

Coming into Care

A booklet for children and young people
in Derbyshire



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Welcome

You are probably reading this because you have recently become ‘looked after’ by the local authority. This can be a really difficult time when you might be feeling sad, angry, confused, or actually pleased that things may begin to change for the better.

Your social worker should have explained to you about why you’re currently not able to live at home and why you’re being ‘looked after’. If you haven’t had this explained or still feel confused you can talk to your carers, social worker, independent reviewing officer or someone else you trust.

Your social worker may give you a copy of their ‘**one page profile**’ with this booklet so you can find out all about them. The independent reviewing officer and your foster carers may also provide you with one about them with their contact details, so you can get to know everyone involved.

You may have a lot of questions about your situation, this booklet aims to answer some of those questions and provide you with details of people you can contact.

If you’re struggling with reading and understanding this booklet, please ask someone you can trust to help you.

All About me...

My Name:	.....
Age:	.....
Birthday:	.....
Height:	.....
Shoe size:	.....
Eye colour:	.....
Hair colour:	.....
Religion (if you have one):	.....
Festivals that I celebrate:	.....
Favourite colour:	.....
Favourite foods:	.....
Foods I don't like:	.....
Favourite film:	.....
Favourite TV show:	.....
Favourite music:	.....
Hobbies:	.....
Address:	.....
Phone number:	.....

My Social worker:

Name

Phone number

Text

Email address

In an emergency call

Their manager's name

Number

My Independent reviewing officer (IRO):

Name

Phone number

Text

Their manager's name

Number

Other people involved in my care:

Name

Role

Phone number

Text

Their manager's name

Number

Name

Role

Phone number

Text

Their manager's name

Number



So what does it mean to be ‘looked after’ by the Local Authority?

For many different reasons, some children and young people can’t live with their parents and the local authority becomes involved.

They make sure there is somewhere safe for you to live and that there is someone to look after you. When this happens the children and young people are said to be ‘in care’ or ‘looked after’.

Is it forever?

The time that you spend in care is different for everyone. Your social worker will explain to you what is happening. They will ask you how you are feeling and what you would like to happen in the future.

All the adults in your life will be working together to decide what is best for you, this could mean going back home, staying where you are or moving to another carer.

What is a social worker?

Every young person in care gets a social worker, your social worker is there to listen to you, support and help you to understand what is happening. You will also have a care plan which the social worker will ask your opinion about and it is important that you share your views on your plan.

The social worker will visit you regularly in your placement, at school or you can decide on somewhere else you may like to meet with them to talk about how you are feeling. You will have regular review meetings to look at how you are doing and to talk about plans for your future.

Sometimes your social worker will have to make decisions that you may not like, they should always listen to you and explain to you why that decision has been made.

The rest of this booklet will help you to understand some of this better, but you must ask your social worker if you have any questions.



Where will I live?

When you become 'looked after' you might live with:

- Foster carers
- Family or family friends
- Or in a residential childrens home

People may refer to these places as your 'placement' - this is a name for where you live.

Family and friends

Sometimes children and young people are cared for by someone in their own family like grandparents, aunts or uncles or close family friends. They are 'assessed' just like foster carers to make sure they are able to care for you properly.

Foster carers

You might live with foster carers - this is where you live with people who look after children and young people in their own home.

Sometimes foster carers can have their own children or they may just

look after foster children. Foster carers are all assessed to make sure they can care for you properly - they have lots of training and support from a fostering social worker to make sure they understand the things you may be going through and are able to look after you well. Foster parents don't replace your parents whilst you live with them, you will still be treated as any other member of their family. You may stay with your foster family for a few days or you may stay for a longer period of time.

What will it be like to live there?

All families are different and have different ways of doing things so it might feel strange, however the foster carers and members of their family will make you feel welcome and they will understand the first few days may be difficult for you.

In the first three days of being in foster care, a meeting will be held where all these things are discussed, including bedtimes, rules, pocket money and other things you may want to know. Wherever possible, you will be at the meeting which is called a placement planning meeting and you'll be able to ask lots more questions. Your social worker and new carer will also be at the meeting.

Residential childrens homes

Some young people live in a residential home, sometimes called a children's home. This is when you live with other young people and you are looked after by a team of support workers. You will have a 'key worker' or 'key team' who will have a responsibility to make sure you have everything you need. Your key worker will talk to you, help you to develop your independence skills and be able to answer any questions you might have.

Residential children's homes are usually different to being in other people's houses as there are usually more children and they will have a number of staff members who will look after you.

Sometimes this is temporary place to stay while we look at what a young person needs to help make the best plan for their future. Most homes are in Derbyshire, but some homes are outside of Derbyshire. There is always a member of staff at 'home' and there are rules just like any house.

What will it be like to live there?

All childrens homes are different and have different ways of doing things so it might feel strange, however you will be made to feel welcome and encouraged to make friends with the other children, we understand the first few days may be difficult for you.

In the first three days of being in the childrens home, a meeting will be held where all these things are discussed, including bedtimes, rules, pocket money and other things you may want to know. Wherever possible, you will be at the meeting which is called a **placement planning meeting** and you'll be able to ask lots more questions. Your social worker and new key worker will also be at the meeting.

How long will I be in care?

This will depend on your situation, some children are in care for a short time, others for longer. Your social worker will be able to help you keep up to date with what's happening and your independent reviewing officers will also be able to help.

Family time

Seeing and staying in touch with your family is important and we will make arrangements with you and your family about how often you see the people you want to see. Your social worker will talk to you about this and the arrangements that will be made. You might have other people that you want to see within your family or friends, so it is important you tell us.

You can write down who you would like to keep in touch with below and share this with your social worker:

Who I would like to see:

Meetings

Lots of meetings are held to make sure we are supporting you in the right way, some of these you will be able to attend and some will take place when you are not there. Your social worker, key worker or foster carer will let you know about the meetings and you will have a chance to let people know what you think.

There are different ways you can **have your say**, this could be done by:

- Being there at the meeting
- Writing down how you feel or questions you want answering
- Having someone you trust to share what you think or feel (like a teacher or the social worker)
- Contacting the Chair (person in charge of the meeting) or the social worker to share your view.
- Having an advocate who can support you to say what you want at meetings
- The important thing is that you have a chance to be listened to and your voice is heard and makes a difference.

The meetings you might hear mentioned are:

- **Placement planning meeting**
- **Review meeting**
- **Personal Educational Plan (PEP) meeting**

What is a Placement planning meeting?

This meeting happens within the first three days of you becoming 'looked after' the social worker will attend with the carer and this is where we can discuss what is expected of you and the people you will be living with. Also any house rules, bedtimes, pocket money and what you can and cannot do will be agreed at this meeting. The meeting also gives a chance to discuss the plan for your care, family time and anything that is worrying you.

What is a Review meeting?

These meetings can sometimes be called a 'looked after review' or a 'child in care review' meeting. It is there to discuss the arrangements for where you are living and to talk about the plans for your future. Usually you would attend this meeting, though this can depend on how old you are. It is however really important that your views are heard. Your social worker would also attend, along with your carer and your parents. The person chairing (leading) the meeting is the independent reviewing officer (IRO).

What happens in a review?

Before the meeting, the Independent reviewing officer (IRO) will offer you the opportunity to talk to him/her about the meeting and also the plans that have been made for you. The IRO will start the meeting by asking everyone there to say who they are. Everyone will have the chance to talk about how things are and if any changes need to be made. The IRO will give everyone a chance to speak and have the opportunity to talk about how things are for you. Decisions will be made at the meeting which your social worker will talk to you about.

People at the meeting will talk about your education, health and when you can see your family as well as the plans for the future.

What happens after the review?

The IRO will write down the recommendations and send a copy to you, your carer and social worker. It is important that everyone completes the work that has been recommended because this will be looked at again at the next review.



What if I am unhappy about the review?

If you want to talk to someone about the review you can talk to your social worker. The IRO will always be willing to listen and help you. Your social worker can also give you a leaflet that explains how you can make a complaint, or compliment if you are happy with how things have turned out.

What if I don't agree with the plan?

Sometimes adults at the review may feel it necessary to make decisions you don't agree with. The decisions made should always be explained to you by your social worker or the IRO.

How often do reviews take place?

The first review should take place before you have been looked after for one month. The next review usually takes place three months later and every six months after that. If the plans for you are changing or there are some difficulties which you (or other people) want to discuss, then a review meeting may be arranged earlier.



Education

Something called '**The Virtual School**' exists to support your educational needs in school. The school does not exist as a real building but it has staff to ensure you are making the best possible progress in your own school. Your attendance is checked and each term your academic progress is looked at with your school. They will also monitor your PEP meeting as we discussed earlier. You will also get a lead teacher in your school for children in care, who you can talk to if you are having any difficulties, they can also help you to settle into a new school if needed.

Will I have to change schools?

We will try to make sure you can continue going to your own school, though if your new home is a long way from your current school we may need to think about moving you. We will discuss any changes with you, and we will not move your school if it is close to exams and might affect how well you do.

All young people are expected to go to school and if for some reason, you are not in school your carer and social worker will need to discuss your education with you.

If settling at a new school is difficult, you can talk to a trusted adult, at school or home. Help is available, and the trusted adult can have a conversation with your Virtual School worker, during your Personal Education Plan meeting, to see how best to help with this. Some children have a creative mentor, who can help them to settle at school, learn new skills and have some creative fun!

Personal Education Plan meetings (PEP)

We want you to do well in school and to receive the support you need. To help make this happen your school teacher and social worker work together to make a **Personal Education Plan** for you. You, your carers and parents, along with other professionals are invited to the meeting to make the plan. Your plan will then be reviewed every six months, around the time of your 'looked after' reviews.



Health

You will be offered a health assessment when you are first looked after and this is your chance to talk a doctor about your health.

While you are looked after you have the right to good health care and all children and young person should have a health check in the first month and at least every year after that. Your carers will also make sure you have regular dental and eye checks. We will respect your wishes if you do not want to have a health assessment, but we think it is important to make sure all your needs are met.

What will happen at the health assessment?

The doctor will talk to you about your health and any concerns you may have. They will check your height, weight, eyesight and hearing.

The doctor then fills in a form (health plan) and sends it back to your social worker, carers and your parents. This form is kept on your case notes confidentially for your file (to find out more information ask your social worker for a 'understanding your health assessment' booklet). Your social worker will attend the health assessment with you along with your foster carer or key worker and your parents if you wish. You can decide who you would like to be there to support you.

Strengths and difficulties questionnaires (SDQ)

When you come into care, you and your carers will be given a questionnaire to fill in, to help to find out what support you may need. This questionnaire will be repeated twice a year to check that you are receiving the right level of support, your school, carer and you will have the opportunity to complete this, and your social worker will also help you.

Why is a strengths and difficulties questionnaire important?

We recognise that coming in to care can be a very difficult time. The strengths and difficulties questionnaire will help us to understand your health and wellbeing needs in order to support you better. We would encourage you to talk about any worries you have to someone you trust, for example your social worker, teacher or carer.

Advocacy and independent visitors

Whilst you are living with foster carers or in a childrens residential home you may need an advocate or independent visitor.

An advocate is someone who can help you to say what you want to at a meeting or help you to make a complaint.

An independent visitor is a person who would visit and spend time with you on a regular basis. They would get to know you and keep in touch. It would normally be decided at your child in care review as to whether it would be helpful for you to have one.



Complaints, comments and compliments

If you are not happy with how you are being looked after, you have the right to complain. First talk to somebody you can trust about the problem and they will try to sort it out. If you still unhappy you can complete the 'putting people first' leaflet which will be in the home or available from your social worker and you can ask an adult or friend to help you fill this in.

Your social worker will meet with you on a regular basis and should give you time to talk without anyone else listening. You'll have an opportunity to talk about your views with your social worker and also at the meetings we have already talked about in this booklet.

You also have the support from your independent reviewing officer (IRO) and their contact details, along with your social workers details and these can be added to this booklet for when you need them.

We are really interested in your views and **comments**, along with any **compliments** around how you are supported in your placement. We will use this information to support you better and also ensure that we offer the best service we can to children and young people in our care and you can use the 'putting people first' leaflet to do this too.



Children in care council

Every local authority should have in place a Children in Care Council (CICC), where children and young people in care can share their experiences of the care system, to help their ‘corporate parents’ get things right and look after them properly.

When a child or young person comes into care their local authority become ‘corporate parents’, this means they have to make sure that everything a parent would normally do to look after their child still happens.

Children in care rely on people like social workers, child in care nurses and foster carers to look after them and to make sure they are safe, well cared for, do well in education and are happy. We listen to children in care and use what they tell us to improve your life in care.

If you’re aged 10-18 and would like to join the Children in Care Council or would just like to find out more about what they do, you can ask your social worker or contact the participation and children’s rights team at: childrens.rights@derbyshire.gov.uk - 01629 532029.

If meetings aren’t for you, we still want to hear from you if you’ve something to tell us about your experience of being in care.



And finally...

Thank you for taking time to read this, we know there is a lot of information to remember and we are hoping this booklet will mean you can read the information in your own time, with your carer or social worker and understand it better.

There are sections in this booklet where you can add important telephone numbers and a 'notes' section and a 'useful telephone number directory' at the back, so use them as it's your booklet to keep.

My Notes and things I want to remember

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.

Useful telephone numbers for you

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing.

