

A Guide for a Child/Young Person who are Looked After

This information is available in Welsh.

What does being 'looked after' mean?

Being looked after means that the local authority is helping to make sure you are being cared for properly. They will be helping you, your parents and other people in your family and work with other people in your life. It also means you will be living away from home because, at the moment, it is not possible for your parents to look after you the way they need to. Sometimes this is called being in care.

This may be with the agreement of your parent/s or because we think it is safer for you. When we arrange for children and young people to live away from home the law calls them 'looked after children'. Sometimes adults shorten this and just say the word 'LAC'.

Sometimes children stay in care for a very short time, others stay longer. Wherever possible we will work with you and your family to enable you to go back home, but we must be sure that this is right and safe for you.

Why are you being looked after?

There are lots of different reasons why children and young people cannot live with their family. Sometimes parents ask for help because they feel they are struggling to look after their children in the best way or sometimes it might be because it might be safer for a child not to live at home.

Your Social Worker

You will be allocated a Social Worker who will carry out an assessment of your needs and will put together a Care & Support Plan with you. They will also be there to help and support you and will:-

- Visit you and explain to you why you are being 'looked after'.
- Let you know how long you may be looked after and what the long term plans are.
- They will make sure you understand what is happening and why and will help you with any problems.
- Visit you within the first week of moving to a new foster home or placement.
- Talk to you on your own.
- Talk about your hobbies, what you like and things you're good at or anything you're unhappy about.
- Tell you about how you can get in touch if you need to.
- Ask what you think about things

- Help you take part in decisions about you

If you need someone to talk about your situation, you can talk to your carers, Social Worker or someone else that you trust, or you can ask for someone independent to talk to.

What you can expect from your Social Worker?

- Your Social Worker must see you on your own.
- They will answer your questions about living away from home.
- They will explain what will happen next.

How often will you see your Social Worker?

You should have a visit from your Social Worker within the first week of becoming looked after and the frequency after that will depend on the plans being made for you.

Your Care and Support Plan?

When you are looked after, plans must be made for all the important things in your life. The main plan is called your Care & Support Plan which is written information that says how you should be cared for and describes your future plans. You will have other plans too for things like where you are living, your health and education. All of the plans should link together to make sure you are getting all the help and support you need while you are looked after.

Your Care & Support Plan will include:-

- Why you are looked after, what needs to happen for you to go home or if you can't go home what the long term or permanency plan is.
- Your wishes and feelings.
- Contact with your family and friends.
- Your health.
- Education and training.
- How you wish to follow your religion, beliefs and culture.
- Hobbies and Interests.
- What people (like social workers and foster carers) will do to help and support you.
- What your plans are now and for the future.
- What your needs are.

Your Care & Support Plan will be looked at in your Looked After Child Review meetings, to see how the plans are going and to check if any changes are needed.

Your Looked After Review meetings?

While you are looked after, there will be important meetings called Reviews. Your Looked After Child Review meeting is a chance for everyone to talk about your placement, the plans that are being made for you while you are being looked after and how you are getting on. You will also be asked your views on where and how the meetings are held.

There will be an Independent Reviewing Officer chairing the meeting to make sure your opinions are listened to up until you turn 18 years old. The meetings will take place as follows:-

- The first review meeting should be held within 20 working days of you becoming Looked After.
- The next one will be 3 months after that.
- The meeting will then be held every 6 months.

What is an Advocate?

An advocate does not work for the Education & Children's Services. They are someone who is just there to help you and others to have your voices heard. An advocate is there to help you and will only tell the people at the review what you have told them to say. If you want an advocate please speak to your Social Worker or Independent Reviewing Officer.

Your Education

All looked after children and young people must have a Personal Educational Plan (PEP). A PEP will say how your school or college, carer and local authority will support you to do the best you can while you are in education. This may mean you are entitled to extra support to help you with your education. This could be a tutor or mentoring or it could be money to help you with books, equipment or travel.

Staying Healthy

Your health is very important. Being healthy does not just mean eating loads of vegetables. It's keeping your teeth clean, regular eye tests, having your immunisations up to date.

When you become looked after, you will have what is called a 'Health Assessment' by a doctor or a Nurse for Looked After Children and young people (LAC Nurse). The Nurse will help you to keep well and stay healthy by making sure you see a doctor, dentist and optician regularly.

Listening to you and having your say

When you are looked after lots of decisions are made about you and your life. The people who are responsible for your care must make sure they find out your views, wishes and feelings about anything that concerns you. Your views will be listened to and taken seriously before any decisions are made.

You can have your say by:-

- Talking one to one with your Social Worker or carers.
- Filling in a Consultation Form to prepare for your LAC Review.
- Going to the review meetings or talking to your Independent Reviewing Officer.
- Making a complaint.
- Having an independent advocate.

What happens when your 16+?

Before your 16th birthday we will begin to plan for your independence and put together a Pathway Plan which is similar to your Care & Support Plan. You will be supported by your carers and Social Worker who will help to teach you life skills to live on your own if that's what you want.

For more information on this please see the Young People's Guide to Leaving Care.

Knowing your rights

You have rights. Every child and young person under the age of 18 years has rights no matter who you are, where you live, or what your situation. It's important for you to know what your rights are so you know when you are not being treated properly.

The United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (also known as UNCRC) is a list of 42 promises that governments have made to children and young people and these are what you have the right to:-

- Be treated with respect
- Say what you think and feel about decisions made that affect you
- Have your language, culture, race, gender, sexuality and religion respected
- Have a private life
- Have protection from being hurt or badly treated
- An education and health care
- A safe place to live
- Not to be punished in a cruel or hurtful way

What can I do if I'm unhappy?

Wherever you are living you should feel safe and looked after. But no one's perfect and there might be times when you don't get on with everyone you are living with, or you might be unhappy with a decision that has been made. If this happens you should tell someone you trust so they can help you sort things out. You can speak to whoever is caring for you, your Social Worker, your Independent Reviewing Officer or another person you trust.

If you are unhappy with what any person working with you has done, you have a right to make a complaint. You can contact the Complaints Officer in any of the following ways or ask your Social Worker or advocate to help you to do this:-

Freephone number: 0800 032 1099

Email: ssdcomments@denbighshire.gov.uk

Write to: The Complaints Officer
Russell House
Churton Road
Rhyl
Denbighshire
LL18 3DP

Web: www.denbighshire.gov.uk/yourvoice

This information can be made available in other languages and/or alternative formats upon request.