

# Children and young people's guide to being in care



# Being in care



## A message from the Children in Care Council...

Hello, we are children and young people just like you, we have either been in care or are in care currently and we are here to help you make sense of what is going on. We have worked with managers and social workers to ensure you have the information that is likely to be important to you. As a group of young people who have experienced care, we want to assure you that you are not on your own. There are lots of people who want to support you, so don't be afraid to ask for help!



*From the Children in Care Council, Kieran, Noha, Hanna, Charlotte and Mel*

**Being in care or being looked after means you are not living with your parents. 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.

You may live with a foster family, extended family, supported lodgings or in a children's home. In this guide we will give you some information about being in care and things that you might want to know. There is also a lot more information available on our children in care council website [Going into Care - Dorset Council](#). You will have been involved in sharing your views and wishes about where you want to live and your social worker will always consider your wishes in making decisions about your care. Throughout this guide it will help you to consider how you want to continue to share your views and how you can be involved in plans about your care and how to resolve any issues you may want to raise.

# Helping you to understand what being in care means

## 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 or Respite Care. Other foster carers can 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 are approved. Foster carers will also have a supervising social worker who supports them in their caring role, and this person is independent to your social worker. The supervising social worker may want to check where you are sleeping and how things are to ensure you are getting the best care possible.

More information about the fostering service is available in Dorset Council's "**Statement of Purpose**". It tells you about how fostering services are organised and about the training and support given to foster carers. Ask your carer if you would like more information about this. Being with a foster carer might feel tough, but your foster carer will try and make you feel welcome and will help you with all the things you want or need to do, such as getting you to school, taking you to clubs and groups, and making sure you are healthy.

Here are some things you might want to ask your foster carer when you first meet them:

What if I am hungry or don't like certain foods?

Are there any house rules?  
What time do I need to go to bed?

Can I go to my room when I feel like it, do I have to ask permission?

You can write down other questions you want your carer to answer here:

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## What is a children's home?

A children's home is where a group of young people live together. For some children this works better than living with a foster family. They have members of staff on duty at all times 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 will also receive a Young Person's Guide or Handbook which will tell you more about the home. You should receive this before moving in but if you haven't got one ask a member of staff or your social worker. At the children's home you will have a key worker who will make sure you have everything you need throughout your stay. They are responsible for meeting you regularly and listening to how life is going for you. They will help you to try out new ideas and opportunities and to solve any difficulties you face. If you want to make a note of their name you can put it below.

## My key worker is:

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### Why am I in care if I live with a family member?

When decisions are made by the local authority that you are not able to live with your parents we have a duty of care to ensure where you are placed is appropriate and all your needs are met. Depending on your individual circumstances we will consider what your long term care needs to be and you can discuss this in more detail with your social worker.

## ✓ Our promise to you

**Everyone involved in caring for you promises to look after you. We will:**



Give you a safe and stable home



Provide support and opportunities to enjoy life



Help you do well in education



Help you look to your future



Listen to you



Keep you safe



Be honest with you



Work Together

# Who's who and what's what

## Who's who?

You will come across a number of people during your time in care. For example, Social Worker, Quality Assurance Reviewing Officer (QARO), Supervising Social Worker, Personal Advisor, Advocate, Designated Looked After Children's Nurse. There is more information about all of these and more on the [Going into Care - Dorset Council](#) site.

## Your Social worker

All children in care have a social worker who is responsible for making sure you are happy and well. They will visit you regularly and also come to any important meetings involving you. Make sure you know how to get in touch with your social worker as you may want to talk to them between the times they have arranged to visit you.

**Social Worker's name:**

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**Social Worker's telephone:**

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**Social Worker's email:**

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## Quality Assurance Reviewing Officer (QARO)

You will also have review meetings with someone who is called a Quality Assurance Reviewing Officer (QARO) They should see you on your own as well as at the meeting and their job is to listen to you and to make sure your care plan is working for you. They act as an independent person to ensure any plans about you will meet all your needs. You can also contact them between your reviews so make sure you have their contact details too.

**QARO's name:**

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**QARO's telephone:**

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**QARO's email:**

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## An Advocate

You are entitled to contact an independent advocate to discuss any problems you may be having, or for support at a meeting. An advocate is someone who:

- Meets with you when you want
- Listens to your hopes, ambitions, concerns and fears
- Helps you to get your point of view across
- They can also help resolve issues and support you in a complaint

Your Advocacy service is provided by the **National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS)** and they have a dedicated website for young people - **NYAS Children and Young People** - . You can contact them whenever you want to:

**NYAS telephone: 0808 808 1001**

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**NYAS email: help@nyas.net**

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## Independent Visitor

Independent visitors are ordinary people who are not part of Children's Services and are not paid but are carefully trained. They can support you, listen to you and be a friend or mentor. They can help you try a new activity, play or watch a sport, go for walks, go to the cinema or whatever you enjoy.

They visit regularly, as agreed by you, either at weekends or in the evening.

**You can ask for an independent visitor by speaking to your QARO or social worker.**



# My views

## Nothing about you without you

You have the right to be involved in decisions about your life and will be invited to different meetings to discuss this. You don't have to attend these meetings, but remember they are for you, your views are very important as decisions are made at these meetings about your care and what will happen in future. These meetings are referred to as Child in Care Review meetings and are chaired by the QARO, who will support you prior to the meeting and discuss how you want to share your views or thoughts. They can support you attending or share views on your behalf. It is up to you and what you want.

If you are not sure what a meeting is or want to know more about what a meeting is for, talk to your social worker, foster carer or a member of staff. There is also more information on the children in care council website about meetings such as your Review and Personal Education Plans (PEP). [Going into Care - Dorset Council](#)

## Do I have to wait for a meeting to get things sorted?

No, if you need to get something sorted or are worried about anything, you can contact your social worker and QARO at any time for advice and support.

