

14+
YEARS

Children and young people's guide to being in care



Introduction

Hello,

We are a group of young people who grew up in care in Sefton. We wanted to put together some information for you to give you an idea of the care and support you will receive while in care.

We know that it can be hard when you first come into care and that you will meet lots of people over the first few weeks which can be very confusing. There are lots of different ways you can be cared for like:

foster care, kinship care, residential. So, we hope this booklet helps.

Remember, you are not alone. Lots of children and young people spend time in care for a number of different reasons.

Try and stay positive and if you have any worries or problems you can always speak to your carer, keyworker, social worker, teacher or someone else that you trust.

Good luck.



What is 'Being in Care'?

Being in care or being looked after means you are not living with your parents, carers or guardians. There could be lots of reasons for this: there could be family problems, one or both of your parents might be ill and cannot look after you, or you are a young asylum seeker and your parents and family live in another country.

What is Foster Care?

Some foster carers look after children and young people for a few days, over weekends or school holidays and this is called short breaks care (also called 'respite care'). Other foster carers provide a home until you are an adult – it all depends on what your individual needs are. Some of you may be living with people you already knew as a family member or friend. This is called family and friends care.

Foster carers have lots of checks and are assessed before they can become foster carers. They have a supervising social worker who helps them to support the children and young people they care for. The supervising social worker will visit regularly to see how everything is going. They will look around the home, including bedrooms, to make sure it is a safe place to live.

You can find out more about the fostering service in something called 'The statement of Purpose'. It tells you how the fostering service operates and the training and support available for foster carers. If you would like to see a copy just ask your carer or social worker and they will get one for you.

What is a Children's Home?

A children's home is where a group of young people live together. There are members of staff on duty to look after you. Their job is to support you and encourage you with things like hobbies and school. You will have your own bedroom where you can put your personal things and make it special to you.

You should have a keyworker at the children's home who will make sure you have everything you need. You may also get a handbook which will tell everything you need to know about living there. If you don't get one ask a member of staff or your social worker for one.



Who's Who

You will come across lots of people during your time in care. For example, Social Worker, Residential Key Worker, Independent Reviewing Officer, Supervising Social Worker, Personal Advisor, Advocate, Designated Looked After Children's Nurse. There is more information about all of these at the back of this booklet.

You will have a social worker who is responsible for making sure you are happy and well. They will visit you regularly and come to any important meetings involving you. You can contact your social worker if you need to speak to them between visits.

It might help to write your social workers name and contact details in the space below.

Social Worker's name:

Social Worker's contact details:

Phone:

Email:

You will also have regular review meetings to make sure everything is going well. This meeting will be organised by someone called an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO for short). They will see you on your own before each of your meetings to make sure your care plan is working for you. You can also contact them between meetings if you need to.

You can write their contact details in the space below.

Independent Reviewing Officers name:

Independent Reviewing Officers contact details:

Phone:

Email:

What is a Care Plan?

All children and young people who are in care and looked after by Sefton Council will have a care plan. The plan explains how Sefton Children's Services can best look after you and makes sure that everyone who has responsibility for your welfare knows what they have to do.

Your Care Plan will include the following information:

- Why you need to be in care
- Where you will live while you are in care
- How we will support your education
- How we will support your health
- How you will keep in touch with your family and friends
- How we will support your race, language, religion or culture.

Who is involved in writing my Care Plan?

Several people can be involved in writing your Care Plan but the most important person is **YOU** because it is **YOUR PLAN**.

Other people who will help to put your plan together will be:

- Your Social Worker
- Your Parents or Carers
- Your Foster Carers or Residential Support Staff
- And, sometimes, it may include:
 - Your teacher
 - Your doctor, or
 - Close Relatives



Can my Care Plan be changed?

While you are in care your plan will be reviewed by an **Independent Reviewing Officer** (IRO) at your Looked After Children Review Meetings. If you, or anyone who helped make your plan, wish to make any changes, then these will be discussed and agreed at your Looked After Children Review Meetings. You can go along to your Looked After Children Review meetings and let everyone know how you think your Care Plan is going – your views are really important.

