

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE IN

FOSTER CARE?





My name is _____

My social worker is _____

Their phone number is _____

My foster carer is _____

Their telephone number is _____

Other important people _____

About this leaflet

This booklet gives information on Gateshead Council's Fostering Service and answers some of the questions you may have about what it's like to be in foster care. It is especially for young people aged ten years and over. There is another booklet for children under ten, called Sam's Story. If you'd like a copy, please ask your foster carer to get one for you.

What does the Fostering Service do?

The Fostering Service makes sure:

- That foster carers are specially trained to look after children properly
- That you get the physical and emotional care you need
- That you receive any help you need with school work and that you have the opportunity to succeed
- That you get enough guidance and support to prepare you for adult life

What is a foster family?

Foster carers look after children and young people who, for some reason, cannot live with their own families.

There are lots of different types of foster families. Some have young or adult children living at home, some have no other children and others are single carers.

Why am I in foster care?

Sometimes, parents ask us to look after their children for a short period whilst they sort out problems at home. If this happens to you, you can go home as soon as your parents are able to look after you.

For others, social services and the courts look at whether it is safe for you to live with your family. If they decide it isn't, you may be placed with a foster family.

Why can't I go home?

Some families have problems that prevent them from looking after their children. This can be very upsetting for everyone and hard to understand. Please talk to your social worker or your foster carer about how you feel and they will be able to help you and make sure everyone involved in looking after you understands.

Did I do something wrong?

No. Children often think it is somehow their fault when things go wrong at home. But you aren't to blame for your family's problems - even if you think you have been naughty.

All families have problems from time to time. In your case, you need to live somewhere else whilst your family has time to sort them out.

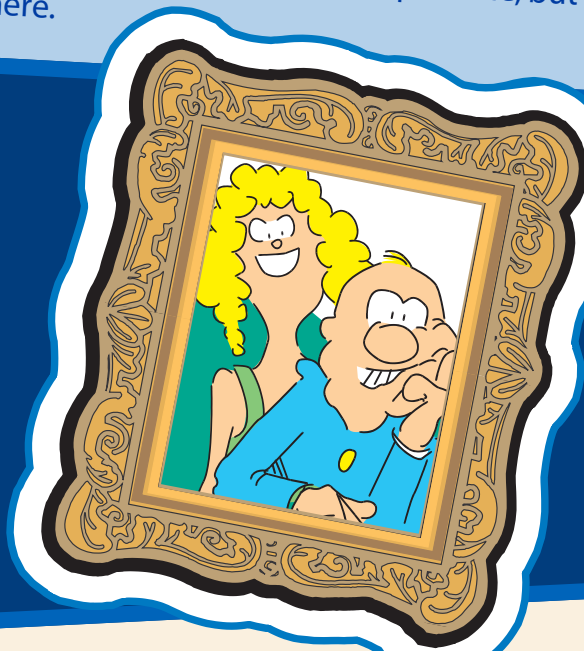
You must remember that everyone faces problems when they are growing up - not just people who are in foster care.

How long will I be in foster care?

Some young people stay in foster care for just a short time and some stay for much longer. Some do not live in foster care all the time but have regular short breaks or weekends with foster families.

You can talk to your social worker about the plans for your future care. He or she should be able to give you some idea of how long you will be in foster care.

Your social worker will be trying to get you home as soon as possible, but only if they know you'll be safe there.



What should I call my foster carers?

You should talk to your foster carers about what you'd like to call them.

Most children and young people call their carers by their first names. Some younger children like to add 'auntie' or 'uncle' to the first names.

Nobody expects you to call them 'mum' or 'dad' as you already have a mum and dad and your foster carers are not trying to take their places.

What does my social worker do?

Your social worker is there to make sure you are happy in your foster family and to answer any questions you may have about being in foster care.

They may take you to visit your mum or your dad.

Your social worker is also responsible for arranging your care plan, to decide how long you'll be with your foster carers. Working with your parents and others, such as the courts, they will help to make sure decisions about your future aren't delayed.

What does my foster carer know about me?

Your social worker has to tell your foster carers the important information about you and your family so they are able to look after you as well as possible. Your foster carer will keep all information safe or 'confidential'.

If you are worried about this, you can talk to your foster carer or social worker, who are there to help you.

Will I have to share a bedroom?

You may have to share a bedroom with other foster children or with your foster carer's children, or you may have a room to yourself. Wherever possible we try to make sure you get your own room.

If you feel strongly about having to share a room, talk to your foster carer or your social worker. They will try to work something out so you feel comfortable.

Will I be able to bring my own clothes and belongings?

Your social worker will try to make sure that you have as many of your own belongings with you as possible when you come to your foster carers' house.

