

Introductory Guide and Resource Directory for foster carers supporting unaccompanied asylum seekers in Devon

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Introduction

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) are some of the most vulnerable young people in the country. They are often alone, in an unfamiliar place and are likely to be surrounded by people who don't speak their first language.

They are unlikely to have had a settled childhood. Some may have experienced racial abuse, been involved in trafficking, child sexual exploitation, been exposed to war or other turmoil, all of which can lead to serious psychological and emotional issues.

The asylum process itself can be stressful and difficult and so they will need support around this. In addition their culture and religion may also affect how they present themselves and how they mix with others in your home. You may find '[Understanding Race in a Devon Landscape – a guide for foster carers](#)' a useful read.

Fostering Devon runs [UASC training](#) for foster carers, and Devon County Council's policy on Child Sexual Exploitation can be found [here](#). Further information and training is available from the Devon Children and Families Partnership website [here](#).

The young person in your care is a child or young person first, a child in care in Devon second, and an unaccompanied asylum seeker third.

Advice from young people

We asked young people seeking asylum in Devon to contribute to this guide, here are their top tips to help make UASC feel comfortable in your home:

- Be open, talk to them, and take time to understand them. Find out what they like and don't like to eat, to do and the living environment. Find out about their religion, is there anything they need to support their faith? How about education?
- Is there anything they want to share about their past? Make it clear that they don't have to tell you, it's completely up to them. Refrain from asking the same questions over and over, including why they are seeking asylum. Simply offer a sympathetic ear if they ever do want to talk.
- It may be easier to write things down so that they can read it carefully or get someone to explain it.
- Understanding the asylum process is important so that you can answer questions they may have.
- Offer advice on their options in life and reassure them about ways to stay safe. Teach them about money and how to take care of themselves without being patronising, many have had to fend for themselves from an early age.
- Everyone makes mistake, don't get angry if they do something wrong, simply explain or show them the right way to do something.
- Understand that they won't trust you straight away but showing them respect, care and love will help build a relationship.
- When they first arrive take them somewhere fun and relaxing, if possible give them options to choose from.
- Remember, you don't have to be an expert, ask as many questions as possible to enable you to build a picture and understanding of the young person without making assumptions.

Understanding age

Due to different cultures and previous experiences, UASC do not always fit with our preconceptions of how to support and care for young people. Some cultures expect young people, especially girls, to be less autonomous than we do in the UK. Often young people seeking asylum will come across as more mature, worldly wise and responsible than their British peers. They are unlikely however to have a clear understanding of their rights and entitlements now they are here in the UK, this is where foster carers should offer guidance and support.

UASC may have had to look after themselves and possibly others under conditions in which we may not have coped, and now find themselves being cared for which can leave them feeling uncomfortable and disempowered. It is important that carers strike a balance between respecting the individual by offering them a safe and secure childhood, and setting rules and boundaries including curfews.

**Please note, many unaccompanied and trafficked children arrive in the UK without documentation, with false documentation or with someone else's documentation. It is common for visa applications with incorrect details to be made to enable the movement of children from some countries. The existence of documentation (or application for any document) does not necessarily prove someone's age.*

Physical Health

Young people seeking asylum in the UK have access to free NHS services. You can find out more about this and how to register [here](#).

It is important that they understand that these services are free as they may be reluctant to attend if they misunderstand that they need to pay. They should be encouraged to go to the doctor, dentist and optician as soon as possible. There is a chance that they became unwell on their journey or have an enduring health problem that has not been diagnosed due to limited health services in their country of origin. It is a good idea to explain about the different health services to avoid unnecessary calls the emergency services when the GP or walk-in services are available.

All UASC have an initial health assessment with a paediatrician within a month of coming into care. They will continue to have Review Health Assessments with a child in care nurse either 6 monthly for children under five years old, or annually for over fives.

Mental Health

Understandably there are much higher rates of mental health problems in young people seeking asylum than in the UK population average. If you are worried about the mental wellbeing of the young person living with you, please speak to their social worker and your supervising social worker.