School and Education

Most children and young people who come into care will be able to stay at the same school. For some though it might be necessary to change to a school that is nearer to where you are living and easier to get to. If this happens your social worker will talk to you about it and you will be helped with any changes that need to be made.

You will also have a Personal Education Plan (PEP for short). This will help to plan for your education and will support you to look at future education options like college and university.

Your education is really important so we have a Virtual School for Looked After Children with a Headteacher and Education Officers who are there to support you with your education. You can contact the Virtual School if you have any questions or worries on: **07929 769285** or email: **admin.virtualschool@sefton.gov.uk**

Every school has a Designated Teacher for looked after children and they will introduce themselves to you once you have come into care. They are there to make sure that everything is going okay for you in school. You can also talk to them if you are worried about anything.

Health and Wellbeing

While in care you will get the medical and dental treatment you need. You will have an initial health assessment when you first come into care with one of the looked after children's nurses and then a follow up with them each year.

You can contact the health team at any time if you have any questions or worries. Their contact details are:

Sefton Looked After Children's Health Team. Tel: **0151 295 9690**

There are details at the back of this booklet about other organisations that can also support you.

You can also get safe, confidential support and advice from Kooth. The site is open to children and young people in Sefton aged 11yrs to 19yrs. They have trained counsellors available until 10pm every night, 365 days a year. You can contact them at www.kooth.com

Your Rights

There are certain ways you should be treated no matter what: these are called 'Your Rights'. You have the right:

- To be kept safe, secure and protected
- For adults to listen to you and treat you fairly
- To information and advice, health care and help with your education
- To enjoy your own culture and religion
- To and advocate to help you if you want to make a complaint
- If you have a disability you have the right to any help you need
- To know why you are in care and when you can see your family and friends.
- To support to take part in activities and hobbies that you enjoy.

If you don't think that you are being listened too and your rights are not being respected then you can talk to your social worker, independent reviewing officer, carer or key worker. You can also ask for an independent advocate.



Moving into Independence

We want you to be as prepared as possible when you leave care. One of the ways we can do this is by helping you to develop a Pathway Plan.

The plan will look at what support you will need, to live independently, when you are ready to make that step. It will be much more detailed than your care plan and will include things like where you will live, any education, apprenticeships, traineeships, college, university or training you might want, job options, your money as well as any health, lifestyle, relationship, family or other support you might need. This includes any specific support you might need if you have a disability or particular lifestyle need.

Your pathway plan will also outline any actions that need to be taken and who will be responsible for making them happen. You will be given a copy of your pathway plan so that you can keep track of everything that has been agreed.

The pathway planning starts, a few months before your 16th birthday, with a meeting with your social worker where you will discuss what you want and what is best for you – this is called a Needs Assessment.

You will also be allocated a Leaving Care Personal Advisor who will support you when you are ready to leave care and will review your pathway plan with you every 6 months. They will also keep in regular contact with you and will be there to support you with any questions or problems you may have.

Your Leaving Care Personal Advisor will also give a copy of the Sefton Local Offer for Care Leavers. The Local Offer outlines all the support available to you as a Care Leaver and covers everything from financial support through to support with education, employment and training.



Independent Visiting and Advocacy

An Independent Visitor is a trained volunteer who can meet with you regularly, usually once a month. They will enjoy spending time with you and will give you a positive 'role model' in your life.

Independent Advocates are specially trained volunteers who help young people to speak up for themselves and get their views and feelings heard.

If you would like an Independent Visitor or an Independent Advocate then you can speak to your carer, social worker or key worker or you can use the details below:

VIVA@sefton.gov.uk / 0151 934 4167

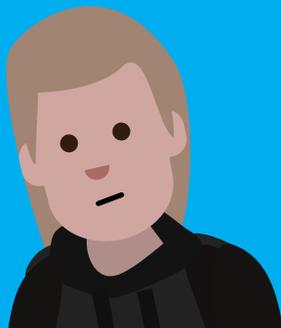
What if I am not happy?

