

Any Concerns

If any concerns are brought to your attention about the IV, the IV Co-ordinator should be informed as soon as possible and the nature of the concern explained.

Recruitment

Independent Visitors are subject to a rigorous recruitment process which includes enhanced DBS check. This process can take some time so IVs have to demonstrate their commitment to the role even before they are matched to a child or young person.

Who can have an Independent Visitor?

IVs are for looked after children, usually between the ages of 8 and 18, who would benefit from having an independent adult in their lives. Matches with older teenagers can be more difficult to establish so the younger children are referred the better. Once made, the match can continue until the child is 18.

Although the match formally ends when the young person becomes 18 many continue to have contact informally with their IV beyond their 18th birthday.

Referral and Matching

If you would like to enquire about, or make a referral, please contact the IV Co-ordinator. Once a referral is received we will arrange to meet with the child to find out about them and what they would like from an IV, e.g. whether they have a preference for a male/female IV or an IV with shared interests. This information, and the referral information from the social worker, will be used to inform the matching process.

Sharing Information

It is vitally important that social workers pass on any information that the Independent Visitor may need to be aware of when taking a child out, e.g. are there any places a child should not visit because of past associations?; anybody they should not be allowed to contact?; anything that is restricted by their religion or culture? It is also important that IVs are given up to date medical information relating to allergies/phobias/fears, restricted diet or other medical conditions.

Photography

IVs may wish to take photographs of the child so that they have a memory of the visit. Please contact the Coram Voice office for a copy of our photography policy and inform us of any reason photographs should not be taken.



Guidance for Social Workers

London & SE Independent Visitor Service



For further information contact:

Email: IVLondon@coramvoice.org.uk

❖ **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 interest 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. And many relationships continue informally once the young person becomes an adult.

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-focussed.

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 with foster carers/staff and the child in advance of visits. Staff/carers must not cancel, or threaten to cancel, visits with IVs as a sanction for a child's challenging behaviour. Please reinforce this with carers.

Regular and Reliable

It is important that the child's contact with their IV is regular, reliable and planned. The IV should at all times have up to date contact details for the child. Please ensure that we are informed as soon as possible of any planned or unexpected changes to a child's placement.

The social worker should ensure that the new carers/staff are aware that the child has an IV and the statutory nature of this relationship. Carers should be informed that visits will take place monthly unless an agreement has been reached with the Coram Voice Coordinator as to another visiting pattern. Children are often anxious, at the time of changing placement, that they will still be able to see their IV in their new placement, so it is important that plans can be made for the IV to visit them in their new placement as soon as possible. A leaflet explaining the role of an IV for Foster or Residential Carers is available.

Communicating and Confidentiality

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. IVs submit visit reports to the Coordinator which are used to monitor the match and advise the IV as appropriate. If matters arise that we believe could be safeguarding concerns this information will be passed to Children's Social Care in line with your reporting procedures.

Initially, in most instances, the IV's contact details will not be given to the child. Once visiting is well established this may change and with the permission of the IV Co-ordinator, the social worker and the agreement of the IV, the child can be provided with the IVs mobile number and/or email address. If the child wishes to contact their IV they should be afforded privacy to do this.

Meetings and Reviews

IVs can attend meetings and reviews with the child if the child wants this and the IV is able to attend. Their role at meetings is to help and support the child in expressing their views.

Risk assessment

Please inform us at referral and during the relationship if the young person's behaviour may present a risk to them or their IV. IVs interact with young people on a one on one basis so there is no back up of other colleagues to alert and assist. If a young person has a history of aggressive behaviour and there is a risk to the IV we may not be able to make a match or the IV may only be able to visit the child in their home setting. It is the social worker's responsibility to risk assess the behaviour of the young person as we do not have the background information on the child that would enable us to do this assessment.

