

Reminder

Who can I talk to and who can help?

Foster carer

Their telephone number:

Social worker

Their telephone number:

School teacher

Their telephone number:

Lewisham Council

Their main number: 020 8314 6000

Lewisham Council complaints: 020 8314 7435



MY GUIDE TO FOSTER CARE



If you have difficulty understanding this document in English please call the number below.

Për të marrë informacion mbi këtë dokument, ju lutemi telefononi numrin e mëposhtëm.

Albanian

Pour plus d'informations sur ce document, veuillez appeler le numéro ci-dessous.

French

更多有关本文件的信息，
请拨打如下电话。

Mandarin

Sidii aad u hesho macluumaad ku saabsan dokumentigaan fadlan soo wac lambarka hoos ku qoran.

Somali

இப் பத்திரத்திலுள்ள தகவல் தேவையானால் தயவுசெய்து கீழேயுள்ள எண்ணில் தொடர்புகொள்ளவும்.

Tamil

Bu doküman hakkında bilgi için lütfen aşağıdaki numarayı arayınız.

Turkish

Để biết thêm thông tin về tài liệu này, quý vị hãy gọi số điện thoại sau.

Vietnamese

020 7253 7700

Also call this number for other formats, including Braille, large print, audio tape, BSL or computer disc. Email: lewisham@pearllinguistics.com Typetalk 18001 020 7253 7700

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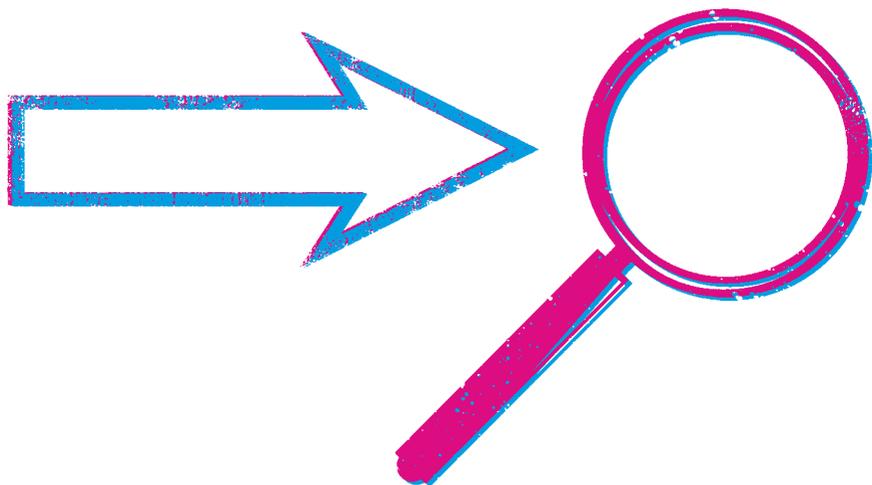
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Visit www.lewisham.gov.uk for all the latest news and information about your Council's services and job opportunities.



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Who is this booklet for?

If you are going to live with foster carers – or are already in foster care – then this booklet is for you.

It is a useful guide to your future in foster care. Keep it. Make good use of it.

So what's in my guide to foster care?

There is information about who is going to look after you and what happens next.

The booklet also explains how you can keep in touch with your family and what will happen about school.

It tells you how you can help us to get your care needs right.

What is foster care?

If you cannot live with the family you were born into, you may go and stay with another family. We call this going into foster care.

Thousands of children across the country are looked after in foster care. They can be any age. Some are only babies. Some go into foster care with relatives or friends of their family. Of course, all children are different, but many other children have been through the same things that you are going through now.

Let's meet two people who want to help – your social worker and your foster carer.

Tell me about my social worker

Social workers try to help children and families with serious problems. They will keep in contact with you as long as you are in foster care or are being 'looked after'. They will give advice and support. They will always make sure your views are heard and you know what is to happen next.

My social worker is:

I can contact

on:



Tell me about foster carers

They are people who look after children when they have to live away from home. Foster carers are specially trained and they have to be approved by the Council or by a fostering agency.

A fostering panel decides who should be foster carers. On the fostering panel are people who have looked after children themselves, social workers and others who have worked with children for a long time.

The panel meets to decide if those who want to be foster carers can do the job of looking after children properly.

Sometimes the panel helps match a child with the right foster family. This may be when fostering is to be for a long time.

Your foster carer will treat you as if you were part of their family. If there are other children in that family, they will be your foster brothers and foster sisters.

Why do children need to go into foster care?

All children need to grow up in a family with a parent, or parents who will love them and look after them. Parents should support their children all the time they are growing up.

But children can't always live with the families they were born into. Things can go wrong. Perhaps your parents are ill, or they have problems that make it difficult for them to look after you. Perhaps they even hurt you.

Sometimes going to live with a foster carer is called 'going into care' or being 'looked after'.

How can foster care work for me?

Many children find that spending time with foster carers can be good, even if they weren't sure about going in the first place.

You may be in foster care for a few weeks. You may be with foster carers for longer, for months or even years. It will all depend on what you and everyone involved with your care thinks is right for you.

