



# Starting Out

All your questions about  
**being looked after**  
answered

A guide for children under 12 years old



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# An opportunity to live a better life

We are giving you this booklet to help you understand how we are going to look after you, who you can contact if you need help and advice or what to do if you are not happy about something and you want to tell someone.



Living away from your family can make you feel confused and worried. We hope the information in this booklet will help you understand who will support you and what to expect, as well as giving you the contact details of people who you can talk to about your concerns.

## Our golden promise:

While you are looked after by Lambeth we promise to do all we can so that you will be safe and healthy, safe, healthy, happy, and successful with your education. We will ask your opinion in decisions about your care and make sure you are well prepared for your future.



# What does it mean to be looked after?

The term 'looked after' means that Lambeth Council's Children's Services are involved in, and have a say about what happens to you. Some people call this 'being in care' and we are called your corporate parents. This means we want the best for you as we would for our own children.

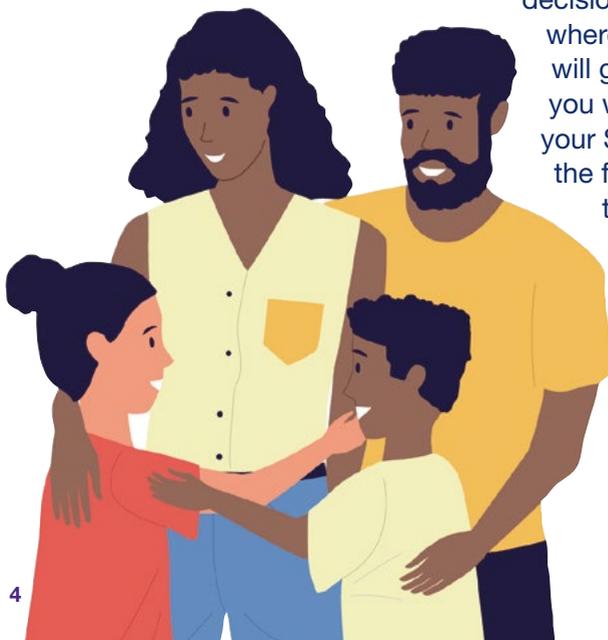
## Did you know?

The council looks after children from when they are babies until they are 18 years old!

There are two different ways you might become looked after – this could be where it is decided through the courts or where it is agreed by your parents.



A **Social Worker** will work with your parents to help them with important decisions about your care including where you will live, where you will go to school and how often you will visit your family. It is your Social Worker's job to make the final decisions about this to make sure it is the best thing for you. You should be involved in all of these decisions made about your life.



# Why am I being looked after?

**This is an important question for you to ask and for you to know the answer to.**

If you don't know why you are being looked after, ask the people listed below. If you find it difficult to remember what they say, ask them to write the reasons down for you or get them to go through your Care Plan with you.

## How long will I be looked after?

Sometimes children and young people only need to be looked after for a very short time. Sometimes this is a few days, a few weeks or a few months.

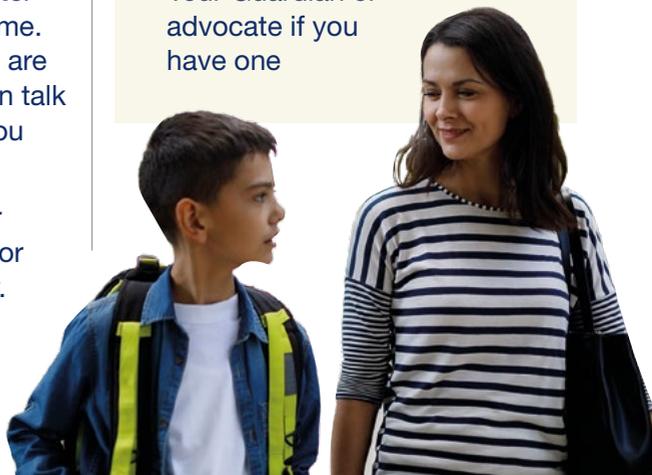
Some children and young people are looked after for a much longer time, until they are 18 years old. It depends why you are looked after and if it is safe for you to go home. If you don't know how long you are going to be looked after you can talk to your Social Worker so that you know what is happening.

Sometimes there are parents or families who hurt their children or cannot look after them properly.

A Social Worker will work with families like this and help make it possible for children like you to stay safely with your birth family. If your family cannot keep you safe, the court may decide that you need to live with a foster family, until a decision can be made about what is best for your long term future.

