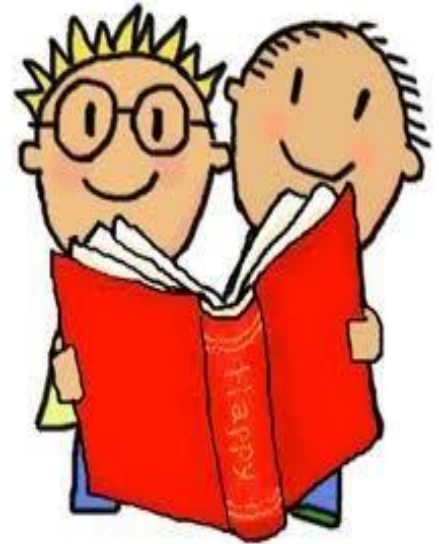
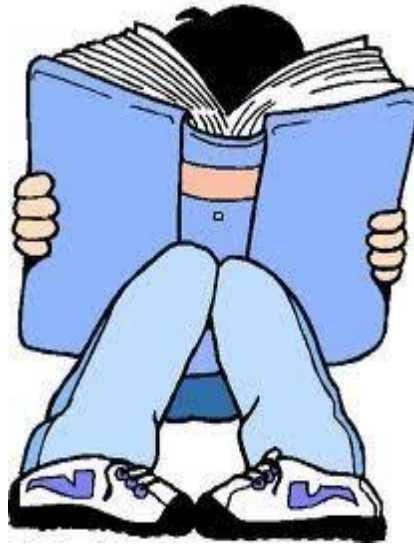


## A Childs Guide to Foster Care



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## ABOUT FOSTER CARE

We hope this booklet will help you find out about foster care and the people who want to help you while you are in foster care. It tells you about (a) foster care (b) who you can talk to, and (c) who you can talk to if you are unhappy, or if you have questions.

If you want to know about anything that is not in this book you can ask your foster carers or your Social Worker. 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.

## WHAT IS FOSTER CARE?

Children go into foster care when they cannot live with their mum and dad. When you are in foster care, you go and live with a foster carer. Foster carers are special people who have time and space in their homes to take care of children who cannot stay with their own families. Some children are fostered by people they know like relatives or friends of the family. In other words for being in foster care are 'being looked after' or 'in care'.

## IS IT JUST ME?

No – At least 56,500 children and young people in the England 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.

# Children have the right...

to be  
protected  
from conflict,  
cruelty,  
exploitation  
and neglect...



## OUR AIM

Our aim is to create the best opportunities for you. If possible we will arrange for you and your family to visit the foster carers before the placement starts. Sometimes you might be able to see some of your family even if you can't see everyone at once. We do understand that you will want to keep in touch and your carers will let you phone and have a visit whenever your Social Worker and your family say this is ok. We think this means:

- ❖ Keeping you healthy
- ❖ Keeping you safe
- ❖ Helping you with school
- ❖ Letting you have fun and enjoying being you
- ❖ Staying in touch with people you care about
- ❖ Making new friends
- ❖ Asking what you think - and listening to you
- ❖ Helping you stay out of trouble
- ❖ Helping you grow up

We want you to tell us how we can do this better. We hope you will contact us if you want to. Use the phone numbers at the end of this booklet if you want to contact us.

## WHY AM I IN FOSTER CARE?

All children need a grown-up to look after them and a happy and safe place to live. Sometimes some mum and dads cannot provide this. This is when children have to go and live with a foster carer. You can talk to your Social Worker about the reasons why you weren't able to live at home.

**and the responsibility...**

not to bully  
or harm each  
other.



## WHAT WILL MY FOSTER CARER BE LIKE?

There are many different types of foster carer. Some foster carers live by themselves, others are married, some have children and some may have pets. Your Social Worker will tell you all about your foster carers before you go and live with them.

## WHAT WILL IT BE LIKE LIVING WITH MY FOSTER CARER?

It is a foster carer's job to look after you and keep you safe in a warm, clean house. They will make you feel like a part of their family for as long as you live with them. Your foster carer will make sure that you:

- ❖ have your own bed to sleep in
- ❖ have somewhere to keep your belongings safe
- ❖ have enough healthy food to eat
- ❖ have clean clothes to wear
- ❖ can take you to see a Doctor if you are poorly
- ❖ attend school, if you are old enough to go to school
- ❖ can go to a church or other place of worship, if you want to
- ❖ receive pocket money (if you are old enough).

