



What is a suitable placement for an unaccompanied asylum seeking child? - Information for local authorities to accompany the interim national transfer protocol for UASC.

Each unaccompanied asylum seeking child should be assessed and a decision made about which placement will suit them best. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' placement. The benefits of each placement will depend on the needs of the child; whether or not they have been trafficked; their experience during their journey to the UK; their culture, age, sex and personality; their sense of personal autonomy and ability to live independently; and their sense of safety and ideas on what will make them feel safe.

The Department for Education Statutory guidance on Care of unaccompanied and trafficked children (2014) sets out the steps that local authorities should take to plan for the provision of support for looked after children who are unaccompanied asylum seeking children, including where the individual is a victim of trafficking. The guidance states that "Placement decisions should take particular account of protecting the child from any continued risk from traffickers, and from a heightened risk of going missing. An out of area placement might in some cases be appropriate to put distance between the child and where the traffickers expect them to be. Specialist accommodation should be considered, for example, in settings which specialise in dealing with victims of trafficking. Bed and breakfast accommodation is not suitable, even on an emergency basis. Such accommodation could leave children particularly vulnerable to risk from traffickers and does not cater for their protection or welfare needs."

Often very little information about the young person is available in the first few days and so it is highly likely that a placement decision will not be made immediately. A temporary placement can enable the child or young person to feel safe and physically recover from their journey and be able to engage with an assessment of their needs with the help of interpreters where necessary.

An unaccompanied child is likely to have developed survival skills and possibly a veneer of being able to cope, which may mask their actual needs. Assessment should be carefully completed before assuming any level of physical, social and emotional resilience. An assessment of needs should include (but not be limited to) language and communication skills, ability to buy and cook food, ability to care for themselves and keep themselves safe, their understanding of British laws and social customs, and their ability to access education and public services (including GP and dentist).

It may be that a young person would benefit from being in a placement with a high level of support initially and then when they are ready they can move on to a placement with a lower level of support.

The placement decision will also require careful consideration of the wider support needs of the child including their cultural and social needs. It may not be that the accommodation setting or carers can meet those needs on their own so other more creative ways such as mentors or links to diaspora groups could be used.

Because of their past experiences and ongoing difficulties, unaccompanied asylum seeking children have a high risk of experiencing psychological distress, including sleep disturbances, attention and concentration difficulties, flashbacks of previously experienced



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trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It is important that carers are able to identify possible indicators of mental health issues.

If a placement is not suitable and the child or young person does not feel safe it can have an impact upon young people's ability to attend and engage with education, training or employment. A lack of suitable accommodation can also increase the likelihood of young people becoming the victims of crime, and/or of associating with antisocial peer groups. This can lead to engagement in antisocial behaviour and possibly entrance into the criminal justice system. Young people in an unsuitable placement can also feel unsafe, and as a result, be unwilling to trust positive adult caregivers. This can lead to an increased likelihood of absconding, which in turn can increase their chances of being exploited – a pervasive risk factor that can have serious and long term consequences for their physical and emotional wellbeing.

Where a child has been identified as having been (or is suspected as having been) trafficked there will be a range of issues which need to be understood when making a decision about a suitable placement. The following documents provide further information and advice in this respect:

Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked, Department for Education and Home Office, 2011.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-children-who-may-have-been-trafficked-practice-guidance>

On the Safe Side: Principles for the safe accommodation of child victims of trafficking, ECPAT, 2011.

http://www.ecpat.org.uk/sites/default/files/on_the_safe_side.pdf

Placement options

The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review¹ is statutory guidance relevant for the care of all looked after children and states that there are a range of placement options which may be suitable, some of which will only be an option if the child is aged 16 or over:

1. Residential Care Home

Care within an Ofsted regulated and inspected children's residential care home.

2. Semi-secure reception unit for trafficked children

Care in specialist accommodation tailored to enable high levels of monitoring and supervision while children who have been identified as having been trafficked are intensively engaged by staff to prevent onward trafficking.

