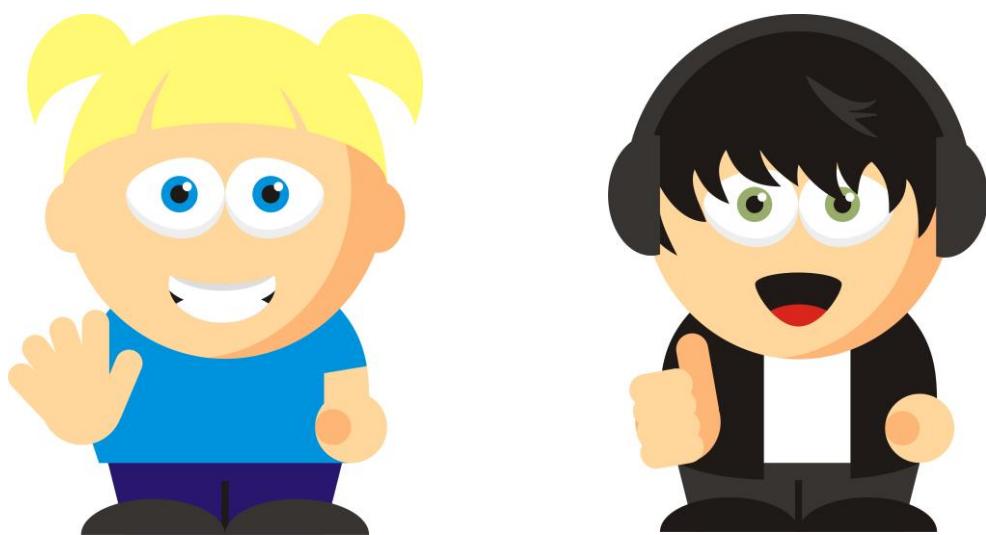


What Is Foster Care?



**A guide for Older Children and
Young People**



Hello! This booklet tells you about foster care and the foster carers you are staying with.

Foster carers will do all they can to help you feel safe and cared for while you are away from your family. They will listen to what you want and help you stay in touch with your family and friends.

The foster care service prepares, trains, assesses and supervises foster carers so they can look after you properly. They and your social worker are part of Children's Services and will work with you and your family to give you the best care that they can.

It can be scary going to live with strangers. All families are different, so you may feel strange at first. Foster carers understand this and will do their best to make you feel welcome and comfortable.



You will have a placement plan which covers lots of things like pocket money, activities, contact with your family etc. Tell your foster carer how you feel and what you do and do not like. Ask them questions, for example:

- Do I get pocket money?
- Can I choose what to eat?
- Can I use the phone?
- Where can I go on the internet?



Foster carers will tell you the rules and routines in their house so you know what to expect. It may take a little time to get used to each other and work things out. You will be involved in agreeing your Placement Plan and wherever possible, you should be given the chance to sign it.

What are your Rights?

Everybody has rights and while you are in foster care you will have extra ones:

- To feel safe and comfortable.
- Not to be hurt
- Not to be made to feel bad about yourself
- To be offered appropriate leisure, play and recreational activities
- To be supported to keep in contact with all important people in your life (The only exceptions may be due to legal restraints, which mean supervised contact or where we think that contact may endanger you)
To be heard and consulted on plans or decisions made about you
- To be supported in expressing your wishes and feelings
- To be spoken to with respect
- To make a complaint. You can do this yourself or get someone to do this for you
- To ask for, or approach an Advocate if you feel like you aren't being listened to or need help to get your views across.

Advocacy

Advocates are there to help if you feel like you are not being listened to or need help to get your views across. They can also support you with any complaint you wish to make. You can contact the Advocates on:



01670 629297 or email
voicesmakingchoices@northumberland.gov.uk

What about School?

Going to school is very important. We want you to stay at the same school, and a taxi may be needed to get you there. If you cannot stay at the same school, we will help you settle into a new one. Your foster carers will go with you to meet the teachers and help you with any problems.

We have a special team of people to help you and your carers with school work, they are called Education Support for Looked After Children (ESLAC). You will meet the person

from the team who supports you at your Personal Education Planning meeting in school.

You or your carers can contact ESLAC at any time, just telephone **01670 810433**



Please ask your foster carers, social worker, teacher or ESLAC support worker if you are not sure of anything.

What about my Family and Friends?

Your family and friends will be very much involved in your stay in foster care. A plan will be made at the beginning for who you will see, and when and how. We will make sure that you are involved in making this plan.

It is important to know what you feel about this so we can make the right plan.

You might have lots of questions which you need answering. These could include:-

- Will my Mam and Dad come to the house?
- Can I see my Gran?
- Can I go out with my mates?
- How often will I see my family?
- What if I don't want to see someone?

You may have many questions or worries about what is happening at home. Your foster carer will help you to speak to the right person about these.

What about my Health?

While you are in foster care, you will be able to get all the care and treatment that you need.



Your foster carer will go with you to visit the doctor, the dentist and the optician to make sure you are healthy and developing properly.

