

A guide to fostering

for children and young people

11 - 18 years

The logo for Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, featuring the word "Dudley" in a large, white, sans-serif font with a white swoosh above it, and "Metropolitan Borough Council" in a smaller, white, sans-serif font below it.

Dudley
Metropolitan Borough Council



What it is and what it means for you

The fostering team aims to provide families to care for children and young people who are not able to live with their own parents. This may be for just a few weeks or a new permanent home. 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. More details are available in the statement of purpose. If you would like to see this please ask your social worker. 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.

What is a foster family?

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

All foster families are different. Some have one adult and some have two. They may have their own children or be looking after other children.

Your foster family will look after you and take good care of you, along with your social worker, your foster family will make sure you are healthy and safe.

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

What is a social worker?

All children and young people living in a foster family have their own social worker. Your social worker works for Dudley 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 place you in a family where they think you will fit in and settle down well. We do our best to find a family that's right for you. You may be placed with a family for a few days until a more suitable home is found. We understand that your culture and religion are important and will always try to place you with a family that understands your background and beliefs.



Going to live with a foster family

Your social worker will take you to meet your new foster family and you will be shown around the house. It may feel a bit strange and different to start with, but your foster family 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 many 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 about your day and they will make sure that you have nice food and clean clothes to wear.

In your foster home you will have:

- a bedroom either on your own or shared with your brothers or sisters
- your own cosy bed
- space to put your things
- toiletries
- 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 (e.g. Christmas, Diwali, Eid)
- fair and respectful parenting
- someone to listen to your feelings and hopes and be interested in you
- support to help stay in touch with friends and family
- help with your education or training if needed

Personal belongings

You can bring your own clothes and other personal belongings with you when you leave your home and your social worker will make sure you have a proper bag or suitcase to move things. If you're not sure about bringing something, then just 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 your own special book about you, your family, what has happened to you and all the important things about you. You can put in photographs, drawings, and write about anyone and anything that you want to remember. This book is your keepsake because it is about you and will help you remember and understand why things happened.

Talking about how you feel and what you want

What you share with your social worker will help them to make the best plans for you. Once your foster family has been found 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 speak to 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 what has happened
- Many children and young people will feel like this. Just try to talk about 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

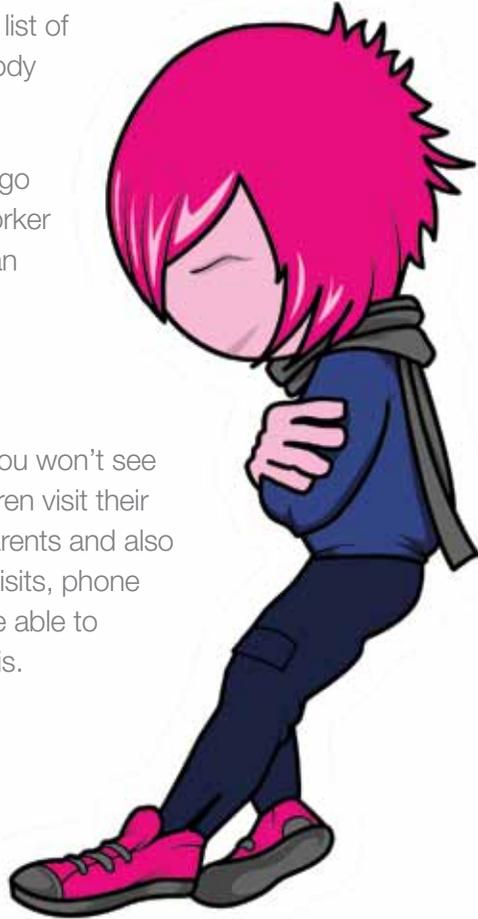
If there are things that have happened to you in your family that you want to talk to someone about, remember there are people there to listen. If you say that someone has harmed or hurt you, your foster carer or social worker will want to make sure that this does not happen again. At the end of this booklet, there is a list of telephone numbers that you can ring to talk to somebody who will listen to you and give you help.

Sometimes it is decided that children won't be able to go back to live with their family. If this happens a social worker may start looking for a permanent family where they can stay until they are grown up.

Will I see my family again?

Living with a foster family does not usually mean that you won't see your family. Social workers refer to the time when children visit their family as '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 family 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.



What about school?

If it's best for you, we will try to make sure you 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 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.