A Social Worker will take you to your foster carer's home where you will meet everyone who lives there. Your foster carer will show you around the house and show you where you will sleep. You will be able to bring your clothes, books, toys and other special things with you. The foster carers will have certain rules in their home. These will be about keeping you safe or making sure that everyone in the house gets on together. Examples of rules might be about watching TV, staying up late, doing schoolwork or what time dinner is.

**Children have the right...**

to be loved  
and  
respected...



## HOW LONG WILL I BE IN FOSTER CARE?

This depends on what is best for you. Some children live with foster carers only for a few days, but some children may live with them for a few years. You could talk to your Social Worker about how long you might be in foster care.

While you are living with your foster carers a Social Worker will help your parents to try and make it possible for you to go back and live with them again. If you go back home to your family you will no longer be in foster care.

## FAMILY AND FRIENDS

While you are in foster care, it will be normal for you to miss your mum, dad, brothers, sisters, grandparents and friends. Most children will be able to keep in contact with these people while you are in foster care. Your Social Worker will make plans for you to do this.

When you see your family or friends it is called contact. You and your Social Worker can plan your contact and arrange how often and where you will see your family and friends. Sometimes your Social Worker will accompany you on contact to make sure that you are safe.

If you don't see your parents you may be able to keep in touch by writing letters, sending emails, texting or making a telephone call. If you feel worried or frightened about seeing someone in your family you should always tell your foster carer or Social Worker.

and the responsibility...

to show love  
and respect  
to others.



## CAN I GO TO THE SAME SCHOOL?

Your Social Worker will try and make sure that you can stay at the same school. If it is not possible for you to stay at this school, your Social Worker will find another one 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. Your Social Worker will sort out how you will get from your foster home to school and back each day. At school you will have a Personal Education Plan. This plan will make sure that you get any help that is needed while you are at school.

Your teacher will know that you have gone to live with a foster carer, but you do not have to tell other people if you don't want to. If you have any problems, are finding things difficult or if you are being bullied because you are in care you must tell your teacher, your Social Worker or foster carer.

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.

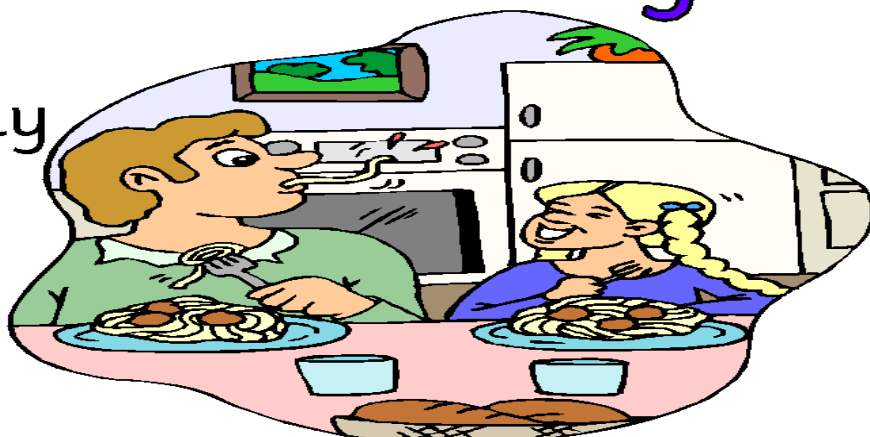
## HEALTH

It is important that you grow up strong and healthy, so your Social Worker and foster carer will make sure that you can see a Doctor, Dentist or Optician if you need one. You will have a Personal Health Plan, which will make sure that all your health needs are met.

Your foster carer will give you healthy food that is good for you and encourage you to take regular exercise.

**Children have the right...**

to be  
adequately  
fed...



## MEETINGS

When you first come into foster care everybody who is involved in looking after and keeping you safe gets together to make plans for your future. They will talk about where you will live, who you will live with, going to school and seeing your family. Your Social Worker writes down everything that is discussed about how you will be cared for.

This is called a care plan. If you want you can ask your Social Worker for a copy of your care plan. This meeting is called a review. Reviews will continue as long as you are looked after. In a review they will see how you are getting on with your foster family and whether you should stay with them or move to a new home. They will also look at how you are getting on in school and whether you need extra help.

These reviews are all about YOU, so if you want you can go to these meetings to say how you feel and what you would like to happen. If you don't want to talk at the meetings you could write down your feelings or ask someone to talk on your behalf.

