

A Young Persons Guide to Foster Care



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 own Social Worker may also have given you a guide as well.

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This guide forms part of the Statement of Purpose of FosterCare UK to which you would have received as part of your Information Pack.

What is FosterCare UK?

FosterCare UK is an independent fostering service that works in partnership with local authorities. We recruit foster carers and then support them and their families to care for looked after children.

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.

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 cultural backgrounds. The panel is managed by a Chairperson to ensure that the meetings are kept on time and all the decisions are agreed and noted.

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.

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



If you are in care for more than a year we will help you with your life story book. which will record all the important things that happen to you while you are in foster care.



Why did I have to be fostered?

There are lots of reasons why young people are fostered. Sometimes when a parent is ill, it is not possible to be looked after at home. Or people who either live in your house, or who visit your home may have harmed you. Or there has been a misunderstanding between yourself and a parent.

Whatever the reason, Social Workers from your local authority (the area in which you live) have agreed it is better for you not to live at home.


Firstly the local authority will always try to see if there are other relatives or friends that can look after you before agreeing to you being looked after in foster care. Your Local Authority will then have asked FosterCare UK if they have foster carers that would be able to meet your needs.

During this time your Social Worker and others will be working very hard to try and sort out the problems at home. This may need many meetings with other people e.g. Teachers and other Social Workers as well as members of your family but you will always be asked about what you think and feel too.



When can I see my family?

Your Social Worker will help you keep in touch with your family. If there are people you want to see, like grandparents or friends, tell your foster carer or Social Worker and they will try to make arrangements. Keeping in contact with your family might be upsetting but if everyone agrees it's good for you to see them and you want to, you will be able to.



When can I go home?

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

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 18). 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's on page 11 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 own 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 services do.

Make a complaint to:

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

Other useful contacts:

VOICE

Free phone: 08088 005 792
Email: info@voiceyp.org

National Youth Advocacy Service

Free phone: 0800 616 101
Text to: 0777 333 4555
Email: help@nyas.net

Children's Legal Centre

Telephone: 0808 802 0008

How to make comments and complaints

FosterCare UK wants to make sure that your comments and any complaints you might have are heard and addressed. You may also want to pass on compliments or good news about being with FosterCare UK.

What you may want to comment or complain about

You may have comments, compliments or complaints to make about a range of issues, perhaps including your foster carer, your social worker, the contact you have with your family, a decision made by FosterCare UK or a decision made at your review. You might just want to tell someone when things are going well or you may want to thank someone for the help they have given you.

Comments/Questions

- Any question about your foster placement or the plans that are being made for you should be addressed to your social worker or your FosterCare UK Supervising Social Worker (SSW) first.
- If the social worker doesn't have the answers immediately they will speak to their Centre Manager and will let you know the answers as soon as possible
- Your own social worker or your FosterCare UKSSW can also pass on any comments or thank the person concerned for you

Complaints

Complaints are dealt with in different ways, depending on what it is you wish to complain about.

This might include a problem with your own social worker, contact arrangements with your family or a decision made at your review.

The chart on the next page shows you what to do if your complaint is about a decision that has been made by your Local Authority

Stage one

- To talk to your Local Authority social worker or the social worker's manager
- Hopefully, your social worker will sort out any complaint you may have, but if you are not happy with the answers you get, you can use your Local Authority's Complaints Procedure. Your foster carer can help you do this

Stage two

- If you don't want to use the Local Authority Complaints Procedure at this stage, you can speak to your foster carer's SSW who visits you and your carer. They will write down your complaint and will give you a copy so you can check they've understood your concerns
- Your FosterCare UK SSW will then try to sort out the problem by talking to your social worker. If the problem can't be sorted out this way, your FosterCare UK SSW will arrange a meeting with all the people involved

Stage three

- If, after the meeting, you are still not happy with the way that people have dealt with your complaint, you may feel it is time to use the complaints procedure offered by your Local Authority. FosterCare UK can help you do this
- We can also contact organisations such as Voice to see if they can offer you additional support in dealing with your complaint. You might also want to contact them directly (see the contact details on page 22)

How to make comments and complaints

This chart shows you what to do if your complaint relates to the care you are receiving in your foster home, problems with your foster family, decision made by your foster carer or something FosterCare UK has done.

