher or anyone else who you trust and can help to make things better. There are also other people you can talk to and you can find their telephone numbers and contact details at the back of this booklet. The social worker will decide the best and safest way for contact to happen and this may be with someone (a contact supervisor) watching over you during the contact.



Going to meetings

While you are living with a foster family there will be different meetings to make the best arrangements for you. When you first start living away from home, foster carer, social workers and if it is ok your parents, will sit down with you to talk about how they are going to look after you in a Placement Plan meeting. This is a meeting all about you. It will keep a record of important information about:

- your family
- where you live
- how your foster carer can keep you safe
- what you like doing
- about your health
- who you want to have 'contact' with
- your school.

To make sure that everyone involved in caring for you knows what the plans are, there will be regular meetings called 'Reviews', all the important adults in your life will be involved in working together to make a care plan for you. It is important that we know what you think and feel about what is happening. So before the Review, you will

be asked what you think and what your views are. You can write this down or to tell your social worker. If you are old enough, you may also take part in the meeting. It may be a bit scary speaking in the meeting or you may not want to write things down and that's ok. We will make sure that you have a way to share your thoughts and feelings.

The Independent Reviewing Officer will also see you alone to check whether you want to say anything. At the end of a Review Meeting, the Independent Reviewing Officer will make a number of decisions, about how best to support you now and planning for the future. If you want to talk about something to



do with your care plan between the Review meetings you can speak with your social worker or contact an Independent Reviewing Officer by calling 020 8856 9932.

Important information when living in foster care

Why you are in foster care?

Any child or young person living in foster care should know the reason they have come to live with a Foster family. This should be explained by the social worker before you start being looked after by foster carers.

What might change for me now I am living away from home?

Living away from home is not always easy. Sometimes it means that you might not see some of your family members as often as you used to. Every home has different rules and ways of doing things and it may take a while to get used to some of the rules, but your foster family will help you and may encourage you to make some house rules too. Making 'house rules' means that everyone including you will have a good idea about

what you can and cannot do. It is really important that not everything changes for you when you start living with a foster family so if you are not moving far away from home we will try to keep some things the same, like going to the same school, having the same friends, and keeping up with other activities you might do after school. There are also important things that you and your family might do because of your religion or the culture of your family. Even though your foster family may not always share the same religion or culture, they will work very hard to help you to continue feeling that your culture and your religion is important.

How we treat each other?

Everyone living in the home, including you, is responsible for respecting other people and understanding that some



behaviour is not acceptable. Getting along with other children and adults isn't always easy but it is easier when respect is shown towards each other. Your foster carers will involve you in their family life and help you to feel cared for and wanted.

Contact with family and friends

It is important that children living away from their own families have been spoken to about when they will next have some contact with close members of your family. Contact with the people who are close to you will be discussed at your Placement Plan meeting at the start of you coming to the foster home and then regularly at Review meetings. Staying in touch with friends is important too and you can discuss how this can be arranged with your Social worker.

Being in good health

Your health is really important and when you first come into care we need to know as much as possible about you so that we can make sure that you will be in the best of health. Your foster carer will make sure you have a local doctor (G.P.) and that you meet a doctor or nurse from time to time to check you are well.

Staying safe from harm

There are many ways in which young people can be harmed and your foster carers and social workers will work together with you, your family and anybody else involved in your care, to make sure that you are safe. You may have felt unsafe or been harmed before. Depending on how you were treated you may not feel confident or want to talk about it. Your foster carers, social workers and perhaps your teacher are people who want to listen to you and do something to make things better for you. They can help you to learn how to keep yourself safe.

Some things you can expect while in foster care are

- A good standard of food and clothing
- Regular visits from your social worker and a visit at any time that you reasonably request it
- Information about the plans that are being made for you
- Be involved in decisions about your future
- Be listened to and respected
- Be protected from harm, abuse, racism, bullying and discrimination

- Help to complain about the things you are unhappy about.
- Receive suitable education including help with homework and support to do well at school – and dependent upon your age being read to daily by the foster carers
- Have good health care and important advice that you need
- Have your individual needs met, for example having special time and attention spent on finding out how you are, and trying to get help for you if you have any special or different needs
- Some pocket money for you to choose to spend
- Appropriate leisure activities.

Who can answer the questions I might have about Foster Care?

It's natural that you will want to know lots of information. It is important that you are able to ask any questions that you have. Your foster carers will be able to answer some of your questions. If they are not able to answer, maybe they could make a note of them for you and get in touch with their or your social worker. Your social worker should be able to get the answer to many of your questions or they will find out the answers for you.



Having contact with my family and important people

Wherever you are living it is important that you are able to see your family and other important people. Usually this time is described by your social worker as 'contact'. The times you can have contact will usually be agreed between social workers, you and your family. There are different ways contact can happen and these include, by telephone, at your foster home, visits to a place called a 'contact centre' or being allowed to visit family members at home or elsewhere.

What does a Social Worker do and do I need a Social Worker?

All children and young people who are looked after by foster carers will have a social worker. A social worker is the person who supports you and helps to make the plans for what will happen to you. They will visit you and go to meetings with you, where plans are made about what happens next. This is called a 'care plan'. It is important to have a social worker who you can talk to about how you are feeling and explain the care plan to you.

My Social Worker's Name:

Contact Details:

My Foster Carer's SSW's Name

Contact Details:

My IRO's Name

Contact Details:

NB. This guide can also be produced in a format which is appropriate to the communication needs of children and young people who are unable to understand the version provided.