

A Young Person's Guide to **Fostering**

For young people who are aged 16 years and older.

Being in care – what does it mean?

We've created this booklet to help answer some of your questions about living in foster care and who to go to for support and advice.

We know you are probably feeling uncertain and anxious, the most important thing about living with your fostering family is that you feel safe. It's our job to help you feel safe.

You may like to chat this guide through with an adult. We may be able to let you have the booklet in other languages or in Makaton if that helps, so please ask.

You might be wondering how people get to be foster carers. Anyone who wants to be a foster carer for South Gloucestershire Council must apply to the Council. Foster families are all different; some have two adults, and some have just one, some may share your ethnic and cultural background, some may or may not have other children or young people living in the home, and foster families are located all across the county. We take a lot of time checking their background, this includes with the police and their doctor. It is really important that we have this information so we are certain you are staying with

people who will make you feel safe. We visit them and make sure their home is suitable. We get to know them really well; we ask them what they know about the issues that are important to young people and how they would support a young person in their home.

So, as you can see, the foster carers have been specially chosen to make sure they are kind and caring and that you are well looked after while you're with them. Living with a different family may feel strange and worrying at first, there are lots of young people who spend time in foster homes and everyone feels a bit strange at first.

Who's who?

There are lots of people around you now to make sure you are ok. We will all work together to listen to you, to hear what you think about the care you are receiving and will try to help with any worries or uncertainties you might have.

Who are foster carers?

The foster carers are responsible for you day to day, which means they will provide you with healthy food, clothes, a warm bed and a listening ear. They don't want to take over, but they are providing you with a safe space within their home for you to be yourself.

When you are out, they are still responsible for you and need to know you are safe.

After listening to you, the foster carer makes the day to day decisions in the foster home about the routines and activities. They do all this to make sure they are doing all they can to keep you safe and give you opportunities to develop the skills you need for life.

Who is the social worker?

All children and young people who live with foster carers, have a social worker. This adult understands your family background and knows what you have been through. They will spend time with you, get to know you more. They will talk to you about why you are living in foster care, how long you might be there and what your plans are for your future. This will form the basis of your Pathway Plan.

Your social worker will write your Pathway Plan working out with you, what little steps you need to take to achieve your goals.

The relationships with your foster carer and social worker are really important because they will be alongside you as you approach and prepare for adulthood. The plans that you make together will form the basis of your Care Plan.

Your social worker will explain how it all works in more detail so that your Care Plan is a true reflection of what you need at this stage in your life. This will include all the practical stuff like your education or work, your times with your family and friends, using the internet and whatever else is on your mind.

Who is the supervising social worker?

Your foster carers also have their own social worker, this social worker is called the supervising social worker. They visit and have meetings with the foster carers to formally supervise them in their role as foster carers and to support them in caring for you. This might happen when you are out or when you are all together, in fact, a supervising social worker also has to undertake an **“unannounced visit”** which is a visit when the foster carers are not expecting it. They help the foster carers understand what you need.



They also check that the foster carers look after you safely and with respect.

The supervising social worker will want to meet you too and hear what it's like living with these foster carers.

Who is the Independent Reviewing Officer?



The independent reviewing officer is often called the IRO. They have written a really helpful leaflet for you about their work. Please ask your foster carer if you have not seen it yet. Their job is to make sure the foster carers are caring for you well and that there are good plans for you which are detailed for you in your Care Plan that your social worker has written. The IRO checks your Care Plan by having a meeting called a "Review Meeting". You decide who comes along to the review meeting, you can involve your mum, dad, teacher or friend. Some young people even run their own review meetings. Ask if you want to do this. It's a great way to feel even more in charge of your life.

Who is the advocate?