You can also speak to your foster carer or FosterCare UK Supervising Social Worker (SSW) during their visits. You may feel that you want to tell your social worker or you may choose to tell someone else you can trust, such as a teacher or a friend, who can then pass your complaint to FosterCare UK.

These are three stages in helping you sort out your complaints:

Stage one

- Either you or the person you have told about your complaint need to tell someone at FosterCare UK
- If we suspect that you or another young person is being harmed, or is likely to be harmed, we have to tell your social worker straight away and we have to have a meeting to make sure that everyone is going to be safe
- Otherwise, we will try to sort out your complaint as soon as possible
- If your complaint can't be sorted out immediately and is more complicated then we might need to have a meeting between you, the FosterCare UK Supervising Social worker and your foster carer if appropriate, If you are still not happy, you can ask for your complaint to be looked at again by the Registered Manager of FosterCare UK

Stage two

- The Registered Manager will either help you write your complaint down or you can tell them what you are not happy about and they can write it down for you
- They will then talk to you and any other people involved and try to solve your problem. They will write to you to let you know their findings, what they've found out and what they suggest to solve the problem
- If you are not happy with the decision made, this will then go to Stage three

Stage three

- If you still feel the problem had not been sorted out, you can ask for a group of three people to meet. This is called a 'review panel'. They will look at the issues involved, but will not reinvestigate the complaint or consider any new matters that may have been raised
- If you want the panel to look at your complaint, you need to let FosterCareUK know within 28 days of speaking to the Registered Manager. You may want to ask an adult you trust to help you write down your feelings
- The panel will write to you when it has met to let you know what it has decided

Is it just me?

No – at least 63,000 children and young people in the UK live with almost 55,000 foster families 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 on page 22.





My Designated
Teacher is:

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.

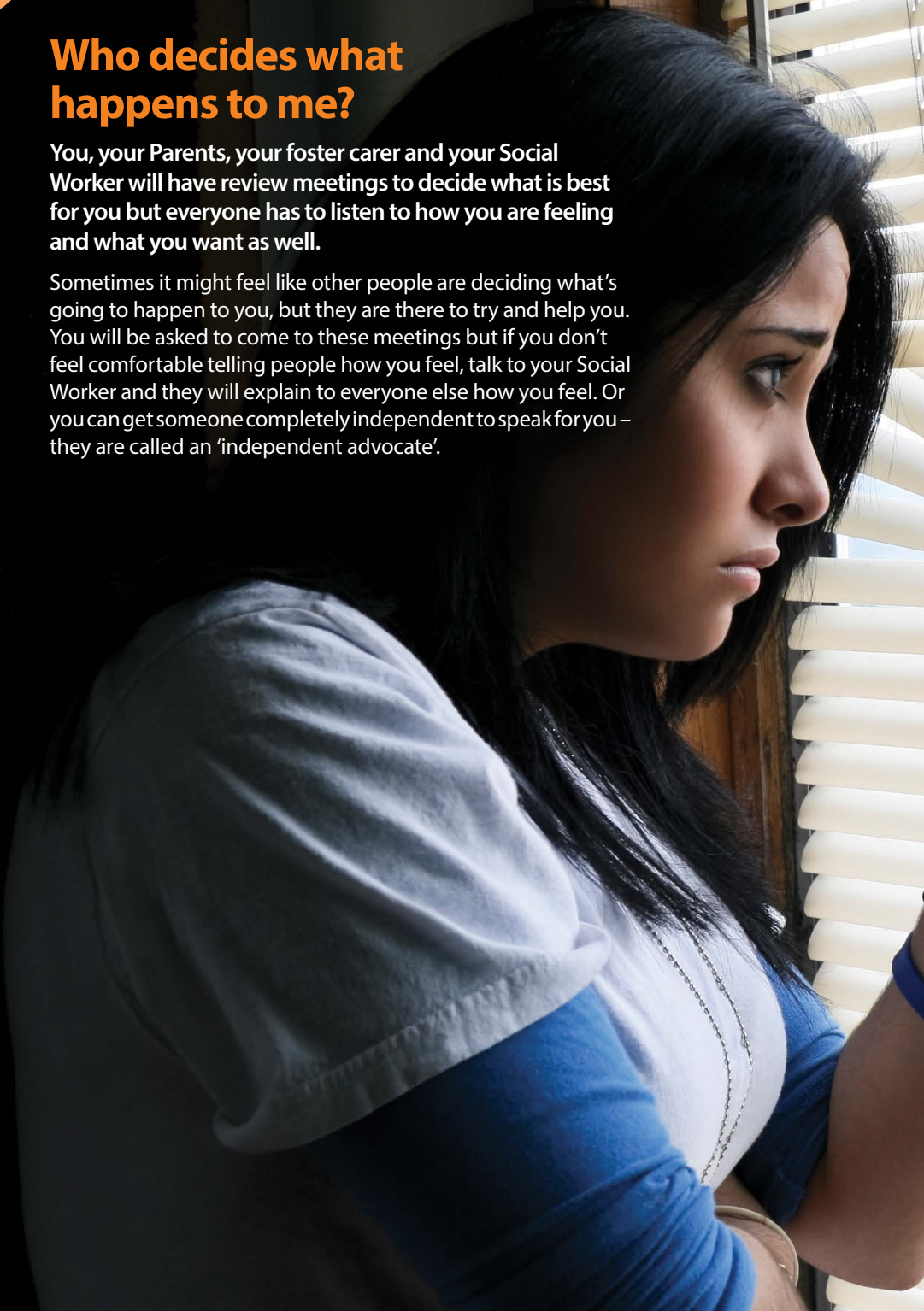
There will also be a teacher at your school called a 'Designated Teacher' whose job it is to help you sort out any problems you might have. Make sure you know who they are and speak to them about any problems or worries – it's their job to help you.


