

YOUNG PERSON'S GUIDE



Hi

This is a guide to fostering and it is for you to keep safe and use.

It explains what being in foster care means and how FosterCare UK foster carers will look after you. Foster carers and your social worker are there to make sure that you will be safe and that good plans are made for you. Your foster carer and your own social worker will talk to you about what is happening to you and will always want to know what you are thinking and feeling.

If there is anything you don't understand in this booklet please ask your foster carer.

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This guide forms part of the Statement of Purpose of FosterCare UK and if you would like a copy of this document, please ask your foster carer.

What is FosterCare UK?

FosterCare UK is an independent fostering agency that works in partnership with local authorities to find the best foster homes for children and young people.

All our foster carers work for us because of their genuine concern for the well being of children and young people.

Each foster carer is assessed and constantly supported, trained and monitored to ensure the best possible care for you. Our foster carers come from a wide range of religious, cultural and economic backgrounds.

What is a fostering panel?

The panel is made up of an independent foster carer, a young person (just like you who has been in foster care or perhaps a children's home before), a doctor or medical advisor, an education professional like a teacher, some managers from FosterCare UK and some other members who work for other organisations like BAAF and Fostering Network. They are usually men and women from different cultures where possible. The panel is managed by a chairperson to ensure that the meetings are kept on time and all the decisions are agreed and noted.

Foster care is also called being 'looked after' or being 'fostered'.

What is foster care?

Foster care is when you go to live with a foster family because you can't live with your own family.

Sometimes parents cannot look after you because they are unwell or have problems and need time to get better. Or they may have hurt you and this is wrong and needs to be sorted out.

You may feel very confused, upset and worried about what is happening but you need to know that you have done nothing wrong. Your foster carer and social worker know this and will talk to you about what is happening, why it is happening and they will try to help you understand.





“ If you don't want to see your family you can probably stay in touch by telephone, letters and email. Your social worker and foster carer can help you with this. ”

When can I go home?

This depends on the reasons you are in foster care. You could be in foster care overnight, one week or several months.

Your social worker will need to be sure that when you return home you will be safe and well and it would be in your very best interest. If everyone (including you) agrees that you can go home, plans will be made for you to return. These plans are usually made at meetings called Reviews (see page 14). Sometimes it is better to have overnight stays, or weekend visits at home before you return permanently.

What if I can't go home?

Your local authority, through your social worker, will find you carers who can look after you as part of a family for a longer time.

At FosterCare UK we always try to keep young people with families that will reflect who you are: your culture, ethnicity (your particular cultural group sometimes called racial origin) and religion are all different parts of what makes you, so we try and match you with foster carers who can give you a positive experience of family life. All families are different and have

different rules. Rules in foster families are there to protect all young people.

Examples of rules are: time to come home, looking after your room, going to school or college, helping out in the house and respecting other ethnicities, religion and cultures.

Sometimes it can be too difficult for a young person to live as part of a foster family. In this case great consideration will be given to other places that may be able to meet your needs; this might be a children's home for a little while.

What if I don't like my foster family?

This can be a very difficult and confusing time. You might find that you do not like your foster family because they do things differently from your family, or because you miss your family but you will probably come to like your foster family as you get to know them better.

If you are finding it hard to get on with your foster family, you must talk to them, tell them how you feel and see if you can agree on some changes that will make life better. They want you to be happy and feel part of the family, so everyone has to work together to help make things better. You should always talk to your social worker about your feelings as they will be able to help you and your foster carer talk through any problems.

You can also talk to an independent advocate – this is someone who does not work for the local authority. The organisation below can help you find an independent advocate.

How to tell people things are not right

Your foster family is chosen very carefully and they're given training on how to look after you. However, if you are really unhappy about where you are living or anything else, you should speak to your social worker. You may be feeling quite muddled in your head about leaving your birth family, moving to a new place and perhaps moving to a new school and trying to make new friends.

If talking to your social worker doesn't help and you are still unhappy they can help you make a complaint. Making a complaint is very serious so it's really important you've tried your best to work things out with your foster carer and your social worker first. If this is not helpful you can ask to speak to your social worker's boss or the Children's Rights Service at your local authority.

