

Children and young people's **Guide to being in care**



Being in care

Being in care or being looked after means you are not living with your parents. There could be lots of reasons for this: there could be family problems, one or both of your parents might be ill and cannot look after you, or you are a young asylum seeker and your parents and family live in another country.

You may live with a foster family or in a children's home. In this guide we will give you some information about being in care and things that you might want to know. There is also a lot more information available on our children in care council website cicc.essex.gov.uk. If you have a smart phone you can create a short-cut to the website so you can access it easily when you want to.



cicc.essex.gov.uk

What is foster care?

Some foster carers look after children and young people for a few days, over weekends or school holidays and this is called short breaks care (also called ‘respite care’). Other foster carers provide a home until you are an adult – it all depends on what your individual needs are. Some of you may be living with people you already knew as a family member or friend. This is called family and friends care.

Foster carers have lots of checks and are assessed before they can be approved as foster carers. They have a supervising social worker who supports them to help the children and young people they look after. The supervising social worker will visit regularly to see how things are going; they might look around the house including the bedrooms to make sure it is a good and safe place to live in.

More information about the fostering service is available in something called the ‘Statement of Purpose’. It tells you about how fostering services are organised and about the training and support that is given to foster carers to make sure they have all they need to look after you in the best way possible. If you want to see a copy of it your foster carers and/or your supervising social worker can show you.

Being with a foster carer might feel tough, but your foster carer will try and make you feel welcome and will help you with all the things you want or need to do, such as getting you to school, taking you to clubs and groups, and making sure you are healthy.

What is a children's home?

A children's home is where a group of young people live together. There are members of staff on duty to look after you. Their job is to support you and encourage you with things like hobbies and school. You will have your own bedroom where you can put your personal things and make it special to you.

You should also receive a Young Person's Guide or Handbook which will tell you more about the home. You may have received this before moving in but if you haven't got one ask a member of staff or your social worker.

At the children's home you should have a key worker. If you want to make a note of their name you can put it below.



My key worker is:

Who's who

You will come across a number of people during your time in care. For example, Social Worker, Independent Reviewing Officer, Supervising Social Worker, Personal Advisor, Advocate, Designated Looked After Children's Nurse. There is more information about all of these and more on the children in care council website.

All children in care have a social worker who is responsible for making sure you are happy and well. They will visit you regularly and also come to any important meetings involving you. Make sure you know how to get in touch with your social worker as you may want to talk to them between the times they have arranged to visit you.

Social Workers name:

Social Workers contact details

Phone:

Email:

You will also have review meetings with someone who is called an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), they should see you on your own as well as at the meeting and their job is to listen to you and to make sure your care plan is working for you. You can also contact them between your reviews so make sure you have their contact details also.

Independent Reviewing Officers name

Independent Reviewing Officers contact details

Phone:

Email:

Being involved with decisions

You have the right to be involved in decisions about your life and will be invited to different meetings to discuss this. You don't have to attend these meetings, but remember they are for you, your views are very important as decisions are made at these meetings about your care and what will happen in future. If you are not sure what a meeting is or want to know more about what a meeting is for, talk to your social worker, foster carer or a member of staff.

There is also more information on the children in care council website about meetings e.g. your Review and Personal Education Plans (PEP).

Do I have to wait for a meeting to get things sorted?

No, if you need to get something sorted or are worried about anything, you can contact your social worker and IRO at any time for advice and support.



Family and friends

Staying in touch with family and friends

While you are in care you will be helped to stay in touch with your family and friends where possible. Your social worker will make a contact plan, which says when and how this will happen. The plan could include seeing them face to face, telephone calls or letters. This plan will be discussed with you at meetings with your social worker, the Placement Planning Meeting and in your Reviews.

Staying with friends

If you are invited to stay overnight at a friend's house, first you need check with your foster carer or a member of staff where you live. If they are happy for you to stay at your friends, they can give you permission. If they are not sure, they can ask your social worker about it. If you are not allowed to stay at your friends, you should always be told the reasons why.



Moving to independence

As you get older, you will be starting to think more about your future. This might make you feel excited or nervous or both. Don't worry, your social worker will help you with any concerns you may have and will help you with your plans. This could mean helping you look for a job, stay in college or go to university.

They will also help you become more independent, which could mean staying in foster care, moving into supported lodgings, back with your parents or into your own place.

When you turn 17 you will get support from someone called a personal advisor. They will continue to support you until you are 21 (or 25 if you stay in education) and will help you with your work or education, finding a home, budgeting and anything else you might need to know.

You can also get help from specialists in leaving care who can help you with important things like your money, housing and your health. If you think you need some extra help, speak to your social worker or personal advisor.