An advocate is an independent adult, who is there just for you. Advocates will listen hard to what you say, will stand up for you and will help others understand your views. Advocates can help you speak out, especially if you feel uncomfortable about talking about how you feel. It's easy to get an advocate, ask your social worker or foster carer, or ring  **0800 389 1571** (Freephone) or email  **yourvoice@reconstruct.co.uk**

Who is the Independent Visitor?

The Independent Visitor is another adult who can be asked to visit you and spend time with you doing the things you want to do. It's someone completely independent so they will not be linked to the other adults in your life and they will be there just for you.

If you would like an independent adult, you could ask your social worker or foster carer or you could ring  **0800 389 1571** (Freephone) or Email  **yourvoice@reconstruct.co.uk**

**That's a lot of people –
it's all so different to what I am used to.**

Yes it must feel very different for you.

You might have lots of questions about how life will be living with your foster family.

There will be a Placement Planning Meeting with the foster carers, social workers and possibly your parents at the very beginning. It is best if you can be part of that meeting as this is where things like the day to day life and routines are discussed and recorded. This includes times to come in or go to bed, pocket money, clothing money and how to get the clothes you need, using the internet, and areas of concern about your safety etc.

Your views are really important as this is your life, so it is really great if you feel able to be there for the meeting. If you are still uncertain about anything, do ask your foster carer. You may not like the food or perhaps you have a favourite meal that you are missing or maybe a TV programme you always watch perhaps you are wondering if your friends can visit or you are allowed to stay out. Your foster carers will enjoy trying to make some parts of the routine more familiar for you, but they will always want to know that you are safe.

You may want to learn new skills, to cook a meal for example or use the washing machine. Perhaps there is an activity you want to start such as going to the gym. Tell the foster carers about this so they know what will make you feel settled with them. Most importantly, they will also make sure you have somewhere for you to keep your things safe.

All families have different ways of doing things and there will be rules in your foster home which you need to know about. Ask your foster carer about this. Basically, the rules are based on respect, you respecting them and them respecting you. Everyone forgets rules and sometimes it is hard to follow them. No one is allowed to hit anyone or be abusive to each other. The foster carer will help you if you feel angry or upset by being there and waiting until you feel ok enough again to talk.

Something else which is very different about being in foster care is that the foster carer has to write recordings about what you have been doing, the achievements, the new things you have learned and if there are any difficulties. The foster carer also has to write down what they have done to give you good care. They will send these recordings in to your social worker so that they have a good idea of what life is like for you. You can read them too.

What about my Identity?

Your Identity is about you being “**you**”. It is important that you continue to celebrate your culture. We want to make sure that you are able follow the habits and practices which are familiar and important to you. This may be about attending a certain place of worship, praying, studying a holy book, celebrating festivals, eating, or not eating certain food or wearing particular clothes.

Although your foster carers may not share your culture, they will respect and promote your heritage and beliefs.

The language you were brought up to speak is important. If you have difficulties with English, we will make sure someone interprets what is said and translates written documents for you.

What about keeping in touch with my family and friends?

Most young people who are fostered will still see their family and this will be arranged by your social worker. You can tell your social worker what is important to you and what you would like. They can talk to you about this and make arrangements that will work for you and the foster carer. Usually the only time this doesn't happen is if the Courts or your social worker don't think that it is safe for you. You may not want to see your family, or there may be other reasons why you cannot see them. You can talk to your social worker about this too.

It is great to have friends and to stay in touch. There will be rules about when you can and can't use your phone and this is to keep you safe. Your foster carer can talk with you about this. For example, often foster carers like everyone to leave their phones charging in the kitchen at night time. That isn't to cut you off from your friends but to give you time away from messaging and social media. Sleep is very good for you, you know and why shouldn't you have some space and time for yourself?!

What about my education, training or job?

Everyone will try really hard to make sure that you keep going to the school or college, apprenticeship or employment you were in before you came into foster care. Your foster carer and social worker will help make sure arrangements are in place for you to continue to get there.

Being in foster care is your private information, however there are people who will need to know such as your college tutor. They will work closely with you, your social worker and your foster carers so that the impact of moving into foster care is minimised and you have all you need to continue in your studies.

School and college is so important that there are meetings called PEP meetings to check everything is in place for you to do as well as possible. PEP stands for "Personal Education Plan". If you need special equipment or clothes for your work or studies, ask your social worker or foster carer to sort it out for you.

What if I feel unwell?

Everyone feels a bit under the weather sometimes and if you feel unwell your foster carer will help take care of you. If you have an accident or need to see a nurse or a doctor, your foster carer will support you to get there and will inform your social worker.

About twice a year you will be offered a health assessment with a health professional. This person really understands about the health needs and worries of young people in care.

In order to stay in good general health, you need to see a dentist or an optician from time to time. Your foster carer can help you make the appointment and will ask if you would like them to go in with you.

As you grow older, you might have all sorts of questions about your health including about sex and relationships. Although you may feel awkward talking about it, your foster carers are happy to talk about your health and relationships and will want to put your mind at ease. It may be that you need or would prefer to see someone from the sexual health clinic so that you can have good information so that you can make good decisions.

Being in foster care gives you the chance to continue to develop healthy habits for adult life. – How to eat well and take exercise, getting enough sleep, what about drinking alcohol and trying out drugs? Perhaps you will learn some things in college or school, sometimes your social worker might be the one to chat things through, or of course, your foster carer.

Taking care of your mental health is so important too. If you need to have some specialist counselling to talk about your feelings and all that has happened, your social worker will help to arrange it for you.

What is the Experienced Panel in Care (EPIC)?

There is a group in South Gloucestershire that represents the views and opinions of young people like yourself who are either looked after or a care leaver. This group meets every other Tuesday and is an opportunity for you to have your say, meet other young people in the same situation as you and have some fun.

Experienced Panel in Care (EPIC) is open to anyone aged 15-25 who is either in care or a care leaver.



Here are some of the things they do:

- We get to meet other young people in care, make friends, have food, listen to music and have a laugh.
- We help interview for new staff such as Social Workers and Managers
- We try to make things better for all young people in care
- We go on trips places like Weston, Swansea and London
- We meet important people and decision makers like Councillors and Managers, even people in Government.
- We hold events like Halloween parties and cinema nights
- We speak up for other young people in care, have a say and make a real difference.

If you want to be a part of this you or your carer can get in touch with **Blanche Duffy** and she can give you all the details to join. You can contact her via text message, email or phone. You can also check the work we do out on our Twitter account, the details are below:

☎ **01454 862349** / 📱 **07824 081087**

✉ **blanche.duffy@southglos.gov.uk**

🐦 **www.twitter.com/southglosCiC**

What if there is something I'm not happy about?

Speak up

Something not right? If things go wrong, we want to hear about it.

Don't stay silent, talk to someone close to you. It could be your foster carer, social worker, independent reviewing officer or teacher. More often than not, it helps to talk about whatever's on your mind even if it seems a very small thing.

We will listen

The first thing to do is talk to your foster carer or social worker.

The next step is to talk to an advocate separate from the Council.

Ring 📞 **0800 389 1571** (freephone)
or email ✉ **yourvoice@reconstruct.co.uk**

After meeting an advocate, use South Gloucestershire's complaint system if you're not getting the service that you think you should.

You can make a complaint to South Gloucestershire Council by calling 📞 **01454 865924**
or email ✉ **CAHFeedback@southglos.gov.uk**

We're committed to listening to you and will always try to help solve any problems.

If you still aren't happy or think the people above have not helped you, you can contact The Children's Commissioner for England 📞 **0800 528 0731**
Ofsted email ✉ **enquiries.gov.uk@ofsted**

The Fostering Service

This children's guide has been written for you by the fostering team with the help of children in care. We have a big document called "**The Statement of Purpose**" which lists everything we do to make sure children like you have the best experience of foster care.