If you are unhappy about something it is important that you try to talk to your Social Worker about it, or another adult you trust like your Carer or Teacher. They can help you sort out any worries you have.

If you feel that it is not being sorted then you can ask for an Independent Advocate. This is someone, independent of the local authority, who will support you to have your thoughts, feelings and wishes heard. You can ask your Social Worker or Carer to arrange this for you or you can contact them on 0151 934 4167. Mobile: 07771843282 or email: VIVA@sefton.gov.uk

You also have the right to make a complaint and you can contact the Children's Complaints Officer on: 0151 934 3628 or at childrenscomplaints@sefton.gov.uk. You can also ask for an Independent Advocate to help you with this, or, you can ask a trusted adult to help you do this.

Access to



Files

You will have records held by social care that contain information about you, for example, why you are in care and discussions you have had with your social workers. You have the right to request access to your personal Social care files, this is known as a Subject Access Request (SAR). It is always best to ask someone to support you with this to make sure that you can understand the information that may be held in your file. When you request your Social Care files, you will be asked to provide ID. You will be asked to provide copies to verify your address, such as a utility bill and photographic ID such as a passport. Once we receive all your ID the statutory guideline states; we have 30 days to prepare your files, however, your files may take up to three months if there is a lot of information or is complex. You can either make a request through your social worker or leaving care personal advisor, or send a request to the Access to Files email accesstfiles@sefton.gov.uk or use the online link to fill out the form [\SMBC-APPFILE-01\accesstfiles](#)

It is always best to ask for support when you read your files as it can be confusing and upsetting. Your file may have lots of information blacked out which we need to do to protect someone else's privacy.

Running Away

If you are feeling unhappy or unsettled, sometimes you might feel that the only thing to do is run away, but it doesn't make things better or help to sort things out. If you are feeling like this it's really important to tell someone how you are feeling. This could be anyone that you trust, friends, family, member of staff, foster carer or social worker. You can also get support from the Runaway Helpline. You can text or call them on: **116 000** or visit their website: www.runawayhelpline.org.uk

What happens if I do run away

If you do run away or go missing, your carers will have to tell your social worker and the police. They will also want you to see someone independent, from Catch 22, when you return so that you have the chance to talk to someone about what is going on for you. We will never be angry with you for running away we are just worried about you and want to keep you safe.

Making A Difference (MAD) Group.

We are a group of young people aged 14yrs plus who are currently, or have, lived in care in Sefton. We meet up regularly and use our experiences to support Sefton Council in making services and support, for children in their care, even better. We get involved in all sorts of things like staff interview panels, training social workers and foster carers and developing information guides like this one.

If you would like to find our more about the group you can contact Karen Gray on **07929 769319** or email: **Karen.Gray@sefton.gov.uk**

Help and Advice

There may be times when you feel hurt, worried or upset and things seem to be going wrong. If this happens, it's really important to tell someone how you're feeling, this could be anyone that you trust, friends, family, a member of staff, your foster carer or social worker. If you don't have any one to talk to there are people and organisations that can help you.

OFSTED. This is a government organisation that makes sure that all local authorities are providing the best possible support to children and young people. Every couple of years they will send inspectors out to visit local authorities to see how they are doing at delivering their services. They also like to get the views of children and young people and you may be invited to take part in a survey or to meet them in person when they visit Sefton. You can also get in touch with them if you would like to.

Their contact details are:

OFSTED
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Telephone: **0300 123 1231**

Email: **enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk**

THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER has a website with useful information and advice on. You can talk to one of the team and ask them for advice and help.

Their website address is: www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk The website also gives you the opportunity to ask your own questions as well as giving answers to some already asked.