If it is not possible to collect all your things, your social worker will explain why.

If there is anything you need, for example new school clothes, your foster carer will take you shopping and help you to pick out the new things.

Will I be able to do what I like?

Like most families, foster families have rules that each member of the household is asked to follow. These may be about what time you should come home each night or how you should behave towards other members of the family.

Your foster carers may also ask you to do some simple tasks around the house, such as tidying your room, setting the table for meals or helping with the washing-up. These are usual family tasks shared between members of the family.

Remember - having rules just means you know what is expected of you and you are kept safe. It doesn't mean you can't have fun!

Will I still go to the same school?

Getting an education and working hard at school is very important as it affects the kind of job you will get when you're older. Your foster carer, and the Council, have a responsibility to make sure you go to school and will give you the support and encouragement you need to do well.

You should be able to go to the same school and your foster carer has to make sure you go every day and do your homework.

All foster families get computers that you can use to do your homework. Your foster carer and social worker can help you with your schoolwork if you get stuck.

If you have any problems at school you can talk to your teacher, foster carer or social worker.

What do I do if I find school difficult?

You will get lots of help and support from your foster carer and social worker to make sure you do OK at school.

The Fostering Service takes bullying very seriously and has a set of rules called an Anti Bullying Policy that explains why no-one is allowed to make you unhappy or stop you from making progress at school.

All foster children are also supported by REALAC (Raising the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children).

Will I still be able to do my hobbies and see my friends?

Your foster carer understands that it is important to you to keep in touch with all your friends and will help you to do this.

If you have a hobby such as playing football or gymnastics, tell your foster carer so they can help you to carry on doing it. Or perhaps you'd like to take part in a new activity. Your carer can help to arrange this too.

How will I stay healthy?

When you come into foster care, you will have a medical assessment to check your health is OK and so any problems can be treated as soon as possible.

Your foster carer has to make sure you stay healthy and will take you to the doctor or dentist when you need to go. They will also encourage you to eat healthily and to exercise regularly. If you have any favourite foods, or any foods that you don't like, tell your foster carer so they know what to cook for you.

Will I get any pocket money?

You will get weekly pocket money depending on your age. Sometimes you may get less money but your foster carer will pay for treats such as cinema tickets or magazines. Your carer may encourage you to try to save your pocket money for something special or the school holidays.

If you misbehave your foster carer may decide to stop your pocket money for a week or a few weeks. If you think this is unfair, discuss it with your foster carer or you can talk to your social worker. Any pocket money you don't get will be saved for another day or put into your bank account.

When will I see my family?

Everyone understands that being away from your family can be upsetting and stressful and that it's important to arrange a time for you to see them as soon as possible.

Your social worker will talk to you and your family to arrange a time for you to meet. Your foster carer will also help you to stay in touch, for example by telephone.



I come from a different culture or religion to my foster carer - what will happen?

All foster carers are given training and support to help them make ALL children feel at home - no matter where you come from or what religion you follow.

You will be given all the help you need to be able to practise your religion and celebrate the holidays and festivals you would celebrate at home. You will also be able to eat the sort of food you eat at home.

Your foster carer and social worker will welcome any suggestions from you about your culture or religion.

You have rights

It's important that you know you have a right to be:

- Protected and safe
- Involved in plans and decisions made about you
- Supported in talking about what you want and how you feel
- Able to go to school, visit the doctor or dentist and take part in leisure activities
- Able to keep in touch with people that are important to you. This would only not happen if this would put you at risk.
- Able to make a complaint

If you do not feel happy it's important that you talk to an adult you trust.

Who can I talk to if I am upset?

Every child may have to cope with lots of different problems as they grow up. These worries and difficulties affect young people whether or not they are in foster care.

Foster carers understand that moving into a strange house with new people can be hard to deal with. If you feel upset or worried for any reason, you should talk to your foster carer or social worker.

Meetings about me

Meetings are for you and the people who have responsibility for you (such as your mum, dad or social worker) to get together and check how things are going and to see if any plans need to be changed.

There are different types of meetings:

- Planning meetings – these may happen before you come into foster care.
- Placement meeting - this will happen soon after you come into care. At this meeting, we will discuss, for example, which school you will go to and how you will get there, what contact you will have with your family and what time you should return to your foster home in the evening.
- Care team meetings – these may identify the need for you to have an independent visitor or an independent advocate (see page 10)
- Meetings with your social worker - these will happen regularly and you will usually talk with your social worker on your own. will usually talk with your social worker on your own.

Review meetings

You will also have a regular review meeting which is a chance to talk about how you feel about being in foster care and if the plans being made for you are the right ones.

Most meetings will be held at your foster home, but sometimes they may be held at one of the council offices.