To help us, we draw up a plan that sets out how we hope foster care will help you. This is called a care plan.

What is a care plan?

Your care plan is about your future – and you take part in making all the decisions. The care plan sets out how you should be cared for, how long you will be looked after and what extra help you may need. It explains how we can tackle your problems together. Make sure you talk about your care plan with your social worker and foster carer. Tell them what you think.

Getting ready for a new start

Going to live with foster carers can be hard at first. It's a big change. It may not be easy for you – you have to get used to your foster carer. They have to get used to having someone new in their home.

Everyone must help to make things work. That includes you as well as your foster carer.

Finding the right foster carer

Your social worker will do their best to find a foster carer and family where you will fit in and settle down well. Your foster carer and family should speak the same language as you do, respect the same religious celebrations and share a similar culture.

Moving in

Before you move to your foster carers, or as soon as possible after your move, you will take part in a meeting to talk about the day-to-day arrangements. This is called a placement meeting.

You will be there. So will your foster carer, your social worker and your birth parents. What food you like, where you go to school, if you have to take any medicines – all the details will be written down for you.

Usually, before you move in, you will visit your foster carer's home and meet everyone in the family living there. Sometimes this isn't possible – for instance, if you have to leave home quickly. But you will still be able to take things with you, such as your favourite toys, books and photographs.



Living away from home

Going to live with a foster carer is a big change.

Try not to worry if you think you don't fit in at first. That's how many children feel. If you can, try and talk to someone about it.

It isn't easy to live in someone else's house. Perhaps they do things in a different way. They may have rules you are not used to. Perhaps they eat at different times. They may not watch the TV programmes you are used to.

But your foster carer is there to look after you. She or he will make sure you have your meals, and help you get to school and back again. Your foster carer will be there to talk to you, watch television and play with you. They will treat you as part of their family.

Many children feel a bit scared about living away from home. If you are anxious about anything then remember to talk about your worries to someone. Your social worker and your foster carer are ready to help.

It's good to talk

Who will I talk to when I am living away from home?

Talk to your social worker, your foster carer, your teacher or any of us at Lewisham's Fostering Service if you have any worries or problems. We can all help – perhaps more than you think.

There may be things about your foster care that you are not happy about. For example, the rules set by your foster carer or the arrangements for meals or for going out on trips. If some things are not how you would like them to be then we will do our best to help improve them for you.

What if I am ill?

If you feel ill talk to your foster carer straight away. They will help.

When you first move in with your foster carer you will also go and see a doctor for a 'health assessment'. Your social worker may call this your 'medical'. The doctor will make sure you are well and healthy.

A health record will be filled in for you - and you will have another 'health assessment' every year, if you stay 'looked after'.

Remember, staying healthy is important for all of us. We can help ourselves by eating good food, taking part in games and exercise and by keeping clean.

My family

Can I keep in touch with my family while I am with my foster carer?

Usually you will be able to keep in touch with your family and friends – even if things have been difficult at home.

Living with foster carers does not mean you must lose touch. Talk to your social worker. If it is not possible for you to contact your family he or she will explain the reasons.

Everyone can keep in touch in their own way. You may want to see some of your family a lot – others you may like to meet up with now and then.

Perhaps you would prefer to talk to some of them on the phone.

Some you may not want to see at all.

Remember too that it's OK to get to like your foster carers. You don't love your own family any less and you can care for your carers and your family without having to choose between them.

The story of my life

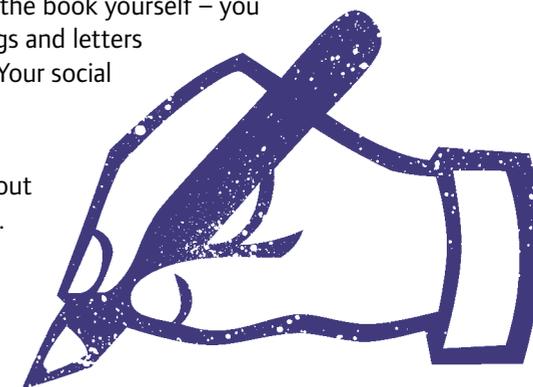
You and your life are the most important thing for your social worker, your foster carer and other people helping to make the best plans for your future.

So your social worker and foster carer will work with you on your life story – all about you, your family and everything that has happened to you.

What is a life story book?

Your life story book is your own special book and tells your story in pictures and in words. You will make the book yourself – you can put your own photographs, drawings and letters in it and write down special memories. Your social worker will help you.

Everything that matters to you can be included – and you can add in more about your stay in foster care as time goes on.



Going to school

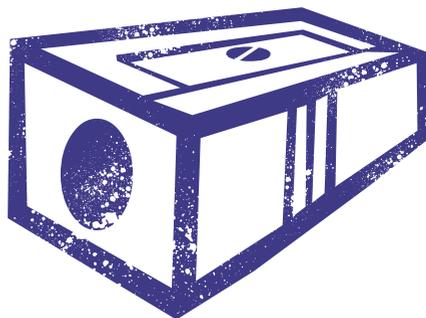
What will happen about school?