If your social worker makes a complaint for you but you think it was not taken seriously enough, you can make a complaint yourself by writing to Ofsted, which is the organisation that registers and checks the work that fostering agencies do is to a high standard.

Make a complaint to:

Ofsted
Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA
Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Other useful contacts:

VOICE
Free phone: 08088 005 792
Email: info@vcc-uki.org

National Youth Advocacy Service
Free phone: 0800 616 101
Email: help@nyas.net

Children's Legal Centre
Telephone: 01206 873 820

Is it just me?

No – At least 40,000 children and young people in the UK are in foster care so you are not the only one. Research shows that 1 in 3 people have some connection to fostering – that's about 20 million people!

Some people might tease you about being fostered, but it's really important that you don't worry about it – there is nothing strange or wrong about being fostered and it's a lot more common than many people realise. If people are bullying you or saying hurtful things about you or your family because you're in foster care, make sure you tell someone about it so they can help stop it. There are also lots of websites and help lines that can give you advice on how to deal with it – check out the ones listed at the end of the booklet.

Can I go to the same school?

If it's possible for you stay at the same school, your social worker will sort out how you will get from your foster home to school and back each day. Sometimes it's not possible to stay at the same school. If this is the case, your social worker will find another school for you. Changing schools can be stressful, so make sure you talk to your foster carer and social worker if you have any worries or if anyone is bullying you or you just need to talk about it.

There will also be a teacher at your school called a 'designated teacher' whose job it is to help you sort out any problems you might have. Make sure you know who they are and speak to them about any problems or worries – it's their job to help you.

Remember, this might be a difficult time for you, but there are lots of people who want to help you – make sure you talk to them about what's going on and how you're feeling.

You may also be slightly behind with your school work so FosterCare UK will also provide a tutor for you. This person is like a teacher but will visit your home once a week and help you in some subjects that you are perhaps finding difficult. This is different to school as the tutor will work with you on your own, which will hopefully make you feel quite special.

My designated teacher is:

Who decides what happens to me?

You, your parents, your foster carer and your social worker will have review meetings to decide what is best for you but everyone has to listen to how you are feeling and what you want as well.

Sometimes it might feel like other people are deciding what's going to happen to you, but they are there to try and help you. You will be asked to come to these meetings but if you don't feel comfortable telling people how you feel, talk to your social worker and they will explain to everyone else how you feel. Or you can get someone completely independent to speak for you – they are called an 'independent advocate'.

What happens at a review meeting?

At the review meeting, what has happened in the past, what's happening now, and what's the best thing to happen in the future will be discussed. From this discussion your care plan will be decided. You can decide who you would like to be at a review like a teacher or tutor for example. Your first review meeting happens when you have

been in foster care for up to 4 weeks. The next meeting happens up to 3 months after that, and then they will take place every six months, at least. This is good as records are taken at each meeting and the chairperson is there to make sure that all stuff that was agreed is happening or going to happen soon.

What is a care plan?

This is a plan to set out what will happen while you're in foster care and explains things like where you will live and where you will go to school. Arrangements to see your family and how you can keep in contact with them, only if you wish to, will also be made at this meeting. Your health needs and educational needs are also discussed. See information on education and health plans (below). Your care plan will be reviewed at each review meeting, so if you're not happy with something, make sure you say so at the meeting, or get your social worker or independent advocate to, or write it down.

What is an educational plan?

Now that you are looked after by your local authority you will have your own personal education plan, known as a PEP. This will be made at school with you, your teacher, your foster carer, your social worker and parent (if appropriate) present. Each school has a designated teacher with special responsibility for children who are looked after. Your education is important and your foster carer and social worker will support you to do well.

What is a health plan?

When you move in with your foster family, you'll see a doctor for a check up. If the doctor says you need any medicine or anything else to stay healthy, this will be explained in your health plan. Many young people in foster care arrive with medical problems so don't worry. Your foster carer will be sympathetic and will want to help you if you let them.

