

Children's Guide

to Fostering

Kent Pledge

12+



This information is available in alternative formats and can be explained in other languages. Please contact your social worker for further information



The main aim of Kent County Council's Fostering Service is to provide stable and first-rate foster care for children of all ages. The fostering service aims to provide a service where children are valued, supported and encouraged to grow and develop as individuals. (Fostering Statement of Purpose).

In Kent we also have the Kent Pledge which sets out how we will work together to make sure children in care get what they need.



Who are Foster Carers?

Foster carers look after children and young people who, like you, cannot live at home. They are carefully checked out and given training before any children can live with them to make sure they can offer you a safe place to live. Many foster carers will have cared for lots of children and young people before.

A foster carer may be a member of your own family, or someone that you are connected to, and this is called Connected Persons Foster Care. Connected Person's Foster Carers are adults who already know you and where it has been agreed that they will look after you because you cannot remain living at home. The connected person's carers will have been assessed to make sure they can provide you with the care you need while you are placed with them. Children and young people who live with connected person's foster carers will receive the same services and support as other children and young people who are fostered and "looked after".

How will you find the right family for me?

Social workers will decide which foster family would be best for you. Sometimes, in an emergency, you may have to move into a foster home quickly. If you need to move again your social worker will try and make sure you settle into your new placement and that you have as few moves as possible. They will ask your thoughts on the type of family that you would like to live with. We know from talking to Our Children and Young Peoples Council (Children and Young People's Council) that it is important to make sure you are involved and listened to. Your social worker will consider what you need, what sort of family you would like and your thoughts about your care while you are looked after.

We will try and make sure your foster family are of a similar background and culture as you and where possible share the same language or languages as you. They will support you to continue to practice any religion or faith you follow. The most important thing is that your foster carers want to care for you and do their best to provide you with all the support you need.

Your foster carer will be supervised by a **Fostering Social Worker** who will meet with them regularly and offer guidance and support in meeting your needs.

What sort of things will my foster carer do?

Your foster carer will support you to settle in and make sure you are well looked after. They will be interested in what you are doing and help you continue with your interests and find new ones. They will carry out the plans agreed for you including supporting you to keep in touch with your family.

Foster carers are given an allowance to look after you. Individual decisions will be made at the Placement Meeting including pocket money and clothing. Your foster carer will also help you to learn how to look after yourself and become more independent. You can also ask them if you want to know about things like what happens if you want to stay up longer or are late coming home.

What will I be told about my foster family?

Living in someone else's home can feel strange especially if you are not sure what you can and can't do. Your social worker will tell you about the foster family and anyone else in their wider family, where they live and the type of house they live in. You will also know where your bedroom will be and the sort of things your foster family do and like. Your foster carer will have written down some of this information in their Foster Carer Profile and may also use a "pop up house" to tell you about themselves and their family. Before you are placed with your new carers we will try and make sure we share this information with you.

What will my foster carer know about me?

Foster carers need to know the important information about you and your family and the reasons why you need to be cared for by them. This will help them to make sure you are safe and that they are able to care for you and make you happy. They will want to know about your interests and hobbies, your health, where you go to school/college, your religion and customs. They need to know if you have brothers and sisters or other members of your family who are important to you. All of this information is confidential. You may also want to tell your foster carer more about yourself and your experiences.

Going to live with my foster family?

Your social worker will take you to your foster carer's home, where you can meet everybody that lives there. We will always try to make sure that you meet your foster carers before moving in but this may not be possible in an emergency. You can bring some of your belongings including those things that are important to you. You may have some favourite things or something that is special or valuable to you. Let your social worker and foster carer know this so that they can be kept safe.

A **Placement Meeting** will take place either before you move in with your foster carer or within 5 days of your move. The meeting is where you, your foster carer, your social worker and your parents may be invited to decide how you will be looked after. If they do not attend, their views will be considered as part of the meeting agreeing the day to day arrangements for your care and what is needed to help the

foster carer to look after you. This will include what food you like; any routines you have; any medication that you may take and who you will see from your family and when.

You will also have a **Care Plan** which will set out how you should be cared for and what the plan for your future should be. Your social worker will go through the care plan with you and record your view in the plan. You can also have a copy of the plan if you want.