They will look after you when you are ill, and listen to you when you are upset or unhappy. You will also be offered regular health assessments to make sure everything is ok.

Let us know how you feel!

We stay in touch with your family about your health. For example they can go with you to the doctor. But we will respect your wishes as to who you wish to be involved.

Once you are 15 years old

When you are approaching your 16th birthday, you will be able to see a 16+ worker. He or she will help you look at what you want to do in the future.

For example, you may want to stay with foster carers, or begin to plan to move to your own place. You may want to go to college or university, or get a job or training. They will also help you look at how to manage your money.



Your foster carer will still be there to talk things over with you. Together, you may start practicing for when you are independent for example by doing your own washing, or buying and cooking food for yourself.

Family Support & Placement Service

Our foster carers are part of a larger Family Placement Service. We have:

Time Limited Foster Carers have children for a few weeks, or longer, sometimes up to two years. It depends on the plans for your future.

Short-Break Foster Carers are linked to a child and his or her family so they can provide them with a break. This could be one night a week, one weekend a month, or an occasional stay in the holidays. They receive an allowance.



Long Term Foster Carers give a child a home for as long as he or she needs one. This may be for several years. They receive an allowance and may receive a fee.

Family Support has other carers who look after children through the day (day carers) or take a child out for a few hours for a particular reason (sessional workers). Sometimes, they also help with contact with children's families, or are involved in out of school activities.

Children's Support Workers are specially trained to deal with crises and emergencies. They help families, and sometimes carers, sort out problems with their children.

Our Foster Carers

Our foster carers are carefully chosen by us to meet standards laid down by the government. We check that they are safe to care for children by contacting the police, their doctor, and people known to them. We find out lots of information about them such as:

- What experience of children do they have?
- Will they be able to work with families?
- What are they interested in?
- What are their children like?

They go on a training course to find out more about fostering.

When we have put all the information into a report, we take it to a Fostering Panel, a group of experienced people who will decide whether they are suitable to be foster carers.



All foster carers have an annual review by an independent chairperson to make sure they are still appropriate to be foster carers. You will be asked to give your views

We want carers to be the best so they carry on with training, and they have their own social worker called a Supervising Social Worker. OFSTED check that we are doing our job properly.

Not Happy with your Foster Care?



If you are not happy with any part of your care please try to talk to your foster carer first. Questions and worries can usually be sorted out easily and most will be sorted out within 2 days by your carer or social worker. If they can't do this, or if you want someone else to deal with it we will follow these stages.

Stage 1

We will ask a manager to look into the complaint and talk to you about it and try to agree a way to sort it out. We will write you a letter saying what we have agreed to do.

If you are not happy with what has been done to sort the complaint out, you or your advocate can ask for it to go to Stage 2.

Stage 2

At Stage 2 we ask people who do not work for Children's Services to help us sort out the complaint. These people are called

"Independent". We will ask them to investigate the complaint.

A senior manager will send you a copy of the report with a letter telling you what Children's Services are going to do. If you want, we will meet with you and your advocate to explain this in more detail.

Stage 3

If you think that:

- the report or letter at Stage 2 was wrong or had bits missing,
- the complaints procedure has not been followed, or
- Children's Services has not tried its best to sort out the complaint,

You or your advocate can ask for the complaint to go to Stage 3. Three independent people who have not dealt with the complaint before will meet with everyone involved and find out what we have done to sort your problem out. After the meeting the panel will write a report to say what they

think Children's Services needs to do to sort out the complaint.

Stage 4

If things are still not sorted, or you are still unhappy, you can write to the Local Government Ombudsman:

Beverley House
17 Shipton Road
York
YO30 5FZ

Tel: 01904 663200

www.lgo.org.uk/

You can contact the Complaints Officer by writing to:

Children's Complaints Officer

Children's Services

Freepost NEA15580

Morpeth

Northumberland

NE61 1BR

E-mail:

client.relations@northumberland.gov.uk

Phone: 01670 623978 Text: 07766 631

Free phone: 0800 373615

Useful Contacts

Independent Reviewing Officer

You will have been given the name of your IRO. You can contact them on:

Tel: 01670 624888

Your foster carer can help you with contacting these people:

Fostering Service

Family Placement Service

3 Esther Court, Wansbeck Business Park
Ashington, NE63 8AP

Tel: 01670 62 62 62

Corporate Director of Children's Services

County Hall

Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 2EF

Tel: 0845 600 6400

Client Relations

County Hall

Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 2EF

Tel 0800 373615 or email
client.relations@northumberland.gov.uk

Advocacy Service

Tel: 01670 629297 or email:
voicesmakingchoices@northumberland.gov.uk

OFSTED

If you want to make a complaint or have a concern about the fostering service

Tel: 0300 1231231 (08.00 am to 6.00 pm) or
email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate, Store Street
Manchester, M1 2WD

Children's Commissioner for England
Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street
London, SW1P 3BT
Tel: 0800 528 0731
Web: www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