3. Foster care

Care in a family setting either in a placement in an Ofsted registered and inspected with an Independent Fostering Agency foster carer or in a placement with a local authority foster carer.

1

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/441643/Children_Act_Guidance_2015.pdf



4. Supported lodgings (only for children aged 16 or over)

Supported lodgings are a service which can allow an individual to live in a family home, experiencing domestic life in a shared and supportive environment, but with a lower level of monitoring than in foster care. The young person has their own room and shares the kitchen and bathroom facilities with the family or householder - or 'host'. Similar to foster carers, hosts can be families, couples or single people.

The accommodation is a furnished bedroom in a domestic house, with use of WC, bathing, cooking and laundry facilities as a member of the household. The householder/host is resident full time in the property but pursues their own lifestyle (including daily routine, absence at work, holidays and weekends away). They provide a home-like environment and domestic routine consistent with the young person engaging in education, training or work, including the provision of some meals. They establish an appropriate and consistent personal relationship with the young person, including non-intrusive practical help and advice.

The service provider (a local authority or independent organisation) undertakes recruitment, scrutiny and approval of a host's accommodation and suitability to work with vulnerable young people in an unsupervised home environment. They typically provide general skills development, training and experience-sharing events for host families.

5. Supported accommodation (only for children aged 16 or over)

Supported accommodation (not regulated by Ofsted but covered by regulations and may be evaluated as part of single inspections via tracked or sampled cases) typically has multiple rooms and young people can provide peer support to each other on accessing services, local facilities and learning English. Staff are available on site (often 24/7) and typically have experience in helping young people to settle in and begin to develop independent skills. They will be trained in safeguarding children issues, and will be responsive to feedback from the young people placed there.

Supported accommodation may include study areas, outside space and a communal meeting room. Staff and health providers are able to run sessions to support the development of independent living skills, support with homework and meeting others. Security can be tailored to the needs of the young people, for example, some have all visitors and guests sign in and out, and CCTV.

Good supported accommodation will provide a family environment in which unaccompanied asylum seeking children can learn to develop and grow. This can serve to nurture a sense of belonging – strengthening their confidence and trust in adults – and providing them with the emotional stability needed to develop positive friendships and engage with their wider community. House meetings can provide an opportunity to encourage young people to eat together and share, whilst also providing them with a forum to air any frustrations within the community and to teach them resolution skills.

6. Shared housing (only for children aged 16 or over)

Shared housing is a multiple occupancy house, shared between other unaccompanied asylum seeking young people (and sometimes some non-asylum seeking young people) to provide peer support, with additional visiting support. This type of accommodation allows young people to live very independently but usually with visiting support – which should be tailored to the needs of the individual young people.



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It may be that a young person moves into shared housing arrangements following a period of time in a placement with more supervision where their independent living skills and ability to manage their own health needs could be fully assessed.

Key workers

If the child is aged 16 or over and placed in either supported accommodation or shared housing, it is important that each young person should be assigned their own key worker who can build rapport, work with them to support their needs and liaise with the local authority social workers or housing team to ensure continuity of care. The child needs to understand who their key worker is and have easy access to them.

So what is “suitable accommodation”?

Statutory guidance and care planning regulations clearly set out that in some cases, a child aged over 16 can be suitably placed in accommodation termed as “other arrangements”. This is “unregulated” in the sense that it isn’t regulated and inspected by Ofsted in the same way that a registered children’s home or foster care provider is regulated and inspected, however it is covered by statutory guidance and regulations explaining when and how local authorities might use them. Appropriate local authority use of “other arrangements” is looked at, as appropriate, by Ofsted as part of the single inspections of any local authority children’s services.

Where there has been an assessment of need of a young person 16 or over and the best match to their needs is in “other arrangements” the placement could be supported lodgings, supported accommodation or shared accommodation.

The local authority must be satisfied that any such placement is in the best interests of each individual young person, with practice in line with all relevant statutory guidance and care planning regulations.