## WHEN CAN I SEE MY FAMILY AGAIN?

This is a very important question but the answer is not the same for everyone. Your Social Worker will talk to you and your family about arrangements for you to see them. Your foster carers will help with this as much as they can.

If your parents are able to look after you again and will be able to keep you safe, you may go back home to live with them again. You will be able to take all your clothes, books, toys or special things home with you too. Your Social Worker will still come to see you when you have moved back home to make sure that everything is ok and that you are happy.

Sometimes people get upset if they can't see their family or if they don't know what plans are being made. Everyone understands that you want to know what plans are being made. We will try to find out what is happening as soon as we possibly can.

**and the responsibility...**

not to waste  
food.



## ACTIVITIES AND HOLIDAYS

General leisure activities within and outside the home will be encouraged, arranged and supported by foster carers. If you have any interests or hobbies, i.e. collecting models, magazines, etc. These will be actively encouraged and supported. If you are a member of a youth club or any regular club, i.e. judo, swimming, football, dance, team, out of school club etc. These again will be encouraged. Holidays must not be taken in term times unless permission is granted under special circumstances. Please do not book your holidays without consulting your Social Worker.

## WILL I BE ABLE TO DO ANYTHING I WANT?

Probably not. Your foster carers have to promise to keep you safe. That means they might not always let you do what you want to. Everywhere has rules. There are rules about how we treat each other, rules about listening to each other, rules about keeping safe and taking care.

Sometimes there are rules about not going in other peoples rooms or about looking after the home. There could be rules like, no shoes in the lounge or no running around at teatime. This is because these make things better for everyone. Older kids will have rules about going out and what time you come in. Having rules doesn't mean your carers don't want you to have fun, because they do. They just want to keep you safe as well.

## BULLYING

Bullying includes such things as: threats, name calling, pinching, hitting, pulling hair or other types of physical intimidation or action which deliberately upsets you. If you feel that you are being bullied at school please talk to a teacher you like. You can always phone or talk to your Social Worker about school or life in your foster home. If you are still not happy ask your foster carer for a complaints form.

# Children have the right...

to relax, play  
and join in a  
wide range of  
activities...





If you feel that you are being bullied, please tell your foster carer or teacher or Social Worker. They can be supportive and sensitive and there are other agencies that might be able to help; e.g. NSPCC Child Protection Helpline on 0808 800 5000 or email [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk).

## ALLOWANCES

You are entitled to pocket money – the amount will be agreed between you, your foster carer and your Social Worker. You are entitled to a clothing allowance – the amount changes according to how old you are. Your foster carer will discuss these allowances with you.

## 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.

## GOING OUT

Depending on your age you may have to be supervised when going out on an activity. However, foster carers would like to know where you are going and what time you intend to return. Foster carers will often go out with you to keep you safe

**and the responsibility...**

to include everyone in their games and activities.



## COMING IN TIMES

These will be arranged with your foster carer, later times can be arranged for particular activities.

## WHAT DO I CALL MY FOSTER CARERS?

This is something you can talk about with your foster carers because they know that it can feel strange living with new people. They certainly won't expect you to call them mum and dad, but you can decide with them what works best.

## BEDROOMS

Whilst living in your foster carer's house, you will be given your own room if possible. You will be responsible for helping to keep your own room tidy. You can use your bedroom to be on your own and have your own space and personal possessions. However, there will still be times when foster carers will need to go in your room. Before entering, foster carers will knock on the door. You should not go into other people's bedrooms. Music and Televisions in bedrooms needs to be kept at a level which does not disturb other people.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU DO SOMETHING WRONG?

During your stay in foster care it may be felt necessary to use some form of consequences due to not so good behaviour. This may take the form of grounding, telling off, the stopping of leisure activities, additional household chores and sanctions for deliberate damage or misusing of money or goods.

More information about this will be shared with you by foster carer according to the Foster Carers Safe Care Policy.



## 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.

## 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 manager.

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.

**and the responsibility...**  
to learn from  
their mistakes.



## IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM

If you have a problem, or are not happy with something you should always tell somebody like your Social Worker, your foster carer or your teacher and they may be able to solve it.

If you don't want to talk to your Social Worker, foster carer or teacher about your problem there is someone whose job it is to listen to you and help you. This person is called the Children's Rights Officer. The Children's Rights Officer is there to help your voice to be heard. They can tell you about your rights, listen to what you want to say, attend meetings with you or on your behalf, support you in making a complaint and make sure that any questions you have are answered.

