



Foster Care for looked after children aged 11 to 18

A young person's guide



What Is Foster Care?

Foster care is a family home for young people to live in when there are problems in their own family and there are no other family members or family friends to help at that time. This is called 'going into care' or 'being looked after'. It may be just for a few days or for a longer time, depending on the problems at home. However you come to be living with your foster family; everyone understands that living with a family you do not know can be worrying and upsetting. This booklet will help answer any questions you have.



Did you know that the following famous people were fostered?

Nelson Mandela

was fostered by the chief of his tribe
when his father died

Eddie Murphy

US Comedian

John Lennon

member of the Beatles,
was fostered by his aunt Mimi

Oprah Winfrey

was fostered by her grandmother

Bill Clinton

ex- President of the USA, was cared for
by his grandparents after his father died.

How do young people come to be fostered?

- A young person may ask for help because they are having a bad time at home. They may ask for help from a neighbour, a friend, a teacher, or maybe phone Childline to talk about it.
- Sometimes a young person's parents may contact a social worker to ask for help. There will be many reasons for this: they may be ill and cannot cope, or they may be hurting their child and need help to stop.
- Sometimes other people (teachers, neighbours, and another family members) may contact a social worker because they can see that a child is not safe, is not happy, or is not being looked after properly by their parents.
- If a concern has been raised, a social worker will visit your home to see what help can be offered. This may be an agreement with your family that you will live with a foster family until the problem is sorted out and you can go home again.
- If things are more serious, the social worker may go to a court and explain to a judge what has happened. The judge will give their opinion as to what would be in the young person's best interests. The judge may then make an order for the young person to be 'looked after' by the Council - in this case, to live in foster care sometimes until they are 18 years old.

What is a social worker?

Your social worker works for Pembrokeshire County Council and Children's Services. It is their job to help children and their families through difficult problems. Your social worker will see you on your own and will answer your questions about living away from home; they will also explain what will happen next. Your foster carer also has a supervising social worker from the Fostering Team. You will be able to talk to him or her too.

You can always talk to your social worker if there is something you are not happy about.

When you reach 15 years and 9 months you will be allocated a **Personal Advisor**, whose job it is to provide you with support, advice and guidance and if appropriate assist you to live independently when the time is right for you.

Who are foster carers?

Foster carers are people who want to offer a home to young people who cannot live with their own family for a period of time. They are carefully checked and trained to make sure they can offer you a safe and comfortable place to live.

A foster carer may live alone, with a partner, and with or without children of his or her own. There may be other foster children living there, and they may or may not have pets.

How will they find the right foster carer for me?

Social workers know about many foster carers who live in your area and will look for the one who most closely matches your needs. We will try to find a foster carer who shares your language or languages and/or have the same religious celebrations and other parts of your culture. If you are not happy at any time, it is really important that you tell your social worker so they can try to do something about it.

Will I see my family?

It is natural for you to miss your family and your social worker will be making arrangements for you to see them as much as is safe and appropriate for you. In fact, if you, your social worker and your family plan that you will be going back home quite soon, it is likely that you will be seeing quite a lot of them.

This is called 'contact' and it can happen in the foster home, in your family's home, or somewhere else. It may be best for you to keep in touch by phone as well as (or instead of) seeing your family face-to-face.

If there is someone you do not feel it would be safe for you to see, let your social worker know. You can talk to your social worker about any feelings you have about seeing your family. Your social worker will help decide what will be best for everyone involved.

Can I see my friends?

Your foster carer will do their best to help you stay in touch with your friends, and make new ones. It will be important for you to agree with your foster carer when you are going to see them.

They will want to talk to their parents if you are thinking of staying overnight with a friend. If your foster carer and social worker agree that it is ok, your friend's parents will want to talk to your foster carer if you invite the friend to stay overnight with you.

Will I go to the same school?

Most children will go to the same school. If you are going to live with a family for a longer period of time and your school is far away, you may be able to change to a school that is nearer and easier to get to. School is very important for the future life of every young person. It is important that you go every day and arrive on time. If you are having trouble with your homework, your work at school or anything else in school life, then do speak to your foster carer or social worker; they are there to help you.

You will take part in meetings at school to make your 'Personal Education Plan'. This will list out what you need to make sure you can achieve your best at school.

If you need additional help with your learning your social worker will ensure this is out in place for you.

What can I expect from my foster carer?

Your foster carer will:

- We will ensure that when you come to our home, you are made to feel welcomed and part of the family.
- We will listen to you and hear what is concerning you. If you tell us anything that has caused harm to you or someone else, we will have to report this to your social worker.
- We will help you celebrate holidays and your birthday.
- We will make sure that you are going to school and that you are doing the best you can do.
- We will provide food to you that will keep you healthy. We will try and cook food that you liked from home and that is special to you.
- We will take you to the doctor and dentist regularly.
- We will work with your social worker to make sure that you have contact with your family.
- We will try and keep you safe, so it is important that we know where you are at all times.