- Unaccompanied young people are children away from their families in a foreign country where few speak their first language.
- Most will have endured significant suffering and deprivation on their journey.
- The lengthy asylum process is stressful; this can affect the young person's mood and increase anxiety.
- Some young people who are seeking asylum in the UK have suffered torture or other significant trauma.

Instances of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are ten times higher for these young people than in the average population. There are also elevated rates of depression and anxiety.

There are some by-products of significant depression, anxiety and trauma that can result in counter-productive behaviour, for example when being interviewed during the asylum process.

Trauma can affect memory. A young person may be unable to remain focused and may seem trancelike when being asked about significant events because they were traumatic. This is a sign they need a break from the discussion maybe a drink, a walk, some space to be upset, some light conversation. By being aware of this you can help.

Your young person may not give eye contact. It may be because they are scared or a by-product of trauma, it does not automatically mean they are not telling the truth.

Finally your young person may appear emotionally blank when telling their story or they may seem very tired. Again this can make their story come across as less believable but it can be a sign of unprocessed trauma.

We know that challenging early life experiences and being separated from primary caregivers often results in children and young people finding it hard to trust. This is also the case for asylum seekers. We need to draw on the same resilience, patience, respect and kindness that we use to support all the young people we care for.

Whilst we may be looking for signs of exploitation or trafficking or risk, we must also acknowledge that behaving secretly or not-disclosing everything is normal adolescent behaviour and may not be cause for alarm.

For our part, we must always make sure young people know what's going on and why, because feeling unsure and out of control can heighten levels of anxiety. We should also model open, transparent communication because this helps young people adopt this way of communicating with others.

Trafficking and Child Sexual Exploitation

Trafficked children are at risk of returning to or being found by their traffickers and further exploited for sex, forced labour, domestic servitude, or criminal activities. They are likely to be uncertain about who to trust and of their rights, and they may not disclose immediately the full facts. They may not initially recognise that they are victims of a crime and may have been told that children's services are not good people. Therefore it may take time for your relationship to grow.

Many trafficked children go missing from care, sometimes within the first 48 hours. This may be due to their fear that their family are being threatened. The location of the young person should not be divulged to anyone until their identity and relationship to the young person has been established.

If your young person is at high risk of going missing then their social worker will agree a specialist plan with you to minimise this risk in accordance with the 'Runaway and Missing from Home and Care protocols'.

The young person will need repeated reassurance that they are safe. They may need to be supported in keeping themselves safe so ask them what would help them feel safe. Involving the young person and empowering them whenever possible can help them regain a sense of control over their life.

If anyone suspects the risk of trafficking or exploitation we will need to monitor the movements and relationships of the young person. This should be done transparently through honest and respectful communications about rights and risks where possible.

Rights

[Here](#) is a link to the UN Convention on the 'Rights of the Child'. You may wish to share this with your young person in their own language.

Relationships

Establishing a strong, positive and trusting relationship can play an important role against young people going missing. Wherever possible rules and boundaries should be discussed and agreed mutually, this is to avoid the young person feeling like they are being controlled, as they may have experienced with traffickers.

Young UASC may feel very isolated and so it is important to try and arrange for them to meet up with others from their country of origin where possible, or at least with people who share a language or a faith.

In building a relationship with them you will need to show an interest and be non-judgemental when exploring differences between their culture and ours. This may include for example different views on arranged marriages, caste systems, differences in age of sexual consent and understanding of the concept of consent which may be different to that set out in UK law.

In addition, the child or young person may be used to relating very differently with older and younger people, or with males and females. It's good to do some research into the cultural norms of their country of origin, but also to remember that the young person is an individual and may not ascribe to the norms of his/her country.

Contact with family

It may be that the young person in your care has links to family members in the UK. These family members will need to be assessed before they can have unsupervised contact, as is the case for all children in care.

The young person may want support to try and contact their family back in their country of origin through [Red Cross Unite](#). It is important to speak to the young person's social worker if you become aware of this.

Prejudice and bullying

UASC may experience prejudices and racially/culturally motivated bullying. Reassure and explain to them that this is unacceptable, help them understand their rights. Encourage them to tell you if they are experiencing bullying in any way.