There will also be regular review meetings, called **Looked After Child Reviews**, which are meetings about you and how the plans for your care are progressing. The person in charge of these meetings is the **Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)**. Your opinions are included at every review meeting and it is an opportunity for you to talk about how things are going and anything that is a problem in your foster placement. You also have the opportunity to chair this meeting. If you would like help and support to do this from someone older who has been in care themselves and had reviews, the VSK apprentice workers can help you.

Children and Young People's Council

How will I know what I can and cannot do in my foster home?

Every family has rules and ways of behaving. Your foster carer will tell you about their house rules and what you and they should expect. This makes sure everybody knows what to do and expect from each other. These may include bedtimes, mealtimes and staying out.

What decisions can my foster carer make?

Your foster carer will make the day to day decisions for your care. These will be agreed at the Placement Meeting and will help your foster carer to care for you. This may include, for example, what clubs you attend and activities you do. They may also be able to decide when you visit your friends and if you can stay overnight. Your parents may also have a view on these things.

There may be some things your foster carer will need to discuss with your social worker before a decision can be made.

How long will I be in foster care?

It depends on the situation and your social worker should give you some idea of how long this could be. If the court is involved a **Children's Guardian** will be appointed by the court to make sure your wishes and feelings are told to the court.

Will I be able to see my family?

How often you see your family and where will depend on the reason you are in foster care. There are lots of different ways to keep in touch with your family and friends and your social worker will discuss them with you. Sometimes a social worker or another person may need to come with you when you visit your family. If you feel worried about seeing anyone you should always tell your foster carer or your social worker.

The Kent Pledge

We understand that being in care and leaving care is not always easy and that it can bring extra challenges and pressures for you. If we are going to get it right for you we need to make a real difference to help you do your best and have success in your life. Our pledge includes a number of things we will do that will help make sure that your time in care is a positive experience. These are based around six themes:

- A sense of belonging.
- An adult who is always there for you while you are in care.
- A good education.
- Good memories for the future.
- Getting ready for being an adult.
- Championing your needs and interests.

Children and Young People' Council

Virtual School Kent organise council meetings for children and young people in care so they can have their say on what it is like being in care and what they'd like to change. Anyone who is in care aged 11 or over is welcome to join. The committee aim to meet up every few months and are helped by a team of Participation workers. Almost all of the Participation team have been in care and so understand how important it is that you can tell people who make decisions how things are for you.

If you are interested in becoming a committee member please email: **VSK_Participation@kent.gov.uk** for more details.

What if I am unhappy with something?

If there is something you are not happy with it's important to tell someone. You could talk to your foster carer or social worker about it or another adult you trust, like a teacher or your IRO. Often these things can be sorted out quickly.

You can contact the Head of Quality Assurance in the Specialist Children's Services Safeguarding Unit who is responsible for the IRO service:

Safeguarding Unit, Sessions House, County Road,
Maidstone. ME14 1XQ

Kent County Council have an independent Advocacy Service with the Young Lives Foundation. They can offer advice, information and support. They will listen to any concerns you may have and make sure your voice is heard and help you to find solutions. Advocates can attend your reviews with your agreement, contact people for you and tell you your rights. They can help with problems like understanding your care plan, leaving care, or working with social workers, school or college. You can contact them directly or ask someone to by telephoning 01622 683815 or emailing advocacy@ylf.org.uk

You can contact the Children's Rights Director at the:
Office of the Children's Rights Director
Ofsted
Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE
Tel 0800 528 0731
Ofsted regularly inspect Kent's Fostering Service.

You can contact Ofsted at:
Ofsted National Business Unit
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
0300 123 1231
Enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

You can also contact the Childrens
Commissioner for England by emailing
<http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/>
or write to:

**Office of the Childrens Commissioner
33 Greycoat Street, London, SW1P 2QF**

Speak up. Be heard

Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC) and Young Adult Council (YAC) are groups of young people in care or who have recently left care who meet regularly around the county. The meetings give you the chance to meet others and have your say on how improvements could be made to help you and others.

To find out more speak to your Social Worker, telephone 03000 412777 or email VSK_participation@kent.gov.uk