Do I have to go to a court?

Not everyone needs to go to court. If this is the only way you can be kept safe and have your needs met your social worker will apply to the court for you to be 'looked after' by your local council.

You probably won't have to go there yourself as people like your social worker and a guardian appointed by the court will talk to the judge for you, so make sure you let them know how you feel. After they have gone to court they will tell you what the judge decided so you understand what's happening. If you have to go to court for another matter, your social worker will explain what's going to happen and will answer any questions you might have.

There are lots of people who want to help you, so make sure you talk to them! Ask your social worker or foster carer to help you with this.

By talking things through with your foster carer, your social worker, and with your family, you'll not only feel better but you'll also help them understand you better. And by listening to their point of view as well, you can all work together to find ways to make life easier.

What if I feel sad or lonely?

Expressing your emotions is very important but there are good ways to express yourself (talking to a friend, listening to or making music or writing a journal) and some not so good ways (like yelling at someone or smashing things). Talking to someone about how you feel won't make the feelings go away but it will make you feel a lot better, and it will help other people understand you better as well.

Who can I talk to about this?

There are lots of people you can talk to about how you're feeling – you could talk to your foster carer, to your social worker, your friends, your family or to a teacher/tutor. There are also special phone lines you can call to talk to someone about how you're feeling. They can give advice on all kinds of things, are confidential, and they are free to call – have a look at the ones listed at the end of this booklet.

At FosterCare UK we also have counsellors and therapists that work with young people.

Organisations that can help me

There are lots of organisations that can help you while you're in foster care. Some of them have phone lines you can call if you want to talk to someone about how you're feeling, and some of them have websites with games and information. **Check out some of these organisations:**

Who Cares Trust

The Who Cares Trust has a website for young people called Oi, with lots of information and advice on being in foster care.

Phone: 0207 251 3117

Email: mailbox@thewhocarestrust.co.uk
www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk

Childline

Childline run a 24 hour helpline for you to talk about any problem, day or night. They also have a website, which has a special section for you to deal with things like bullying.

Free phone: 0800 1111

www.childline.org.uk

NSPCC

Call the NSPCC's free 24 hour helpline to talk about any kind of problem. You can also email for advice and they will reply within 24 hours. Or you can visit the NSPCC's site for young people, which includes lots of info about all sorts of problems.

Free phone: 0800 800 500

Email: help@nspcc.org.uk

www.worriedneed2talk.org.uk

National Youth Advocacy Service

For free advice and info for young people, including free legal advice, you can call the National Youth Advocacy Service. They will also send an independent advocate (someone who is not your foster carer or social worker) to court or meetings to speak for you or to help you make a complaint.

Free phone: 0800 616 101

Email: help@nyas.net

www.nyas.net

VOICE

You can call or email them if you would like an independent advocate to help you make a complaint or to speak for you in meetings or at court.

Free phone: 0800 800 5972

Email: info@voiceyp.org

Text message to: 07773 334555

www.voiceyp.org

Some blank pages for you and your stuff



My stuff

Name

Nickname

Date of birth

Address

.....

.....

.....

.....

Mobile

Email

School

Best subject

Worst subject

Best teacher

Least favourite teacher

Favourite sport

My social worker contact details

My independent reviewing officer contact details

My designated teacher details

Emergency duty team details



Contact our head office:

FosterCare UK Limited • Home Farm
Betteshanger • Kent • CT14 0NT

Tel: 0844 800 1941 • **Fax:** 01304 619018

Email: enquiries@fostercareuk.co.uk

Website: www.fostercareuk.co.uk

Whether you prefer to write,
email, or telephone us,
we will always be ready to listen.



mosaicappeals.com



FosterCare UK's Mosaic Appeal is an exciting fundraising venture for Make-a-Wish Foundation. We have created a digital mosaic complete with 600 tiles, and we are now inviting you to help grant magical wishes to children and young people fighting life-threatening illnesses by buying a virtual tile. Please visit: www.makeawish.mosaicappeal.com.



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