If you have other young people living with you it may be a good idea to get them to watch one of many short films showing the asylum process from the point of view of the young person. These can be found on YouTube or via Google.

You may also need to prepare your existing children and young people to report any bullying that they may experience by association, this is due to a negative public perception of asylum seekers by some people.

Education

Educational levels between UASC will vary greatly, it will depend on their country of origin, previous formal education and fluency in speaking and comprehension of English. The young person's social worker will organise for them to have an assessment and support at school or college, you will have an important role to play in supporting them to attend and settle in.

If they have very little English they will begin with intensive English lessons before starting other subjects. Young people consistently tell us that they really want to spend time in the evenings speaking English with you, so please make the time for this.

If the young person is of college age it is important that they enrol as soon as possible so that they can learn and practice their English and build relationships with others. This will also show the Home Office that they are hardworking and keen to integrate with UK

life. Attending college entitles them to a bursary which may be used to pay for transport, or equipment, students should discuss this fund with their college.

To discuss education options for an UASC in Devon please contact Colin Mitchell: colin.mitchell@devon.gov.uk .

Finances

UASC are entitled to a bank account. Nationwide are a welcoming bank, in addition to ID typically accepted by all banks they will accept either:

- 1) A biometric residence permit
or
- 2) An immigration status document from the UK Border Agency
alongside
- 3) A letter from the Home Office with proof of their address on.

As with any young person, support with budgeting is very important, in addition you will also need to ensure they understand the value of British coins and notes. You may need to be careful that the young person is not sending all their money home.

Some young people will not accept money from a female carer. Any allowance should be discussed at the placement planning meeting to ensure the young person is aware of the process. Please discuss any difficulties with your supervising social worker.

Interpreters

All UASC should have access to a translation service through [Multilingua](#) for important meetings. You may wish to check this is the case at the placement planning meeting. You may also wish to set up access to Language Line for emergencies. If this is not in place you will need to contact your supervising social worker or the Emergency Duty Team to get a code to access a translator if needed at short notice.

When using a translation service make sure you look directly at the young person, rather than at the translator – this can be tricky at first but remember; you are talking with the young person. It is also worth mentioning that the translator will only translate what you say, they will not chat with the young person, so if you don't want to sit in silence please keep up conversation. There are details of further training on working with translators in the [fostering training handbook](#).

The asylum process

The asylum process is long, stressful and emotional. Young UASC will need to revisit memories of significant trauma and separation, whilst at the same time remaining hopeful. They also need to think about what happens if their application is refused.

They will have multiple interviews, some of which can last a whole day and will need to have a responsible adult of their choice with them during their interviews. They will also have access to a solicitor which their social worker will help them to find. They have a right to change solicitors if they do not feel they are being well represented.

Devon Children's Services should also find a translator for the young person. You can help by checking that the interpreter has had training in working with children and undertaking home office substantive interviews.

The asylum process includes a complex set of timescales to comply with. It is important that you support them to keep hold of their ID and all correspondence from their solicitor and the Home Office and that you get them to all required appointments. The consequences for not attending a meeting or not responding to a phone call or letter can at worst be deportation. The young person or their social worker must inform their solicitor and the Home Office if they move address or get a new phone number.

Transition at 18 Years

Once an UASC turns 18 there are three main outcomes that they will face, it is a stressful and important time in their lives and so is likely to make them very anxious, it can also be very upsetting for the carer.

Outcome 1: Leave to Remain post 18: it is important to equip the young person as well as possible if they are to have a future in the UK. Part of the fostering process will help support the young person towards being ready to live an independent life in the UK – ensuring they have independent living skills, an education that will support them to get work, and a strong social network.

One foster carer observed a change in behaviour of the young man staying with her as soon as he had his leave to remain. There was a shift in his expectations, he wanted his national insurance card, the chance to work, to learn to drive and go to university immediately. He was frustrated when all this didn't happen right away.

Outcome 2: We also need to prepare the young person to be returned to their country of origin if they are refused an extension to remain in the UK.

Option 3: We may have to support a young person who has been refused leave to remain in the UK and who has exhausted all appeals, but has not yet been removed.