HELPLINE FOR CHILDREN IN CARE: 0800 528 0731 Help at Hand email address: help.team@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

CHILDLINE has a website that you can look at which has lots of useful information. You can also talk to someone online from there. The website is www.childline.org.uk or you can phone them on **08001111**

BULLYBUSTERS provide a web site and a free-phone helpline for anyone who is affected by or concerned about bullying. Helpline number is **0800 169 6928**. The website is at www.bullybusters.org.uk

RUNAWAY HELPLINE: provide information and support to young people who are thinking about running away. Call or text on **116 000**
The website is at www.runawayhelpline.org.uk

CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health) Crisis Line **0151 293 2577**

Mermaids provide free and confidential support for transgender, non-binary and gender diverse young people up until their 20th birthday. You can visit the website at: www.mermaids.org.uk or you can call them on: 0808 801 0400 or text MERMAIDS to: 85258

Complaints, Compliments and Comments. If you are unhappy about something or you would like to make a comment about your care you can contact the Children's Complaints Officer on **0151 934 3628** or email them at: childrenscomplaints@sefton.gov.uk

Independent Visitor or Advocate. If you would like an independent visitor or advocate you can contact the VIVA Officer on **0151 934 4167** or email: VIVA@sefton.gov.uk

Who's Who

FOSTER CARER: This is a person or a couple who provide a place in their home for children when they come into care.

RESIDENTIAL SUPPORT STAFF: These are the people who work in residential children's homes and provide support to the children living there.

SOCIAL WORKER: Your social worker is the person who makes sure you are happy, safe and well and that everything is in place for you.

SUPERVISING SOCIAL WORKER: This person gives support to Foster Carers and makes sure that they are providing the best possible care.

DESIGNATED NURSE & Looked After Children's Health Team: The health team will see you when you first come into care for an assessment of your health.

They will do a review health assessment once a year, with you, to make sure everything is going well.

DESIGNATED TEACHER: Every school has to have a teacher who is there to look out for any looked after children in the school. They will be the one who links in with your social worker. They are also there for you to speak to if you have any problems or concerns.

ADVOCATE: This is someone who is independent of the local authority who can provide you with support to have your views heard. They can also go to meetings with you to make sure you are heard and that your views are taken seriously

EDUCATION OFFICER AND VIRTUAL SCHOOL: The virtual school team are there to make sure that you get the most out of your education. They can also help you plan for further education, university, employment or training.

COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS OFFICER: This is the person who you would contact if you have any comments, compliments or complaints about your care.

ACCESS TO FILES OFFICER: This is the person that would help you to access your personal files.

Meetings and what they mean.

LAC Review Meeting: This is your Looked After Child meeting and it is chaired by your IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer). These meetings will look at your care plan and how everything has been going and if any changes need to be made to it then they will be agreed at this. It is really important that you are involved in this meeting and get your views across. Your IRO will make contact with you before your meeting to support you having your say. Your foster carer or residential key worker will be there too and others that are involved in your care may also be invited.

Care Planning Meeting: These meetings are held when changes need to be made to your care plan. It will bring together everyone involved in delivering your plan to make sure that the changes are right for you. You can also attend your care planning meetings if you want to.

Personal Education Planning (PEP's): You may be asked to go along to your Personal Education Planning meeting which will involve the designated

teacher from your school and possibly one of the education officers from the Virtual School. Again, it is a chance to have your voice heard in relation to your education and your plans for your future career, training or study.

Initial Health Assessments: When you first come into care you will have an Initial Health Assessment with one of the nurses from our Looked After Health Team. It is important that this takes place so that we can make sure your health and wellbeing is properly planned for. Each year you will have a Review Health Assessment, again with a nurse for the health team, to check that everything health related is going well.

Pathway Planning: When you are a bit older you will start to become involved in planning for your future. This is called Pathway Planning. It will start when your social worker starts a Needs Assessment with you to make sure that everything will be in place for when the time comes for you to leave care. Once you have a plan in place this will be regularly reviewed with your Leaving Care Personal Advisor to make sure you are on track.

We hope this guide has been useful to you. Good luck for the future from members of the Making A Difference (MAD) group.

