

My fostering guide



About fostering

The fostering service aims to provide foster carers to care for children and young people who are not able to live with their own parents for any length of time. Going to live with a foster family is sometimes called “going into care” or “being looked after”. This booklet will give you some more information about what to expect. We will always try to listen to your wishes and feelings and there are more details at the back of this booklet about what to do if you are unhappy.

Why are children and young people fostered?

There are lots of different reasons why children and young people are fostered. Sometimes parents ask for help because they feel they are struggling to look after their children in the best way and sometimes a court decides that a young person would be safer if they were not living at home. Some young people travel to the UK from abroad without their family and need to be cared for until they are adults.

What is a foster family?

Children and young people who cannot live with their own family for any reason may go and live in a foster home. You may live with your foster carer for a short time or it may become your permanent home. Some children and young people may move into their foster home with their brothers and sisters and others may live with relatives or friends of the family.

All foster homes are different. Some have one adult and some have two. They may have their own children or be looking after other children. Your foster carer will look after you and take good care of you. Along with your social worker, your foster carer will make sure you are healthy and safe and will help you go to school.

Your foster carer has had special training so you receive the best possible care.

What is a social worker?

All children and young people living with a foster carer have their own social worker. Your social worker works for Lewisham Council and is specially trained to support you and your family.

How will you find the right foster family for me?

Your social worker will do their best to find you a family that's right for you, where you will fit in and settle down well. We may not be able to do that straight away and you may be placed with one family for a few days who will look after you until the most suitable home is found.

We understand that your culture and religion are important and will always try and place you with a family that understands your background and beliefs.



Going to live with a foster carer

Your social worker will take you to meet your new foster carer. You will be shown around the home. It may feel all a bit strange and different to start with, but your foster carer will help you settle in. Like any house there will be rules about things such as doing your schoolwork, watching TV, staying up late, times for you to be in by, what time dinner is and other things. It may take a little while to get used to the rules but slowly 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 good food and clean clothes to wear.

You will always have:

- A bedroom, either on your own or with your own brothers or sisters
- Your own cosy bed
- Space to put your things
- Toiletries such as shampoo, creams, soap, body lotion and wash kit
- Space to be able to meet your Social Worker, Children's Right's Officer or Solicitor
- Pocket money
- A chance to celebrate your birthday and religious festivals, such as Christmas, Diwali or Eid.
- 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
- Any help you need with your education or training.

In your foster home you will have personal belongings

You can bring your own clothes and other personal belongings with you when you come into care and your social worker will make sure you have an appropriate bag or suitcase to move things. If you're not sure about bringing something, then please ask!

It is a good idea to let your foster carer know if you have anything that is valuable or really special, so they can help you look after it.

Your life story

Your foster carer or social worker will encourage you to understand your own life story. This could be in a special book about you, your family, what has happened to you and all the important things about you. In this book you could put photographs and drawings and write about anyone and anything that you want to remember. The book would be yours to keep and treasure because it would be about you and would help you understand why things happened.

Who can I talk to

What you share with your social worker will help to make the best plans for you. Once your foster carer has been identified, there will be plenty of time to get to know each other.

- Remember that YOU are very important.
- You will be part of the decision making so you can always ask your social worker if you feel your views are not being listened to.
- This might be a difficult time. You may feel scared, upset or angry about everything that has happened.
- Many children or young people will feel like this. Just try to talk through your feelings. You can ask questions about what's happening as many times as you need. Your foster carer, social worker or someone else you trust will do their best to answer you.

If there are things that have happened to you in your family that you want to talk to someone about, remember there are people that will listen to you. If you say that someone has harmed you or hurt you, your foster carer or social worker will want to make sure that this does not happen again.

At the end of this booklet, there is a list of telephone numbers that you can ring to talk to and somebody who will listen to you and give you help over the telephone. Sometimes the decision is made that you will not be able to go back to your family, your social worker may start looking for a permanent family for you, with whom you can stay until you are grown up.

What happens if you are not happy with the foster family?

If you are unhappy living with your foster carer, you should tell your social worker or another adult you can trust. It can take a while to feel settled in a new home, particularly if you have a lot of other things going on. Your social worker is there to help you sort out your feelings and help work out any difficulties. If you don't want to meet in your foster home, ask to meet somewhere else, like a café or park.

What is a care plan?

Your care plan is written information that says how you should be cared for and describes your future plans. 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.

You will have a placement meeting before you go to the placement, or within five days of you going to live with your foster family. At the placement meeting, many things about you will be shared, for example the food you like, any medicines you have to take or information about your school. This information will all be included in the care plan to try and make sure you are looked after as well as possible.

Your care plan is updated at review meetings. At review meetings, you, your parents, foster carers and social workers all get together to look at the plans for while you are living with your foster carers. It is important that you share how you feel about all the plans being made for you.