## Who to ask?

- Your parents and other members of your family
- Your Social Worker
- The person looking after you
- Your Independent Reviewing Officer
- Your Guardian or advocate if you have one





## What is a Care plan?

When you become looked after you will have a **Care Plan** – this will have all the information about you and the plans for your future, including:

- Health
- Education
- Where you live
- When you see your family
- What happens when you leave care

Your **Care Plan** is updated all the time because you change and so do the things you need. You should always be asked your views, wishes and feelings regarding your Care Plan because it is **about you!**

By the time you turn 16, you will have what's called a **Pathway Plan** which says how well you're doing and what extra support you'll get from the council. It is there to help you to plan future goals and tasks, and to deal with any worries you have or challenges you may face.

A **Pathway Plan** will help you to:

- Prepare for living independently
- Get work or start a course
- Become self sufficient
- Make a successful transition from care into your own home
- Build and sustain a permanent home for yourself
- Plan for the unexpected
- Achieve your goals and ambitions

## What about how I feel about being looked after?



**Going into care for the first time or moving into a new place can be very scary. There will be lots of new people to meet and you may be moving away from friends and family. You may be feeling angry, worried, confused or very sad. You are not alone – your Social Worker will be there to talk to you and to keep you safe.**

Moving away from your family can be a very hard thing to do – and you might not want to leave and might not think that you need to go. Sometimes a Court will make a decision that you will not agree with. This can make you feel very angry, powerless and confused.

Your Social Worker will try to help you understand this. There are other people you can talk to if you think this might help.

Other things you can do when you feel angry or upset about being in care:

- Speak to an independent advocate to help you have your say
- Talk to a friend, teacher, Social Worker, or other trusted adult
- Speak to the mental health service for children looked after (CLAMHS)
- Keep a diary
- Write a letter to an adult that knows you and tell them how you are feeling
- Ring a confidential helpline



# Where will I live?

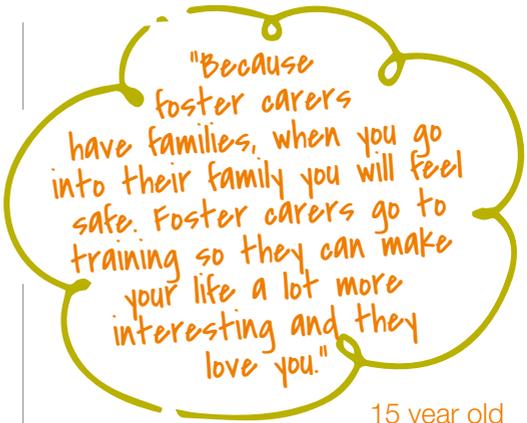
**Most children who are looked after live with foster carers. Some may live at a residential school where you sleep as well as learn, in secure accommodation, a therapeutic home or in a children's home. All foster carers will have been checked out and they have been trained to look after you very well and help to meet your needs.**

Foster carers are all very different. They may be single carers or a couple. They may be same sex (gay) or heterosexual (straight) couples. They may be of different races and religious backgrounds. There may be other adults or children living in the home.

Some foster carers live in flats, others live in houses, some have pets and some don't. We will always try and find the best match for your needs

All foster families have different ways and different house rules. These rules should be discussed and agreed with you at the Placement Planning Meeting which takes place when you move to a new carer. At this meeting, a **Placement Plan** will be made.

This plan will have details about you, what you like and don't like,



"Because foster carers have families, when you go into their family you will feel safe. Foster carers go to training so they can make your life a lot more interesting and they love you."

15 year old

what your routines are, why this placement is right for you and how it meets your needs and how your carer and the council will share the job of looking after you.

**If there is anything you want to know, just ask. No-one will be upset with you. It is very important that you get answers to your questions.**



## Your social worker

**A Social Worker is an adult whose job is to make sure children and young people like yourself are safe, your health and educational needs are met and your views, wishes and feelings are heard and given consideration.**

Your Social Worker works for Lambeth Council.

Your Social Worker must visit you at least once every six weeks if you have been living somewhere for less than one year. If you have been living in the same place for more than one year; your Social Worker must visit you at least once every three months.

If you feel you need more visits, talk to your Social Worker or Independent Reviewing Officer about this.

"Social Workers are always there for you."