## 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 and equally.
- To information and advice, health care and help with your education.
- To an advocate to help you if you would like help to speak up or to make a complaint.
- To enjoy your own culture and religion.
- 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.



## Complaints

You have the right to complain about anything that makes you angry, upset or frustrated. Complaints help to:

- Sort out problems quickly
- Allow professionals to learn
- Make things better for everyone

You can either contact your QARO who is responsible for ensuring that your care is right or you can speak to the complaints team: [complaints@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk) they also take compliments, if you feel anyone working with you has helped you or improved things for you, you can also feed this back too.

OFSTED are a regulatory body for children's services and they regularly inspect local authorities to ensure they are providing good quality services to children and families.

You can also contact them here: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk) or by calling **03001231231**





# Keeping in touch

## Family and friends

While you are in care you will be helped to stay in touch with your family and friends where possible. Your social worker will make a contact plan, which says when and how this will happen. The plan could include seeing them face to face, telephone calls or letters. This plan will be discussed with you at meetings with your social worker, the Placement Planning Meeting and in your Reviews.

If you are invited to stay overnight at a friend's house, first you need to check with your foster carer or a member of staff where you live. If they are happy for you to stay at your friend's, they can give you permission. If they are not sure, they can ask your social worker about it. If you are not allowed to stay at your friend's, you should always be told the reasons why not.

## My pets

Some of you may have had a pet at home that was important to you, either a dog, or cat, rabbit or hamster and we know leaving them may make you feel sad. However, you can speak to your social worker as part of your plan about how you can still see your pet so they can try and make arrangements where possible.



# Your health and education

## School and education

Most children and young people who come into care will stay at the same school. Sometimes you might change to a school that is nearer and easier to get to. If this happens, everyone will make sure that you are asked what you want and will help you with the changes.

The people who look after you will help you to get to school or college and even help where they can with homework! They will attend your school open evenings, plays and sports days.

Your school has a Designated Teacher for Children in Care. They are there to support you and will lead your Personal Education Plan (PEP). A PEP meeting is held at least once a term to look at your education, celebrate what is going well and decide what areas you can develop and what help you need to get there. You are invited to the meeting and are asked for your views before the meeting as well so that we can make sure that it is really your plan and will help you to achieve your ambitions.

The Virtual School is Dorset's support team for all Children in Care's education. We will work with you and your school or college and are always there if you want help with your education. You will have a Virtual School Lead who will stay with you all the way through to the end of the academic year that you turn 18.

## Staying healthy

### Health checks and chats

While you are in care you will get the medical and dental treatment you need. This is started through an initial health assessment that your social worker will arrange for you when you first enter care. You will also be invited to an annual 'health chat' with a designated nurse to make sure you are fit and well.

Your carers can't give you permission to smoke, drink or take drugs while you are living with them. They have to abide by the law too! They are also expected to help you stay healthy. If you would like help and advice about smoking, drugs or alcohol there are a number of people you could talk to. For example, your carers, social worker, doctor, or school nurse. There is also a useful website you can look at which is called to **Talk to Frank**.

# What happens when you get older?

## Moving to independence

As you get older, you will be starting to think more about your future. This might make you feel excited or nervous or both. Don't worry, your social worker will help you with any concerns you may have and will help you with your plans. This could mean helping you look for a job, stay in college or go to university.

They will also help you become more independent, which could mean staying in foster care, moving into supported lodgings, back with your parents or into your own place. Supported lodgings is accommodation where they enable you to live independently but with some support and is only available once you are 16 years old. You should speak to your social worker about your future plans and discuss them in your review meetings.

## Personal advisors

When you turn 16 you will start to get support from a personal advisor. They will continue to support you until you are 25 and will help you with your work or education, finding a home, budgeting and anything else you might need to know.



# Did you know?

In Dorset we provide groups for children and young people if they want to be part of making a difference to how we provide services.

Groups we have are:

- Dorset Youth Council aged 11-18 years
- Dorset Youth Parliament aged 14-19 years
- Children in care Council aged 5-15 years
- Care Leaver forum aged 16-25 years.

All of the above offer opportunities for the young people to have their voices heard. To influence decision and policy makers and to improve services for all young people in Dorset.

Other opportunities are also made available through these groups, such as being part our recruitment of new members of staff, being on interview panels, taking part in surveys, carrying out inspections and research with other young people, training, accreditation and more.

For more information on any of the above or to join, see Dorset Council web-site (google youth voice in Dorset [dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/children-families/youth-link/youth-link](http://dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/children-families/youth-link/youth-link)) or email [youthvoice@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:youthvoice@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)

## Guess what...

Fostering is much more common than you might think. There are around 55 children and young people who are newly fostered every year in Dorset.

Many famous people have also been fostered, including:

### Eddie Murphy

Famous American actor who starred in the films The Nutty Professor, Dr Doolittle, Beverly Hills Cop and was the voice of 'Donkey' in the Shrek films

### Kriss Akabusi

An athlete who won several Olympic medals in the 400m hurdles. He's known for his loud laugh!

### Neil Morrissey

Another famous actor, especially known for comedy and as the voice of Bob the Builder. Neil felt he didn't understand why he came into care and was placed in a children's home, he did a BBC documentary called Care Home Kid.

### Pierce Brosnan

Best known for his iconic role as James Bond, Pierce Brosnan was brought up by his grandparents when he was aged four.

### Pandora Christie

A Heart FM and Kiss FM radio presenter who also does her own beauty blogs.

If you feel confused or unsure why you are in care this guide will have given you some ways to raise this and various people you can speak to. [dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/children-families/youth-link/youth-link](http://dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/children-families/youth-link/youth-link)