

Guidance for Foster Carers & Residential Staff Hillingdon Independent Visitor Service

Independent Visitors (IV) are a statutory provision under the 1989 Children Act and yet independent from the Local Authority. They are appointed to children/young people who are looked after by the local authority if they have infrequent contact/communication with their parent(s) or if it would be in the child's interests to be matched with an IV.

IVs are unpaid volunteers who are recruited, and supervised by Coram Voice, a national Children's Charity. They undergo rigorous assessment and training to ensure they are safe people to have unsupervised access to children.

An Independent Visitor is a reliable, consistent, constant and independent friend. Children looked after by the local authority often have many people involved in their lives. Most of the people involved with them are paid professionals and it is not uncommon for children to experience changes of social worker and foster/residential placement during their time in care. In contrast we aim to ensure that the IV remains constant and continues to visit, regardless of other changes taking place in their lives, until their 18th birthday or the child no longer wishes them to do so.

We only match each IV with one child. Children have told us that they value knowing that their IV is only their IV.

The purpose of an Independent Visitor

The Children Act (1989) states that the IV should contribute to the welfare of the child by:

- promoting the child's developmental, social, emotional, educational, religious and cultural needs;
- encouraging the child to exercise his/her rights and to participate in decisions which will affect him/her;
- supporting the care plan for the child and his/her carers; and
- aiming, as far as possible, to complement the activities of carers

The IV's role is to visit, advise and befriend the child and should not be anything other than child-focused.

What do Independent Visitors do?

The IV will normally visit the child once a month and together they pursue leisure/social activities in line with the child's age and interests. Common activities include: going to the cinema; bowling; shopping; out for a meal. Usually the child and IV decide together how they are going to spend their time. The purpose of these outings is to afford privacy, ease communication and develop the relationship between the child and the visitor by sharing an activity.

The length of visits will vary from a couple of hours to a whole day depending on the planned activity and both the child's and IV's availability. Visits usually take place at the weekend or in the evening.





Arranging Visits

The IV will make arrangements in advance about visiting with both foster carers/staff and the child.

Regular and Reliable

It is important that the child's contact with their IV is regular, reliable and planned and your cooperation in making this possible is very important. Please make a note of when the child is next seeing their visitor to avoid double booking.

Staff/carers must not cancel or threaten to cancel visits with IVs as a sanction for a child's challenging behaviour. If it is necessary to cancel a visit because of a child's illness or an unexpected event, the carer should contact the IV as soon as possible and arrange an alternative time.

Communicating and Confidentiality

Please do not engage the IV in any discussions about the child and their behaviour beyond that which is relevant for health and safety purposes. It is in the best interests of the child if the foster carers/residential staff and the IV can seek to enjoy a polite, cooperative and courteous relationship with each other.

It is helpful if you can give the IV contact details when they are out with the child e.g. mobile telephone number. This could be important if the child has an accident, feels unwell or the visit takes longer than expected. Please ensure the IV is fully informed of any allergies, dietary requirements or medical conditions and that the child has any relevant medicines with them e.g. asthma inhaler. Please ensure the child has taken any relevant medication before the visit begins e.g. for travel sickness or that sun lotion has been applied when relevant.

What the child talks to their IV about, is confidential and will not be disclosed without the child's consent. However IVs are fully aware of the need to report to the Co-ordinator if there are safeguarding/child protection concerns.

Initially, in most instances, the IV's contact details will not be given to the child. Once visiting is well established this may change. If the child wishes to contact their IV between visits they should be afforded privacy to do this.

Meetings and Reviews

IVs can attend meetings and reviews with the child to help and support the child/young person in expressing their views, if the child wants this and the IV is able to attend.

Any Concerns

If a foster carer/staff member has any concerns or queries about the role of the Independent Visitor they can contact the IV Co-ordinator or the child's social worker.

For further information contact:

Saskia Borchardt-Hume (IV Co-ordinator)

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OR

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