



A Children's Guide to Foster Care (12-18s)

This booklet is about foster care in Hertfordshire. It is yours to keep and refer to whenever you want to find something out. If there is anything you don't understand, you can ask your foster carer or social worker to explain it to you.



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When a young person cannot live with their own family, they can move into a foster home.

Sometimes this is called 'going into care' or being 'looked after'. There are lots of reasons why children are fostered. Maybe your parents cannot look after you properly. If this is the case, a social worker will help you to be safe and well looked after with a foster family.



It is important that you grow up with a family who can take care of you. Even if you are only with your foster family for a very short while, they will treat you as part of the family. Being in foster care does not mean that your parents and family don't love you.

Many children are fostered every day. Some of these are babies, some older, some fostered with their brothers and sisters, and some are fostered by people they know like relatives and friends of the family. You may know other young people who are fostered through school or through friends of your own foster carers. Sometimes Hertfordshire County Council's fostering service arranges activities and meetings where you can meet other young people who are fostered. You should tell your foster carer or social worker if you would like to go along to any of these activities.



What is a social worker?

Your social worker works for Hertfordshire County Council and it is their job to make sure you are OK. They will visit you regularly to talk to you about what is happening in your life. Your social worker wants to make sure you are happy and well looked after and you can talk to them about any worries you have.



What is a foster carer?

Foster carers are people who have been specially selected to look after children and young people who have to live away from home. They have had lots of training and at a meeting called a fostering panel, it has been decided that they would be able to become foster carers. Their main job is to make sure that you feel welcome, that you are well cared for and feel that you are able to talk about any worries or concerns you have with them or your social worker.

Your safety and well-being is really important to your foster carers, and as part of this they will need to report to the police if you go missing.



Going to stay with a foster family...

A social worker will take you to your foster carer's house, where you can meet everyone who lives there. Wherever possible, your social worker will try to make sure that you can take a bag with the things you need with you. You can also take some things that are important to you, such as books and photographs.

When you arrive your foster carers will show you around the house, show you your room and introduce you to everyone who lives there. Although it may feel a bit strange at first, everyone will help you to settle in. Your foster family will have rules about things like doing homework, staying up late, mealtimes, etc. They will tell you what these rules are and you will learn them slowly as you become used to living there and become part of the foster family. You will be shown your room where you will sleep and keep your things – this is your space and you can expect to have the same privacy as other members of the family.

You will be treated as part of the family and your foster carers will make sure you have food to eat and are safe. They will make sure you have suitable clothes for school and for home and you should also have the opportunity to say what food and clothes you prefer. They will wash and iron your clothes and make sure you have lunch or money for lunch on school days. They will make sure you feel comfortable in your home and have the opportunities to do the things you enjoy.

Foster carers will support you with contact visits with your family, they will help and encourage you with your school and college work and any decisions you make around your education.

They are also there to give you help and advice about friendships, and will encourage you to develop your hobbies and interests in sports and other activities.



All sorts of people can be foster carers, they can be couples. Some foster families can be big and there might be lots of other children and young people around.

Foster carers get some money from the council. This is to make sure that they have enough money to pay for your clothes, food, outings and anything that you might need for school. This is called a fostering allowance and from this they will also make sure you have some pocket money if you are old enough.



What is a placement meeting?

This is where you, your social worker, foster carer and parents meet to talk about how you will be looked after. They will talk about things like what food you like, your school, which of your family you will see and how often, and lots of other things. Your social worker will write it all down. If you are old enough, your social worker will give you a copy. At this meeting you can talk about what you think.

Finding you a foster family

Your social workers will decide which foster family might be the best for you. They will try to find foster carers who are from a similar ethnic background and speak the same language as you. If such a family can't be found, they will try and place you with a family that understands your background and culture. It is important that you talk to your social worker if you are not happy with the family that you will be living with.



Talking about how you feel

Remember that YOU, your thoughts and feelings are very important.

- You can ask your social worker how they are making sure that what you think is being properly listened to before they decide things.
- This may be a difficult time. Everything that has happened to you and all the changes around you might make it confusing to understand what's really going on. You may feel scared and upset and even angry.
- Many young people will feel like this. Please make sure you talk about how you feel.
- Make sure you tell someone you trust about how you feel. They will help you to understand what is going on.
- Don't hide these feelings. You can speak to your social worker, your foster carer, your teacher, or someone else you trust.
 - You will also have an Independent Review Officer (IRO) who you can talk to about anything you are unhappy with.



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. 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 over the telephone.



Having your say

In Hertfordshire we have something called a 'pledge' which says what you can expect from us. It is based on what other children who are looked after by Hertfordshire County Council have said is most important to them.

We also have a Council for Children Looked After. Depending on your age, you can get involved with the council. You can also let them know what you think of fostering and any problems you are having and they can talk to people on your behalf. Your social worker will let you know about both of these things.

What is a review meeting?

Your first review meeting happens when you have been in care for four weeks. Your parents, social worker and foster carers all attend. Sometimes your teacher or health visitor may be there too. It is a chance for everyone there to say what they think and feel and everyone listens to you. The next review meeting happens 3 months later and then every six months after that. An Independent Review Officer (IRO) will be in charge of the meeting and writes down everything that is said. This then becomes your Care Plan. You can ask your Social Worker for a copy of your Care Plan.

Going Home

If your social worker thinks that you will not be able to go back to your family, he or she may start looking for a permanent family for you. This may be a family who will foster you long-term. Your foster carer and social worker may start working with you on your life story.

If your social worker thinks it is ok for you to go home to your parents again, he or she will plan this with you. You will go for visits and then, if things are going well, stay overnight. The social worker will want to know that your parents are able to look after you and that you are safe. Once it is decided that you will move home, the social worker will take your things from your foster home back to your parent's home – your clothes, toys, games, any new presents you have had, photos, your life story book and anything else.

You may be very happy to go back home or it may take some time for you to feel settled again. You must remember that if things go wrong again, you can always ask for help. Your social worker will be visiting you at home to see that everything is alright and you can tell them if it isn't.

Other important information:

Hertfordshire County Council's Customer Service Team

The Customer Service Team can be contacted at:
Room 143 County Hall, Hertfordshire County Council,
County Hall, Hertford, SG13 8DF

01992 588 842

cs.complaints@hertfordshire.gov.uk



NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service)

National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) now provide the advocacy service for all children looked after children in Hertfordshire.

Helpline on 0808 808 1001

The Office of the Children's Commissioner

The Office of the Children's Commissioner Sanctuary
Buildings 20, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT

Tel: 020 7783 8330

Email: info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

Ofsted

Ofsted checks the work of fostering agencies in
England and Wales.

Piccadilly Gate Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD

0300 123 1231

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