What will my foster carer expect of me?

Your foster carer will expect you to:

- Show respect to everyone and his or her possessions.
- Join in family meals and activities
- Attend school regularly
- Complete homework and coursework
- Keep to agreed times to come home.

What is a placement meeting?

A placement agreement meeting is one where you, your foster carer, your social worker, the foster carer's social worker and your parents (if possible), meet to decide how you will be looked after day-by-day.

The meeting will discuss many aspects of life in the foster family, including:

- Foods you like
- Arrangements to have contact with your family
- School arrangements
- Routines like mealtimes, TV, bedtimes, homework times and times to come home
- Pocket money
- Arrangements for you to keep up any hobbies, sports, clubs, or other interests
- Medical needs.

All of this will be written down and everyone will have a copy of your placement agreement

What is a LAC review meeting?

A LAC review meeting is a chance for everyone to talk about:

- You
- Your placement
- The plans that are being made for you while you are being looked after
- How you are getting on.

This meeting is for you, your parents (if appropriate), Foster carers and social worker, although there may be times when your teacher will also be able to come along. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) will chair the meeting, and the plans for how long you will stay in the foster home will be considered. If you need any extra help, this will also be discussed.

The first review meeting should be within four weeks of you becoming looked after; the next one will be three months after that, and then every six months. It is very important that you contribute your feelings on all aspects of your life at the review.

If you don't feel you can go along, please make sure you give your views to the social worker so that they can let everyone know how you are feeling.

Staying Healthy

When you move in with your foster carer, you will go and see a doctor for your health assessment. This means that everyone can be sure you are keeping well and healthy.

You can do many things for yourself to make sure you stay healthy - like eating good food, getting plenty of exercise and enough sleep. It is also important to keep up good personal hygiene and to see the dentist and optician on a regular basis.

Your foster carer will help you with all of this. If you have to have any treatment, injections or medicines, your foster carer will also make sure these are taken regularly.

Your Life Story Book

Your social worker will help you put together your life story book, especially if you are to be looked after for a long time. This can include all kinds of memories about you and your family.

This book - and the work you do in putting it together it will help you understand why things happened and why you were unable to stay with your parent(s).

Your foster carer will also be collecting memories for you to remember your time living in the foster family. This may be photographs, video tapes or DVDs, tickets and mementoes of the activities you have enjoyed together. This book will be yours to keep for the future.²young

Moving On

When appropriate, young people move on from their foster home to a variety of other places – which could include a return home. When they are older, it is possible for a young person to move to a place where they have more independence, but are still supported to gain some living skills; this is called ‘Supported Lodgings’.

Your foster carer will work with you and the personal advisor to help you learn the skills you need to live on your own. This will be written down in your ‘Pathway Plan’. Eventually, a looked after young person will be considered for independent accommodation, but this will not be given until everyone is convinced that the young person will be able to cope alone. This makes sure that they can hold onto the tenancy successfully.



What can I do if I am not happy with my foster family?

Whether you are feeling good or bad about living away from home, you can always talk about it with your social worker. Your social worker and the foster carers should be able to sort things out for you. You do have the right to complain if you are not happy

If you have any problems in your life or in your foster home, you can talk to:

- Your foster carer
- Your social worker
- Another adult (like a teacher)
- An Advocate
- You can mention it at your review meeting.

Advocacy

- Advocacy can help you to:
- Know and understand your rights
- Take part in meetings and reviews
- Get your voice heard
- Make a complaint
- Sort things out with your social worker or carer

Phone: You can also speak to an advocate call 01545 571865 or free phone 0808 168 2599

Email: send us a message on:
westwalesadvocacy@trosgynnalplant.org.uk

Web: You can also visit our website www.trosgynnal.org.uk

Useful contacts:

Voice for Care

Voice offers advocacy to children in care, making sure that they are listened to and their views are taken seriously.

Phone: 0808 800 5792

Web: www.voiceyp.org

Childline

Childline is a counselling service for all children and young people. You can contact them about anything. No problem is too big or too small.

Phone: 0800 11 11 (free 24 hours)

www.childline.org.uk

NSPCC

Phone: 020 7825 2500

Lawstuff

Phone: 0808 8020 008

www.lawstuff.org.uk Website from the Children's Legal Centre full of information about your rights.

Who Cares Trust

The Who Cares Trust is a voice and champion for children and young people living in care.

Phone: 0500 564 570

www.thewhocarestrust.org.

Social Worker

Phone: 0300 333 2222 Out of hours social workers (Emergency Duty Team)

Notes



Pembrokeshire County Council
Cyngor Sir Penfro

www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk