

together for
children
FOSTERING SUNDERLAND

Children's Guide to Foster Care



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If you have this children's guide you must be moving to a foster home?

We hope this leaflet will help you understand what is happening. As a fostering company we have to follow a set of rules made up by the Government (the people in charge of the country).

The rules say how children should be cared for properly in foster care. These rules are called the National Minimum Standards for Foster Care. If you want to know more about this, your carer or social worker can help, you just need to ask. There are people who make sure the rules are being followed, they are called Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills). If you have anything you want to say to these people about foster care, your social worker or foster carer can help you contact them.

There is also a special set of rules that tells you how foster care should work in Together for Children Fostering Sunderland. This is called the Statement of Purpose. You can find out more about this from your social worker.

What is a social worker?

A social worker is someone who is there to help you and do what is best for you. It is your social worker's job to help children, adults and families when they go through a difficult time. Every child or young person in foster care has a social worker. Your social worker will visit you to check that you are OK. They will ask you how things are going and tell you about any plans that affect you. Your social worker will also work with your family to try and make it possible for you to return home, if that is what is best for you.

The plans that are made for you are called 'Care Plans' and these cover things like where you will go to school, who will take you to the doctors if you are ill and how often you will see your family. Your social worker will ask you how you feel about the plans being made for you. If you are worried or don't understand something tell your social worker so they can explain things to you. If you want to, you can see your Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) in private if you need to know more about your Care Plan.

What is an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)?

An IRO is very important person, they check your Care Plan and they make sure your social worker and Together for Children are doing what they should do.

You should be told who your IRO is within seven days of being in foster care. You should have the same IRO throughout your time in foster care, but if your IRO leaves their job they should introduce you to a new IRO before they leave.

Your IRO should talk to you before every review meeting to make sure you're happy and to check how things are going. Your IRO will make sure you get a copy of everything that was talked about at the review of your Care Plan. Two weeks after the meeting you should have a written record of all the decisions that were made. You can contact your IRO at any time and not just before or after a review meeting.

Lots of young people from Sunderland live in foster families, here are some of the things they say:

- "I had a good time I went to the beach a lot"
- "They help you if you are sad"
- "Foster families are good people"
- "They look after you if you are poorly"
- "Fostering is nice if you can't live with your real family"
- "They are very caring families"
- "We went on a caravan holiday; we took lots of photos there"
- "Don't worry about it too much"
- "I had a lovely birthday; my brother came to my party"
- "They help you to see your family, if that's in your Care Plan"
- "They make sure you get to school and home again"
- "They are there when you need to talk"





What is foster care?

Foster care is a place where you can go to live if you can't live at home with your family. We all have families that we are born into. These are called birth families. We have mams, dads, sometimes brothers and sisters. We do not always know all of our birth family and might just live with a mam, a dad or someone else in our birth family.

Sometimes our birth families can't look after us in the way we need - they may be ill or have troubles they need to sort out. When that happens we might need to go and live with someone else who can look after us and keep us safe for a little while or sometimes a long time, in foster care. A social worker helps sort this out.

What is a foster carer?

Foster carers are people who have been specially chosen to look after children and young people. They have had lots of training and do all the things mams and dads do, like take you to school, play with you and make your tea. They will look after you and help make sure you are happy.

How long will I be in foster care?

How long you will live with foster carers will depend on your situation and Care Plan. If you are in foster care because your parent is unwell, then as soon as your parent is better and able to look after you, you will return home.

Sometimes, however, Together for Children and other organisations may be worried about whether your parents are keeping you safe from harm. This may involve asking magistrates or judges at court to make a decision about your care. Your social worker and everyone concerned with your care plan will be working with your family to ensure that it is safe for you to return home. Sometimes this can take a long time.

Who are foster carers?

Foster carers are people who look after children and young people in their own homes when they are unable to live with their family. Foster carers are ordinary people who care about children and young people and want to help make sure they are safe.

Not all foster carers are the same: they may be young or older, single or married, black or white; they may or may not have children of their own.

Foster carers may live in a house or a flat. They may have pets. All foster carers, their families and their homes have been carefully checked to make sure that they can offer you a safe place to live.

Together for Children will do their best to find you a foster carer who has a similar background to you, who will be able to look after you and make sure that you have everything you need. The foster carer's home will be safe and comfortable. You will have your own room unless you are sharing with your brother or sister and safe places to keep your special things.

Your carer will keep you healthy and make sure that you go to see the doctor, dentist and optician. You will be given information about your foster carer, their family and the rules of the home before you go to live with them, this is called a 'profile'.

When you become cared for, your foster carer will care for you as if you were part of their family. They will look after you until you are able to return home or until other longer term plans are made. You will be able to talk to your foster carer about how you are feeling.

They will understand how upsetting it can be living away from your family and friends. Your foster carer will get to know you and help you do the things you like, and if you want something that is very important to you, they will do their best to help you. Your foster carer will help you with hobbies or leisure interests, so let them know what you like to do and they will make sure you can get to do all the things you enjoy.

What sorts of things will my foster carers do?

Your foster carers will try and make you feel happy and comfortable while you are living with them.

Foster carers will;

- Look after you well and keep you safe
- Make sure you have food to eat
- Make sure you are safe and warm
- Get your breakfast in the morning and help you get ready for school
- Wash and iron your clothes
- Make sure you have your lunch or lunch money on school days
- When you are home they will be there to talk to you, watch television, and play with you
- Make sure you are safe and well cared for
- Try and make you feel part of the family
- Listen to you and try to help you when you feel sad or worried
- Help you learn new things
- Respect, help and support you
- Treat the information about you and your family confidentially
- Explain why they are asking things about you
- Support family time with you and your family when this is planned
- Enable you to follow your religion if you wish
- Attend meetings about you at school and with your social worker



Foster carers will also make sure you have;

- A bedroom of your own or shared with your brother or sister
- Somewhere safe to put your clothes and belongings
- A private place to meet with your social worker when they visit
- Pocket money (how much you will get depends on how old you are)
- A chance to celebrate your birthdays and religious festivals eg Christmas.

Foster carers will expect you to;

- Show respect to everyone
- Join the family meals and activities
- Attend school regularly
- Stick to your coming in times
- Respect the property of others
- Share your views
- Stick to the rules the family live by

Are there rules in a fostering family?

Every foster family has its own rules just like other families. Some foster carers have firm rules about homework, bedtimes, swearing, smoking and other things. Other carers have a few rules that they are very strict about, like the time you must come home, but will be flexible about other things.

Living in a family means that you have to share things and respect each other. Depending on your age you may be asked to help out with household tasks like setting the table or tidying your room.

Like any parent, foster carers will want to talk to you if you have done something wrong and they may take away a favourite game, stop your pocket money or 'ground you' if you misbehave badly. However, they will also praise you when you have achieved something or done something good. Your carers will help you to learn things that are new, and help you to grow independently.

What about my family?

Sometimes you or your social worker might think it is not a good idea for you to see your family. You can chat with your social worker about this. If they can, your foster family will help with visits, telephone calls, letters or emails. Being away from your birth family can make you feel sad or upset or scared. Your foster family and your social worker are there to listen and help you sort out any upsetting feelings.

Together for Children wants to help make sure that you stay in contact with your family and friends while you are being cared for by foster carers. Regular time with your family and friends will be encouraged, whether by visits or phone calls.

Where and how often you see your family will depend on your individual circumstances, particularly if there are any concerns about your safety. At the beginning of your stay with foster carers an agreement will be made about how often you will spend time with your family and when and where this will take place.

You will be encouraged to continue seeing your friends, but your foster carers will want to know where you are and who you are with to ensure you are safe at all times. You can stay overnight with your friends but only if parents, foster carers and social workers are satisfied that you will be safe, and this will need to be agreed in advance.





Will I have to change school?

Together for Children will try to make sure that you can stay at your own school, so that you can see your friends and carry on with activities that you enjoy. Our Virtual School will help if you are not happy with any of these arrangements. You should also tell your foster carer or social worker if there are any other problems at school. We know that your education is very important and your foster carer will go to parent's evenings and will help you with homework.

What about my wishes and feelings?

Foster carers will listen to what you want. However, if you feel unhappy about something and you think that we are not listening to you, you could get an 'Advocate'. An Advocate is someone with a lot of experience of working with children and young people and listening to their views.

They will listen to your concerns and will work with you to find ways to put things right. They will make sure that you are listened to in meetings, and can pass on your views and wishes to other people involved in making decisions. If you think you want an Advocate you can talk to your social worker or telephone an organisation called;

National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS)

NYAS is a UK advocacy service providing children and young people advice about their rights. Web: www.nyas.net

Who will help me if I am unhappy?

If you do not feel happy for whatever reason at your foster home, then it is important that you tell your social worker or another adult who you trust. No one will be cross, and there are lots of other independent people you could talk to who can help sort things out.

If you ever want to make a complaint you should ask your social worker for the complaints procedure and contact numbers. Or you could telephone the complaints department, see number below.

Statutory Complaints Procedure for Children and Young People (Under 11's) and (Over 11's)

Together for Children Customer Feedback Team, Together for Children, City Hall, Plater Way, Sunderland SR1 3AA

Tel: 0191 561 7997

email: customer.feedback@togetherforchildren.org.uk

You could also contact 'Ofsted'. They are an organisation set up to monitor and inspect all children's services in the country. If you have a complaint you can contact them by writing to them at:

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD

Alternatively, you can call them on 0303 123 1231, or send them an email to enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk



Other important information:

Alex Bowey

Participation and Engagement Officer,
Together for Children, Sandhill Centre, Grindon Lane, Sunderland SR3 4EN
Tel: 07823 593 858
email: alexandra.bowey@togetherforchildren.org.uk

Helen Monks

Director of Children's Social Care,
Together for Children, Sandhill Centre, Grindon Lane, Sunderland SR3 4EN
email: helen.monks@togetherforchildren.org.uk

Simon Marshall

Director of Children's Services and Chief Executive,
Together for Children, City Hall, Plater Way, Sunderland SR1 3AA
email: simon.marshall@togetherforchildren.org.uk

Kimberley Richardson

Interim Director of Education,
Together for Children, City Hall, Plater Way, Sunderland SR1 3AA
email: kimberley.richardson@togetherforchildren.org.uk

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