School and education

Most children and young people who come into care will stay at the same school. Sometimes you might change to a school that is nearer and easier to get to. If this happens, everyone will make sure that you are asked what you want and will help you with the changes.

The people who look after you will help you get to school or college and even help where they can with your homework! They will also go to your school open evenings, plays and sports days.

More information about school and education is available on the children in care council website where you can find out more about the following:

- What a designated teacher is.
- Personal Education Plan (PEP).
- Leaving care.
- Going to university.
- The Virtual School.



Staying healthy

Health checks and chats

While you are in care you will get the medical and dental treatment you need. You will also be invited to an annual 'health chat' with a designated nurse, to make sure you are fit and well.

If you are having problems with any relationship then do talk to your foster carer or a member of staff. They can also help with advice around sex and contraception; don't be afraid to ask.

Your carers can't give you permission to smoke, drink or take drugs while you are living with them. They have to abide by the law too! They are also expected to help you stay healthy. If you would like help and advice about smoking, drugs or alcohol there are a number of people you could talk to. For example your carers, social worker, doctor or school nurse. There is also a useful website you can look at which is called to Talk to Frank: www.talktofrank.com



Your rights

There are certain ways you should be treated no matter what; these are called your 'rights'. You have the right:

- To be kept safe, secure and protected.
- For adults to listen to you and treat you fairly and equally.
- To information and advice, health care and help with your education.
- To an advocate to help you if you want to make a complaint.
- To enjoy your own culture and religion.
- If you have a disability you have the right to any help you need.
- To know why you are in care and when you can see your family and friends.



In Essex we have something called The Essex Pledge which is made up of 5 promises. In it we promise to do our best:

- To do everything we can to make you feel cared about, valued and respected as an individual.
- To make sure you have a social care worker who will spend time with you and get to know you.
- To make sure you have opportunities to achieve and succeed.
- To help you keep in touch with your family, brothers and sisters and friends when you come into care.
- To involve you in decision-making so your views are listened to and to explain when we make a decision you may not like or agree with.

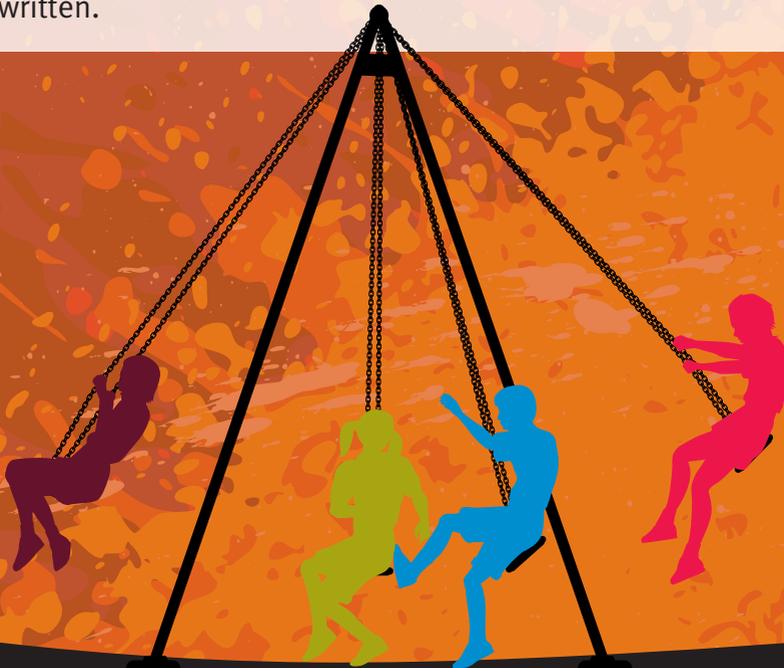
If you think that someone is taking away your rights or that we are not sticking to our promises then let your social worker, foster carer or independent reviewing officer know. You can also contact the customer care team and you can find out how to contact them later on in this guide.



Seeing your file

We all have records held by social care that contain information about us, for example, why we are in care and discussions we have had with our social workers. You can see your file and what is written in it. It is best to talk to someone about this before you do it as there may be information in there which is difficult for you as well as more helpful information.

- If you want to see your file you can ask your social worker to arrange this for you or;
- You can write to: Transparency Team PO Box 11, County Hall, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1LX.
- There is no charge for providing you with copies of your information.
- The Authority has to provide you with the information within 40 days.
- You also have a right to add your own views about what is written.



Help and advice

There may be times when you feel hurt, worried or upset and things seem to be going wrong. If this happens, it's really important to tell someone how you're feeling, this could be anyone that you trust, friends, family, a member of staff, your foster carer or social worker. If you don't have any one to talk to there are people and organisations that can help you.