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.

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 Authority.

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.

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, smashing things or running away). 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 on page 22.



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.



A close-up portrait of a young person with light skin, numerous freckles, and green eyes. Their hair is blonde and slightly messy. The image is the background for the page, with two circular callouts overlaid on it.

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.

At FosterCare UK we also have counsellors and therapists that work with young people to better understand how you are feeling.

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:

Ofsted

(Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills)

Phone: 08456 014 772

Email: nbucie@ofsted.gov.uk

or enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Children's Commissioner for England

Phone: 0844 800 9113

Email: info.request@11MILLION.org.uk

www.11million.org.uk

The Children's Rights Director for England

Free phone: 0800 528 0731

(Email through website)

www.rights4me.org

Who Cares Trust

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 pages for you and your stuff

Name

Nickname

Date of birth

Address

Mobile

Email

School

Subject I like best

Subject I don't really like

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

Preparing for your review

What would you like to talk about in your review? This form may help you write down things you want to bring up at your meeting.



A large, rounded rectangular box with a thick orange border, designed for writing. It contains 20 horizontal lines, providing space for the user to list items they want to discuss during their review meeting.

My notes:

A large white rectangular area with rounded corners and an orange border, containing horizontal lines for writing notes. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the area.



Contact

London Centre

FosterCare UK Ltd
 Airport House Business
 Centre, Airport House
 Purley Way
 Croydon CR0 0XZ
T: 020 8226 6654

Kent Centre

FosterCare UK Ltd
 Newbury House
 Court Lodge Farm
 Hinxhill, Ashford
 Kent TN25 5NR
T: 01233 210668

Sussex Centre

FosterCare UK Ltd
 Basepoint Centre
 Little High Street
 Shoreham-by-Sea
 BN43 5EG
T: 0844 800 1941

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-  fostercareuk.co.uk
-  [@FosterCare_UK](https://twitter.com/FosterCare_UK)
-  [WeAreFosterCareUK](https://www.facebook.com/WeAreFosterCareUK)



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