Staying healthy

When you move in with your foster family you will be offered a health assessment with a doctor to make sure you are healthy and well. You will then have a health assessment once a year with a nurse, or a doctor, if you prefer. You will also have regular check ups with a dentist and optician.

Going home

If your care plan says that you will be going home to your family, 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 your things with you, including any new stuff 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 help you if not.

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

If you are unhappy living with your foster family, 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 live with a foster family, or within five days of you going to live with. 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 also 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 your stay with your foster carers. It is important that you say how you feel about all the plans being made for you.

The first review meeting will take place four weeks after you move in with your foster family. Three months later there will be another meeting and if everything is going well they will then take place every six months.

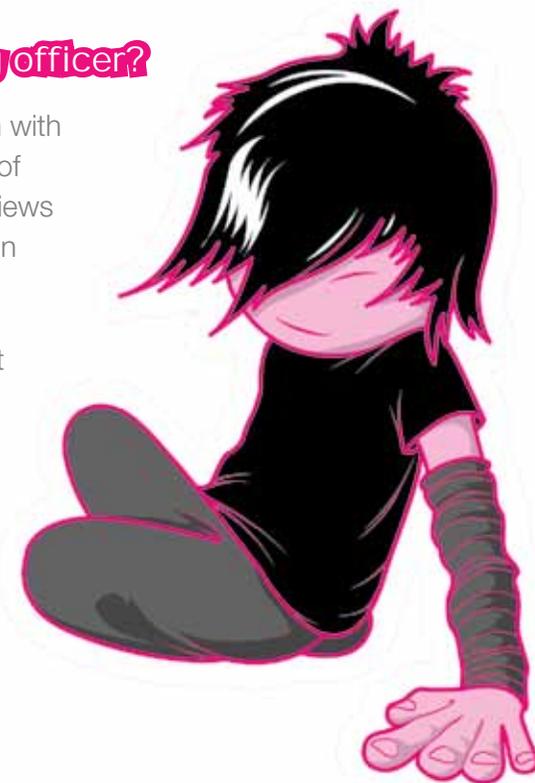
The person in charge of the meeting is called the independent reviewing officer (IRO) and they will make sure that everyone, especially you, has a chance to say what you think. If you don't want to talk at the meeting you can ask someone else to talk for you.

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 being listened to 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.

You can contact the independent reviewing officer who has responsibility for chairing the review meeting by calling 01384 813061.



Complaints and representations

Sometimes we make mistakes 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 the situation.

All carers, children and young people have the right to complain if they are not happy about something 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 help you or contact our **Compliments and Complaints Section (01384 814723)** who can guide you through the process. Alternatively your social worker can give you a leaflet explaining the process.

Independent visitors, advocates and children's rights

All children and young people who are not in regular contact with one of their parents or anyone with 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 visit you to find out more about 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 with.

If you are not happy with the way the social worker or anyone else has been handling your foster placement, you can make a complaint to the children's rights director.

Information on how to do this is in the Rights4me section are on the next page.

Independent visitors, advocates and children's rights

Dudley Council provide an advocacy service from the Black Country Advocacy Service who can help children and young people to say what they feel and provide advice independent of Dudley Council. If you want to get some advice, support or information you can contact the Black Country Advocacy service on the number below.

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

Tel: 01902 877563 or e-mail: bca.referral@childrenssociety.org.uk

Ofsted

This is the organisation responsible for inspecting fostering services and making sure we are doing what we should do in running our fostering service.

As part of their inspection process they will interview some foster carers and children and young people. Carers and children and young people can also contact Ofsted at any time at:

**Royal Exchange Buildings, St Ann's Square, Manchester M2 7LA
08456 014772 / 404040**

Rights4me

Rights4me is part of Ofsted especially designed for children and young people.

They can be called free on:

0800 528 0731

Office of the children's rights director

Ofsted

125 Kingsway

London

WC2B 6SE

www.rights4me.org

Children's Commissioner for England

Maggie Atkinson is the Children's Commissioner for England. The role of the Children's Commissioner is to promote the views of children and young people from birth to 18 years (up to 21 for young people in care or with mental health problems).

General enquiries: 0844 800 9113

www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/

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?

01384 817673

email : melanine.fincher@dudley.gov.uk

Children's Legal Centre

The CLC will provide you with legal advice.

Telephone: 08088 020008

www.childrenlegalcentre.com

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 free on:

0800 800 5000

www.nspcc.org.uk



If you require a translation of this booklet into another language or a copy in another format such as large print or audio tape, please call 01384 815833.



www.dudley.gov.uk/fostering