The ECPAT (2011) report *On the Safe Side: Principles for the safe accommodation of child victims of trafficking* sets out some key considerations when assessing the most suitable placement for an unaccompanied child who may have been trafficked:

“There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ accommodation for children who have been trafficked. The benefits of any particular form of accommodation depend on a child’s personal needs and circumstances, including their relationship to their trafficker/s and level of risk; the type of exploitation they were subjected to and how traumatised they are; their culture, age, sex and personality; their sense of personal autonomy and ability to live independently; and their sense of safety and ideas on what will make them feel safe.

*For example, **for some children, fostering is a ‘culturally bound concept’ that is difficult to relate to because of their personal experiences of being exploited. Some children who are used to living more independently can reject the idea of ‘having a substitute family’, while others feel pressured to bond with their foster family at the cost of ‘betraying their birth families’. Some young people feel more comfortable living in a group setting, which may feel less intimate, with a staff group providing care, access to care, access to peers (some with similar experiences) and group activities including therapy.***

Professionals often have different opinions about what determines a child’s best interests. Challenges include working with agencies that are ‘resource-led’ and have different work



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cultures and priorities, and working with needs assessments that are not properly completed or sufficiently focused on trafficking. Face-to-face meetings as soon as possible after first contact with a child can help professionals come to a shared determination of a child's best interests. Assumptions by professionals about a child's needs, such as finding a 'cultural match' in a foster family, can lead to unsuitable placements." (p.13)

Considerations when commissioning a supported lodgings provider

- Are there clear and robust assessment, approval and ongoing monitoring and review processes in place to determine the suitability of hosts?
- Do all hosts participate in an induction programme which includes awareness raising about all aspects of the Supported Lodgings Service and training on safeguarding?
- Is there a suitable safeguarding policy?
- Is there a protocol in place for a trafficking risk assessment and referral to the National Referral Mechanism?
- Is ongoing training provided, which is also offered to family members, to enhance their knowledge and skills based on an analysis of individual learning and development needs?
- Are arrangements in place to provide ongoing support to hosts through the appointment of a named worker to each host by the Service Provider?
- Do support arrangements for hosts also specify access to out-of-hours assistance?
- Is a mechanism in place for hosts, including those who are not deemed suitable, to make representations or a complaint?
- Is there a written protocol to be followed in the event of an allegation being made about a host? Do both the young person and host know how they will be supported in the event of an allegation being made?
- Do hosts receive advice on allowances payable for the provision of accommodation and support to the young person placed in their home in accordance with established financial policy and procedures, including implications for their personal income including tax implications?
- Have arrangements been made by the host for meeting any public legal liabilities as a result of a Supported Lodgings placement?
- Are hosts aware of their obligations to inform the police and the responsible local authority if a child goes missing?

Considerations when commissioning supported accommodation and shared accommodation

- Are there robust systems of recruitment, induction, supervision and development of support staff?
- Do support staff undergo specific awareness training in cultural awareness, differing religious needs and legal support required when working with unaccompanied asylum seeking children?
- Do all support staff participate in an induction programme which includes awareness raising about all aspects of the service provision and training on safeguarding?
- Is ongoing training provided, to enhance staff knowledge and skills based on an analysis of individual learning and development needs?
- Is there a suitable safeguarding policy?
- Is there a protocol in place for a trafficking risk assessment and referral to the National Referral Mechanism?
- Are there clear processes for receiving new arrivals to ensure all immediate medical, physical, legal and safety needs are met?