Sticking by the young person

All children in care benefit from having fewer carers and fewer moves, this is particularly the case for young UASC since they have had so little stability in their lives.

Leisure

It's a good idea to find out what sports or leisure activities the young person may enjoy, and try to link them in with these. They may be unsure and if so you could explore different options and try some together. Sports, creative activities, outdoor activities and socialising with peers are all shown to be protective factors against mental health problems and help build resilience.

Faith

Faith may be important to your young person, if this is the case you should find out more and help support them to continue to practice their faith. This can include providing food that is sourced and prepared in ways that are endorsed by their faith, respecting their prayer times, allowing them to keep an altar or prayer space in their room, and giving them information and support to attend a place of worship if possible.

It is a good idea to do some research into the religious customs and holidays, and to ask the young person what they want or need from you in relation to their faith.

It is worth noting that just because the young person comes from a country where most people are religious, it does not mean that they will be. They may have a complex or even adversarial relationship with faith and this could be a contributing factor to their asylum application, so never assume.

Exeter holds an annual [Respect Festival](#) which brings together communities to say no to racism and yes to multi-cultural understanding and social inclusion.

Devon Factsheets

This [Devon factsheet](#) may be useful in helping an UASC understand more about the place in which they are living.

Resource Directory

The following are a list of practical resources that may be useful.

- **Islam – Prayer Mats**
Exeter Mosque have offered prayer mats free of charge to asylum seeking children – contact Babul (office manager) on enquiries@exetermosque.org.uk
- [Devon Interfaith Forum for Youth \(DIFFY\)](#) is a dynamic group of young people from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds who come together for change. Young people from Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, and Bahai faiths, as well as those with no specific religious affiliation, gather to socialise, have fun and learn from each other.
- **Shops and online resources**
 - [Islamic Place](#) - buy everything from prayer mats to scarf pins
 - [Amazon](#) – find travel prayer mats
- **Exeter and East Devon**
 - Mosque and Islamic Centre for the South West,
12-13 York Road, Exeter, Devon, EX4 6PG.
www.exetermosque.org.uk - contact via email to arrange a visit
 - Exeter Hebrew Congregation,
Exeter Synagogue, Synagogue Place, Exeter, EX4 3EX.
www.exetersynagogue.org.uk/
- **South Devon and Torbay**
 - Torbay Islamic Centre
128-130 Avenue Road, Torquay, Devon, TQ2 5LQ.
- **West Devon and Plymouth**
 - Islamic Cultural and Community Centre (<http://piety.org.uk>)
19 Greenbank Avenue, St Judes, Plymouth, Devon, PL4 8PS.

Support Organisations in Devon

- **Devon Refugee Support** - <http://refugeesupportdevon.org.uk/> - open on Tuesday and Thursday with a drop-in service between 10am – 12.00 & 2pm – 4pm. Exeter Community Centre, 17 St Davids Hills, Exeter, Devon EX4 3RG. General advice on accessing statutory services, cultural networks etc.

- **Olive Tree Association** – English language learning. UASC should access English language learning through their school/college. The following may be useful as a top-up but is aimed at adults.

Olive Tree offers free English classes during term-time taught by volunteer teachers. Currently running 12 classes per week in Exeter, Teignmouth, Torquay, Newton Abbot and Honiton. Used to working with asylum seekers and refugees. Contact: Paul Vass: paul@devongrapevine.co.uk 01392 666222.

Also, free English lessons for minority ethnic groups in Exeter, contact David Wright via www.diversede Devon.org

- **Black and Minority Ethnic Information and Support in Devon** Hikmat Devon CIC (www.hikmatdevon.co.uk) offers a range of health and social care services for all including children and young people. These include activity and sports groups, carers service, skills and training, footcare and one-to-one support across Devon. Hikmat is happy to talk to foster carers about bespoke services but funding would be needed for these.

- **North Devon Sunrise CIC** www.northdevonsunrise.org/ in Barnstaple supports individuals from BME and diverse communities with a range of issues including: family welfare, social support and abuse. Facilitated through casework, advocacy and signposting. It also aims to reduce social isolation and promote inclusion by holding regular drop-in and information sessions, and a range of diversity-themed events open to all. English Language (ESOL) classes and training are held to improve confidence and increase employment potential.