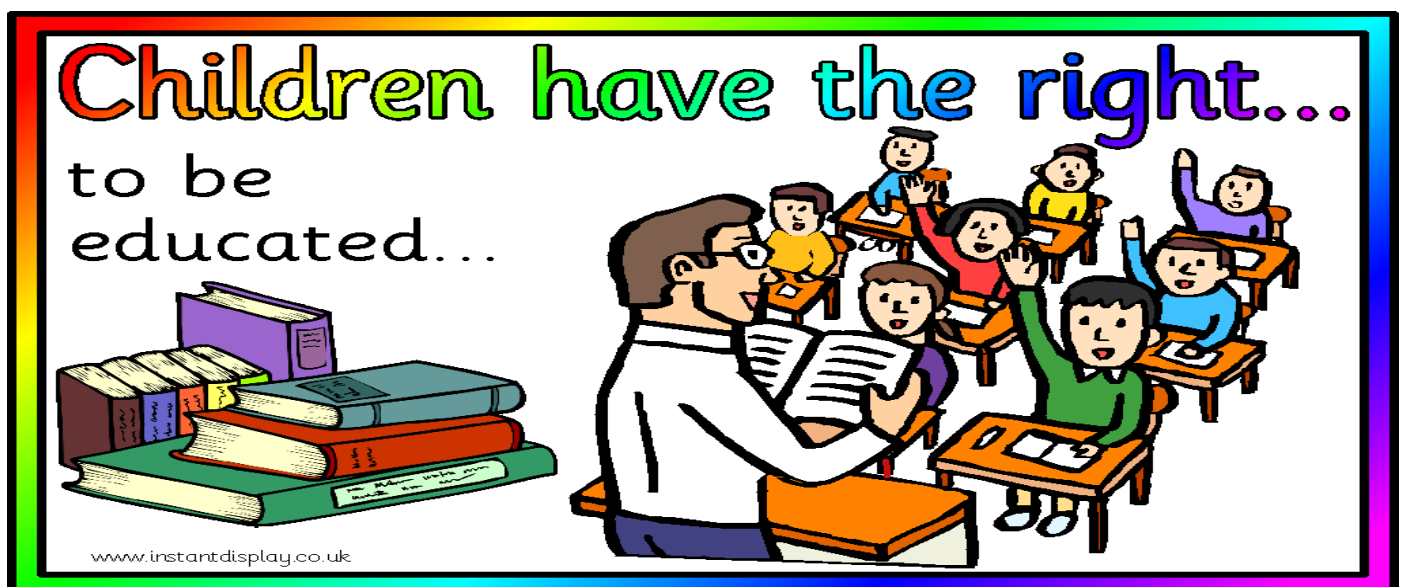
You can also contact your Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). If you do not know who is your IRO, check with your Social Worker who will help you in getting in touch with the IRO.

## ORGANISATIONS THAT CAN HELP YOU

There are 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:

### 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](http://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. Alternatively, you can visit the NSPCC's site for young people, which includes lots of info about all sorts of problems.

Free phone: 0808 800 5000

Email: [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)

Website: [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

## Coram Voice

You can contact the Coram Voice Advocacy Helpline 0808 800 5792,

Email: [info@coramvoice.org.uk](mailto:info@coramvoice.org.uk)

## OFSTED

Piccadilly Gate Store Street

Manchester - M1 2WD Tel: 0300 123 1231, Email: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

## Office of the Children's Rights Director

OFSTED, 33 Kingsway, London, WC2B 6SE

Free phone: 0800 528 0731, [www.rights4me.org](http://www.rights4me.org)

# and the responsibility...

to learn as  
much as they  
can and help  
others to  
learn.



## Action for Children Independent Complaints and Representation Service

0500 564570

### Voice of the Child in Care

0808 800 5792, [www.voiceyp.org](http://www.voiceyp.org) (free advice for any child in care needing support or wanting to make a complaint)

Helpline for children living away from home 0800 884444

### HOW TO CONTACT US

If you would like to talk to us at anytime you can do so by:



020 82525252



020 82202020



SHARED CARE SERVICES LTD

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[fostering@sharedcare.co.uk](mailto:fostering@sharedcare.co.uk)

Information can be made available in other languages, or other formats such as Braille or Audio Tape, on request. Please ask a member of our staff for more information, or if you need any other help or advice. They can arrange to speak to you in your own language if you need them to.