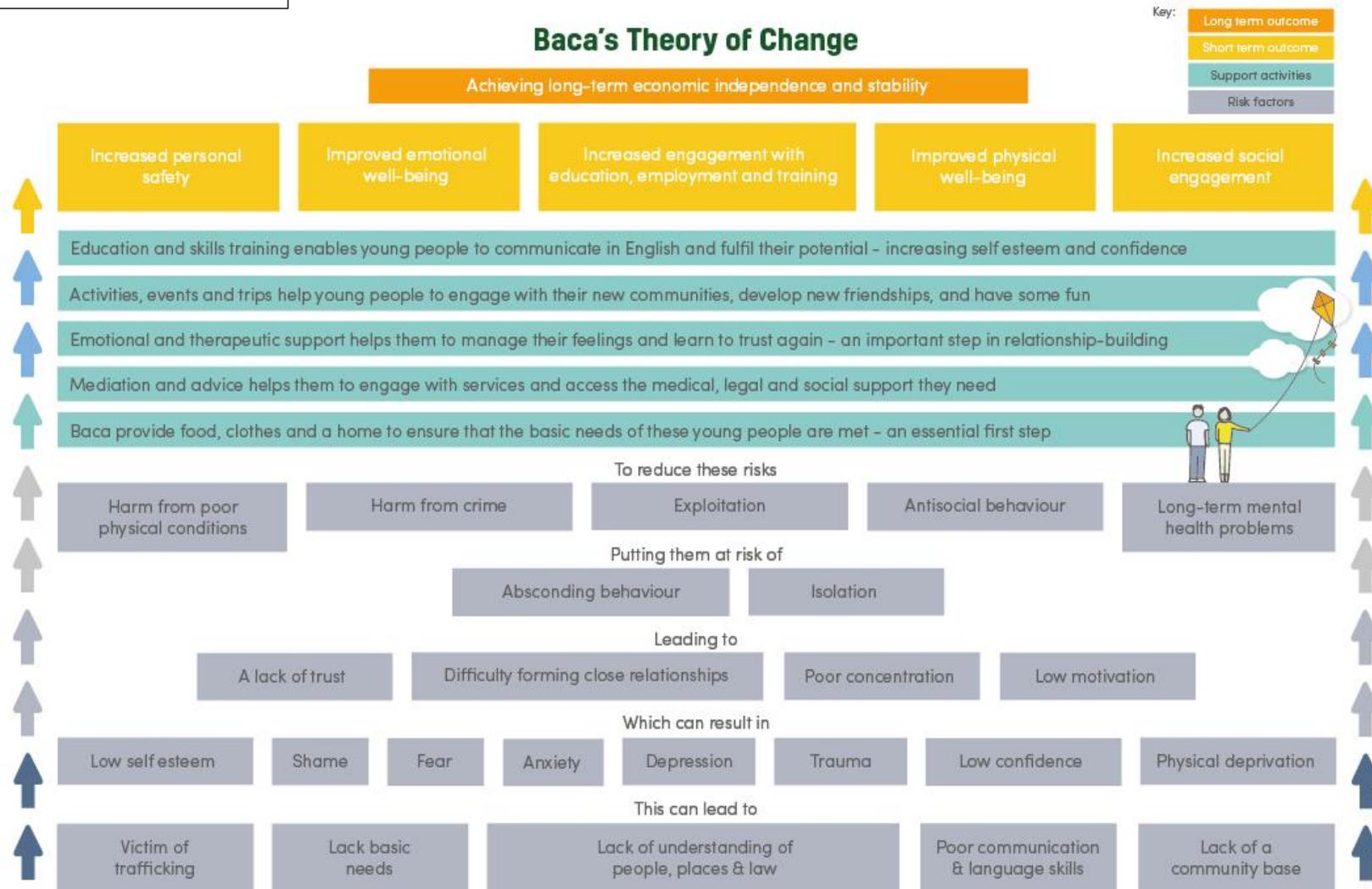


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- Is accommodation located in a safe area where there is reasonable access to support networks (cultural & religious), health and leisure services and other amenities?
- If there is any point in a 24 hour period where staff are not on the premises, is there clear access to out-of-hours assistance for children?
- Is there a written protocol to be followed in the event of an allegation being made about a support worker? Do both the young person and support worker know how they will be supported in the event of an allegation being made?

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UASC arriving in the UK are often traumatised from their journey, from the experiences that initially made them flee and from exploitation that may have occurred through trafficking or other violence.