At the review meeting there will be:

- Your social worker
- Your mum, dad or member of your family (if this is possible)
- Your foster carer and your foster carer's link worker
- Sometimes a health visitor
- Sometimes your teacher or headteacher - who may stay just for the part of the meeting about your education
- An independent reviewing officer who is in charge of the meeting and who will make sure your views are heard.

You can attend part or all of the meeting. You can also write down what you want to say or tell your social worker what you would like to say and they will discuss it in the meeting for you.



Independent advocacy

Action for children provide an independent advocacy service for children. An independent advocate will represent your views if you feel you are not being listened to. To get an independent advocate you can:

Contact your social worker • Ask the Children's Advice Service • Ring Action for Children direct on freephone 0800 085 0621. Full contact details are on the back page.

Independent visitor

Some young people may benefit from having a trained adult volunteer, known as an independent visitor, who is separate to the foster carers and the existing adults in the young person's life. An independent visitor can offer friendship, spend regular (reliable) time with you doing new activities or having the opportunity to go to new places.

If you are interested you should talk to your social worker. You will get a booklet telling you about the person before you meet them to make sure you still want to go ahead.

What do I do if I have a complaint?

If you are not happy with the fostering service or have any ideas on how it could be made better, it is really important that you can tell us. You can do this by using the Complaints Procedure and either tell your foster carer or social worker what you want to say, or do it yourself. You can also contact:

- The Complaints Service on 0191 433 2407 or 0191 477 9706
- Children's Rights Service on 0191 433 2396
- OFSTED on 0300 123 1231
- Independent Reviewing Officers on 0191 433 8030

Full contact details are at the end of this booklet.

For teenagers only...

When will I leave foster care?

When you are older you will leave foster care. You may live as an adult with your carer in what is called 'supported lodgings' or live on your own or with friends. This won't happen until you are ready and may not be until you are 18 or 21, or even older.

The Government's Leaving Care Act spells out very clearly that all young people must get help to live on their own, and be prepared to live on their own. As you get older you need to start learning how to look after yourself and to do practical tasks around the house.

By the time you are 16 it is important that you can:

- Make yourself a basic meal
- Know how to change a light bulb
- Know how to use the washing machine
- Be able to change a plug fuse
- Be able to iron your clothes

You should also have your own savings account and know how to pay bills. Your foster carer and social worker will help you to learn all of this.

You will usually have a social worker from the Looked After Children's Over 15 team to help plan your future with a 'Pathway Plan' of action in place to support you.

About the fostering service

There are over 200 children and young people in foster care in Gateshead. Some are in full time foster care and others stay for short breaks or holidays.

What we do

We want to provide the best foster care service possible and to do this we:

- Talk to you to make sure we are providing what you want.
- Always try to improve by looking at what other services are doing and making sure we follow Government rules.
- Try to make sure we have enough foster carers.
- Offer foster carers plenty of training and support so they can give you the best care possible.
- Work with other services such as health and education.

How do we find our foster carers?

We regularly advertise in newspapers and at events to find new foster carers.

- All applicants to foster are thoroughly checked and assessed to make sure they are able to look after children properly.
- Applicants go on a preparation training course before they become foster carers and continue to do training once they are carers.
- All foster carer applications are checked by a special Fostering Panel who recommend whether they should be approved or not.
- For some children, it is a relative or friend who is checked and approved to be their foster carer.
- All foster carers are reviewed at least once a year.

Contact information

The Fostering Service

Gateshead Council, Prince Consort Road, Gateshead NE8 4HJ
Tel: 0191 433 8333

Complaints Team

Gateshead Council, Civic Centre, Regent Street, Gateshead NE8 1HH
Tel: 0191 433 2408

Gateshead Council's Children and Young People's Rights Service

You will be visited by a worker from this service and provided with contact cards so you can easily stay in touch.

Children and Young People's Rights Service
Gateshead Council, Regent Street, Gateshead NE8 1HH
Tel: 0191 433 2647

Independent Advocacy

Action for Children
Children and Young People's Advocacy Service
Mea House, Ellison Place
Newcastle NE 1 8XS
Tel: 0800 085 0621
Email: necrs@actionforchildren.org.uk

Independent Visitors

Action for Children
North East Children's Right Service
Independent Visitor Service
Mea House, Ellison Place
Newcastle NE 1 8XS
Tel: 0191 261 9212

Ofsted

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA
Tel: 0300 123 1231

Childline

All calls are free and in confidence
Tel: 0800 1111
www.childline.org.uk

Children's Rights Director

Ofsted
Aviation House, 125 Kingsway
London, WC2B 6SE
www.rights4me.org
Tel: 0800 528 0731