Need help to tell people what you want?

An independent advocate may also be able to help you get your voice heard in decision-making meetings like your Review or help to you to make a complaint if you are unhappy about something. To find out more about getting an advocate, contact the Essex Advocacy Service run by the children's charity,

Barnardo's:

- Email: essexadvocacyservice@Barnardos.org.uk
- Telephone: 0800 652 4546 calls will cost from a mobile phone

The Children's Commissioner has a website with useful information and advice on. You can talk to one of the team and ask them for advice and help.

Their website address is: www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk
The website also gives you the opportunity to ask your own questions as well as giving answers to some already asked.

Helpline for children in care: **0800 528 0731**

Help at Hand email address:

help.team@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

Childline has a website that you can look at which has lots of useful information on. You can also talk to someone online from there (it works like instant messenger).

The website is www.childline.org.uk or you can phone them on **0800 1111**

Complaints and Compliments: If there is something you want to complain about, comment on, or make a compliment, the Customer Care Team are there to help you.

You can contact them if you have a comment, complaint or compliment about anything to do with your social worker or being in care, they will listen to what you have to say and will help you to sort out the problem where they can.

They can be contacted by:

- Email: haveyoursay@essex.gov.uk
- Tel: **03330 139817**

Or you can complete the 'Have Your Say' form online. Your foster carer should also have a copy of the 'Have Your Say' form, or you can get one from your social worker or a member of staff.

These can be posted to:
Customer Services,
Essex County Council,
PO Box 11,
County Hall,
Chelmsford CM1 1QH



Bullying

No one has the right to bully you, whether you are in care, or not!

Bullying can happen by: being threatened, name calling, pinching, hitting, pulling hair or doing anything that is meant to upset someone. This can also include cyber bullying which means bullying by text, BBM or writing things on facebook or other social networking sites.

Bullying can happen anywhere; at school, at home or when you are out with friends.

If you are ever bullied, there are people you can talk to:

- Your teacher at school.
- Your foster carer.
- A member of staff or your social worker.
- Contact Childline on 0800 11 11.



Running away

If you are feeling unhappy or unsettled, sometimes you might feel the only thing to do is run away, but it doesn't make things better or help to sort things out! If you are feeling like this, it's really important to tell someone how you're feeling, this could be anyone that you trust, friends, family, a member of staff, your foster carer or social worker.

You can also contact

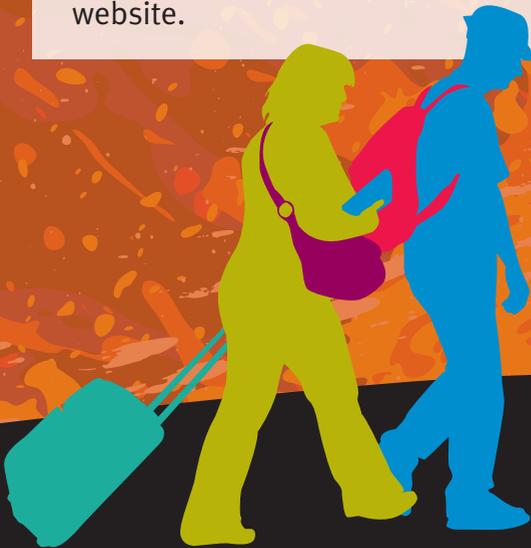
Child line: 0800 1111

Missing People – Call or Text 116 000

Email: 116000@missingpeople.org.uk

What happens if I run away?

If you do run away or go missing, your carers will have to tell the Police and your social worker and certain information has to be given to them. They will also want to see you when you return and will offer you the chance to talk to someone independent. For more information about what would happen if you go missing is available on the children in care council website.



Ofsted

This is a government organisation and part of their role is to make sure that Essex County Council are doing all they can to make sure you are looked after properly. Sometimes they come and do an inspection and will talk to social workers, managers, foster carers and others who are involved in making sure you are well cared for. They also like to get your views and they will sometimes send you a questionnaire to fill in. You might also be asked if you want to talk to an inspector when they visit. They like to hear from children and young people as your views are very important. You can also contact them if you would like to.

Their address is:

Ofsted,

Piccadilly Gate,

Store Street,

Manchester, M1 2WD

Telephone: 0300 123 1231

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk





This information is issued by:
Essex County Council
Fostering Service

Contact us:
adoptionandfostering@essex.gov.uk
www.essex.gov.uk/fostering
0800 801530

Fostering, Essex House,
200 The Crescent,
Colchester Business Park,
Colchester, Essex CO4 9YQ

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formats, on request.

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