Your school and education are essential for your future and one of your foster carer's most important jobs is to be sure you can get to school and back again safely.

Remember, you spend a lot of time at school. You are the same as any other child – you may have problems at school that those who care for you and who look after you know nothing about.

If anything is worrying you, try to make sure you have someone you can talk to about it. Talk it through with a teacher, your foster carer, or social worker.

You should also tell your foster carer or your social worker about your worries. They may be able to help sort out school problems.



Planning my future

What can I do to make my life better?

Talk to people about how you feel and tell them what you want.

Get involved in planning for your future.

Think about getting an advocate – someone who can speak up for what you want. Your social worker will be able to give you more information about this.

If you don't have anyone close in your family to keep in touch with then ask about an independent visitor.

An independent visitor is someone who will come to talk to you who is not connected with your foster carer.

Many children and young people don't find it easy to talk about things. But when you're away from your family you may want to have someone you feel comfortable talking to.

Reviewing how you are getting on

While you are in foster care we will hold regular meetings to find out how you are getting on. These are called review meetings.

You will be invited along. Your parents, foster carers and your social worker should be there, perhaps your teacher from school as well. A person called an Independent Reviewing Officer will talk to you before the meeting, and encourage you to be there too. They will also ask you on your own if you have

any worries or complaints about where you are living, or who you are living with, or anything else that you might want to tell them – good and not so good. Their job is to make sure the review makes a good plan for you.

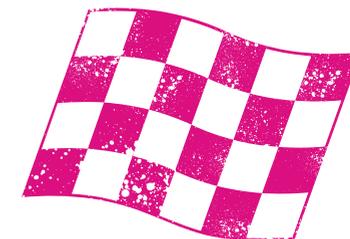
All the decisions will be written down in your care plan.

When fostering ends

Going to live with foster carers can be hard – it's a big change. But when you come to leave your foster carers it can be just as hard.

If you are going home to your parents you will plan the move with your social worker. First you will just go for visits. Then stay for a night. When your parents are able to look after you properly you will move back in with them. Your social worker will collect your clothes, toys, games, any new presents, photos and your life story book.

You will be able to keep in touch with your foster carer if you wish.



Useful things you should know about fostering

There are different foster care arrangements:

- short term – a few weeks or months
- short breaks – sometimes disabled children can take a break from home for a weekend or a week
- kinship – when your foster family is a relative or friend
- long term or permanent fostering – when children stay with a foster family until they are grown up.

How is fostering different from adoption?

If you are not able to go back to your family, your social worker may look for a family who will look after you until you are grown up. They will foster you long term.

If you can't go home to your family, the carers looking after you may want to adopt you. If that is agreed – and you will be asked about what you want – your carers will become your new legal parents. Then you will not be 'in care' or 'looked after' any more. But perhaps the foster carers will look after you until the right people who can look after you forever – adopt you – are found. You will be told about the plan, so you would know about this before it happened!

Who else makes fostering decisions?

Sometimes a judge in court will be asked to decide where you are to live and whether you should be 'looked after' in the care of Lewisham Council Children's Services – that includes your social worker and the Fostering Service.

The supervising social worker

The supervising social worker is the link person between your foster carer and the fostering service; and visits regularly to provide support and guidance.

What is a children's guardian?

A children's guardian tells the judge in court what you think about where you should live. The guardian has the job of finding out your views, your thoughts and your feelings – and making sure the judge hears about what you want.

How foster children can get more help

Who else can I have on my side if things are not going well?

When you have problems, when things are not going right for you – get in touch with your social worker:

.....

If they are not available to help, you can speak to:

.....

who also works for Lewisham Children's Social Care. The telephone number is:

Tel:.....



Can I talk to someone who is not from the Council?

Yes. We understand that you may still want to call in someone else – an independent advocate – to help you. Your advocate will not work for our fostering team or for Lewisham Council.

You can talk to someone at:

Lewisham Children's Rights Service

Freephone: 0800 169 3762

You can also talk to:

National Youth Advocacy Service

Freephone: 0800 616 101

Children's Legal Centre

Telephone: 01206 873 820

Website: www.childrenslegalcentre.com



What if I still have worries and problems with fostering

We will do the best that we can to help but you may still have problems. You may even want to make a complaint.

First, make sure you tell your social worker how you feel. Then you can talk to us at the Council. You can make a complaint to

Lewisham Children's Social Care

Their telephone number is: 020 8314 7435,

or email talk2us@lewisham.gov.uk

They will send you a leaflet that tells you exactly how you can make your complaint and what we will do to help.

An organisation called Ofsted checks the work of fostering. They have a dedicated website for children and young people. This is also the website for the Children's Rights Director who will also listen to any complaints you may have.

You can contact them on:

Telephone: 0800 528 0731

Website: www.rights4me.org.uk

Address: Ofsted, Aviation House, 125 Kingsway, London WC2B 6SE