The first review meeting will take place when you have been living in foster care for four weeks. Three months later, there will be another meeting and if everything is going well, they will then take place every six months. The person chairing the meeting is called the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) and they will make sure that everyone, especially you, has a chance to say what you think. You can ask someone else to give your views if you don't want to.

What is an Independent Reviewing Officer?

An Independent Reviewing Officer is the person with responsibility for chairing and being in charge of reviews. It is their job to make sure that your views are heard, and that the Care Plan is in your best interest.

At the end of a review meeting, the Independent Reviewing Officer will make a number of decisions, which are aimed at supporting you and planning for your future.

What about school?

If it's the best thing for you, we will try and make sure you can stay at the same school. Your social worker, foster carer and one teacher from your school will work with you and develop a Personal Education Plan (or PEP for short). Your PEP will show what you are doing well at school and if there are any areas where you need extra help. Your PEP also gives you a great opportunity to say what sports, music and drama or other after-school clubs you would like to be involved in.

Will I see my family again?

Living with a foster carer does not usually mean that you won't see your family. Social workers call the times when children visit their family "contact". You may have contact with your parents and also with grandparents, your extended family and friends. Visits, phone calls, emails and letters are all different ways you will be able to keep in touch and your foster carer will help you do this.

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 discuss with you what is happening and will always listen to your wishes and feelings.

Staying healthy

When you move in with your foster carer, you will be offered a health assessment with a doctor, to make sure you are healthy and well. You will then be offered a health assessment once a year with a nurse or a doctor if you prefer. You will also go to the dentist and optician regularly.

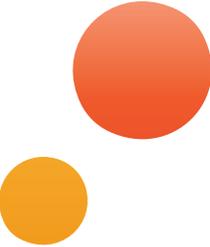
Going home

If your care plan says that you are going home, you will have the chance to talk about how this makes you feel and work out any concerns you have. You will be able to take home your things, including any new belongings you have been given and your life-story book.

Your social worker will visit you at home to make sure everything is going well and will be able to support you to resettle back in your family.



Complaints and representations



Making a complaint

Sometimes we make a mistake or things go wrong. Our aim is to discuss any concerns or worries you may have and by working together, resolve any problems. There may be times when this does not work and you remain unhappy about a particular situation.

All carers, children and young people have the right to complain and parents can also complain on behalf of children and young people.

If you would like to make a complaint ask your social worker to give you a leaflet explaining the process.

Independent visitors and children's rights

All children and young people who are not in regular contact with a parent, or a person who has parental responsibility, should be given the opportunity to obtain the support of an independent visitor.

An independent visitor is someone who does not work for the Council and will get to know you by visiting you. It will give you an opportunity to spend time with someone outside of the Council, who you can speak to and share achievements, as well as concerns.

The Advocacy Service

Lewisham Council provides an advocacy service from Croham who can help children and young people to say what they feel and provide advice independent of the Council.

SFC Croham 0800 093 2012

They can:

- Let you know your rights
- Give you information
- Help with complaints
- Help you have your say
- Come to meetings with you
- Help you sort out what you want

Children's Commissioner for England

Anne Longfield is the Children's Commissioner for England. The Children's Commissioner promotes the rights of children and young people in England.

General enquiries: 0844 800 9113
www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

or write to:

Office of the Children's Commissioner,
33 Greycoat Street,
London SW1P 2QF

Children in Care Council

Are you interested in learning more about the Children in Care Council where children and young people in care talk about what matters to them?

Have you seen the Lewisham's Pledge to Children in Care stating what you can expect from the Council?

Denzil Bell, Participation Manager 020 8314 7215

Who Cares?

This is a special service that gives help and advice to any child or young person who is being looked after or has been looked after.

You can call them free on 020 7251 3117 on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays (3.30–6pm).

Website: www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk

ChildLine

This is the free 24-hour helpline for children and young people in the UK.

You can call the Helpline on Tel: 0800 1111 about any problem, at any time – day or night. ChildLine's counsellors are there to help you find ways to sort things out.

ChildLine is confidential – which means they won't tell anyone about your call unless you want them to talk to somebody for you, or you are in danger.

Website: www.childline.org.uk

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

If you are having a bad time at home, being bullied at school, or if you are worried about something you can ring the NSPCC for free on 0800 800 5000

Website: www.nspcc.org.uk

Kooth

Online chat. Get real time help with friendly, qualified counsellors.

www.kooth.com

Metro Centre

email: youth@metrocentreonline.org

tel: 020 8305 5000 ext 138

website: www.metrocentreonline.org





My Notes

Social worker's name:

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Social worker telephone number:

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Foster carer's name:

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Foster carer's telephone number:

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My Independent Reviewing Officer is:

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IRO telephone number:

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Other important people:

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We hope you found this booklet helpful. If there is anything that you did not understand or you want to find out more about, please talk to your social worker.

Produced in conjunction with the CICC