Food shopping and eating out

Food has a strong link to identity and belonging. It is important to try and offer an UASC food that is familiar to them, this may mean traveling to specific shops and learning from them how to cook favourite dishes.

- Halal food - Halal is Arabic for permissible, it is food that adheres to Islamic law, as defined in the Koran. The Islamic form of slaughtering animals, dhabiha, involves a cut through the jugular vein, carotid artery and windpipe.

Supermarket	or	Is Halal meat sold?	Are products labelled as Halal?
Waitrose		Yes. Some lamb is halal. All other meat is non-halal	No halal labelling on New Zealand lamb
Marks and Spencer		Yes. All New Zealand lamb is halal. Chicken, beef and British lamb is non-halal	No halal labelling on New Zealand lamb
Tesco		Yes. Most New Zealand lamb is halal and some	At halal counters and kosher ranges

	other meats use halal techniques. Some halal-only counters	
Morrisons	Yes. Some branded halal chicken, lamb and beef. New Zealand lamb is halal	No halal labelling on New Zealand lamb. Halal ranges show slaughter method
Sainsbury's	Yes. A range of halal and kosher products	Halal and kosher ranges are labelled
Asda	Yes. A range of halal and kosher products	Only branded halal and kosher meals
Pizza Express	Yes	Not on menus, but on website
Zizzi	Yes	No
Ask	Yes	Not on menus, but on website
Harvester	Yes	Not on menus, but on website
Nando's	Yes, at most restaurants	Information in some stores and online
Beefeater	Yes. 80% of chicken is halal	No
Gourmet Burger Kitchen	Yes	Not on menus, but on website
Slug and Lettuce	Yes	No
Costa	Yes. 80% of chicken is halal	No
Greggs	Yes	No
KFC	Yes	No
Subway	Yes	Yes

- List of Halal restaurants and takeaways available here: www.zabihah.com/mob/sub/dUo2MHxpkH?t=r&s=r
- The Halal Monitoring Committee (HMC UK) is an independent, not for profit, registered charity who certify the production of genuine Halal food. HMC complies with UK Laws for food production, as well as Islamic dietary compliance Laws. www.halalhmc.org
- Online halal recipes: <http://halaal.recipes/>
www.faskitchen.com/
- **Exeter and East Devon**
 - Sidwell Street in Exeter has several Halal shops – including two butchers – and a halal restaurant
 - Mashawi Restaurant Exeter
44 Sidwell Street, Exeter EX4 6NS. Tel: 01392 202688

- Brothers Butchers-halal Exeter
119-122 Old Tiverton Road Exeter. Tel: 01392 206666
- Heera International Food Supermarket (8.30am – 10pm every day)
5-6 Well St, Exeter EX4 6QR. Tel: 01392 434323
- Yonk Asian Food
Summerland Street, Exeter, EX1 2AT. Tel: 01392 411598
- **West Devon and Plymouth**
- Embankment Halal Grocery, Plymouth (9-5 Mon-Sat Sun 10 – 4)
94 Embankment Road, Plymouth PL4 9HY. Tel: 01752 226 223

Cosmetics and skin care:

Young UASC will need skin and hair care products that work for them. Most products in high street stores have been developed for Caucasian skin and hair. It is important to find out what products the young person needs and to take them to buy them.

Buying foundation, concealer and other beauty products that match with darker skin tones is challenging in Devon and this may be a source of shame or feeling isolated. You may need to look further afield (Bristol) or buy online.

- Afro Caribbean hair products are available at
Moniques Hair, Harlequins, Paul Street, Exeter, EX4 3TT
Or
Moniques, 94 Pinhoe Road, Exeter, EX4 7HU

Thank you and updates

Thank you for reading this new guidance, we hope it has been helpful. It is by no means exhaustive and as we live in a changing environment this guide will be evolving over time. If you have any additions/amendments/recommendations please do get in touch via foster@devon.gov.uk

We really appreciate all the hard work you do in supporting Devon's young people and we know that you are making a huge difference to the lives of those you care for. Thank you.

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