13 year old

**We will try not to change your Social Worker. If we have to, your new Social Worker will find out as much as they can about you before meeting you.**



## Other things your Social Worker should do

- Give you a contact card with their details on it so you can contact them or their manager (you can also write them in the back of this booklet)
- See you on your own when you meet
- See your bedroom when they visit your home
- Tell you what is happening with your Care Plan and involve you in the decisions that are being made about you
- Help create Life Story Work for you
- Explain what decisions are being made about you and why
- Help you plan for your future
- Talk to you about your interests and the things you would like to do
- Tell you about what is happening with your birth family
- Celebrate your birthday, special occasions and your achievements
- Keep their promises and do what they say they are going to do
- Help keep Lambeth's pledge and promises to children looked after for you



## Role of the IRO

**Each child in care gets allocated an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) who checks that your care plan and placement is meeting their needs. They may challenge your social worker to make sure that your needs are being met, they will also make sure that your views and wishes are in your care plan.**

The IRO chairs meetings in the first four weeks of you coming into care or moving into a new placement and then at three-month and six-month stages thereafter that. You are always invited to these meetings and it is important that you go so that you can have your voice heard, you should also decide where the best place for these meetings is to be held to make sure you feel comfortable. If you feel confident you can actually chair these reviews and your social worker and the IRO can support you to do this. If you feel worried about something or feel you need more support, you can contact your IRO directly.

## The role of a supervising social worker

Your carer will also have their own social worker to support them and make sure they are providing the best support and home for you. This will include making sure foster carers have the right training and to discuss any issues that may come up.

# Will I see my family?

**We want you to make sure that you keep in touch with your birth family and friends as long as it is safe for you to see them.**

This is called having “contact”. Sometimes it is not always safe for you have direct contact with your birth family but you may be able to have telephone or contact by letter with them instead.

**If there is someone that you want to be in touch with, let your Social Worker know.**

## Life Story Work

When you come in to care, your carer and Social Worker will contribute to your Life Story work. This could be a book, a photo album or a special box where you can keep things that are important to you like cards, letters, awards or toys. Your Life Story work may also have your birth certificate, a family tree and information about your birth family. It is very important that you contribute to this and have a say about what you want in it because it is about you and for you to keep for when you are an adult so that



there is a record of your journey growing up.

## Children looked after reviews

While we are looking after you, an Independent Reviewing Officer will have meetings with you, your carer and Social Worker, to see that your care plan is meeting your needs, and that plans are made for your future. This meeting is called your Looked After Review and it should take place within 20 working days of you coming into care. Your second review should happen three months later and then every 6 months (at least twice per year) after that. The Independent Reviewing Officer will talk to you before the meeting to see how you are getting on. This meeting is a chance for you to tell people your views, wishes and feelings and it is important that you attend this meeting. Your Social Worker should meet with you after each review meeting to see that issues have been followed up.



## Will I change schools?

**While we are looking after you, you will still go to school or college and participate in extra-curricular activities.**

You will also be helped with your own Personal Education Plan (PEP). This is part of your Care Plan and it looks at what is going well for you at school, where you might need some support and any achievements you have made.

It is very important for you to say how things are going at school/ college and what you want to get out of it.

Your Social Worker, designated teacher and carer/s will attend this meeting with you every six months and you will agree on targets for you to aim for over the next six months.

It is important for you to contribute to this and you can write down your views, wishes and feelings on the PEP form, or you can have your say at the meeting.

If you have any difficulties at school or would like to talk to someone about how things are going, talk to the teacher in your school who is responsible for supporting children looked after. They are called the designated teacher.. It's their job to make sure that you are supported in school and that you get the best from your time at school.

# Who will take care of me if I'm ill?

**When you are looked after, Social Care has to make sure that you are well looked after and healthy. Why? If you were living with your family, they would need to do the same. It is your Social Worker and carer/key worker's job to make sure that you are healthy.**

The best way to check your health is if you see a doctor once a year for a check up. The law says that all children and young people who are looked after should see a doctor once a year for a 'health assessment' or 'looked after medical'. The doctor you see works especially with looked after children and the health team make sure all children and young people who are looked after are seeing a doctor when they should.

They will check to see that you are up to date with your medical needs and that you are registered with a doctor and dentist and if you need one, an optician. You can also talk to them about anything to do with your health that you may be worried about, whether this is healthy eating, exercise, smoking, contraception or drugs and alcohol.

During the first few weeks of you becoming looked after, a health check will take place with either a doctor or a nurse. Your carer will be invited to the health check, but you can see the doctor or nurse on your own if you choose to.

At the end of the assessment, the doctor or nurse will write a personal health plan for you, recording what was talked about and anything that needs to be followed up. Copies of the plan will be given to your carer and Social Worker and other health professionals that need to support you and this will also be part of your Care Plan.



## Will I be able to attend my sports and activities?

**We think it's really important that you should be able to have fun and to have opportunities to do the things that interest you.**

Wherever you are living, your carers should organise activities and give you time and space to play and have a good time.

If you are already involved in activities like a sports club, dance classes, learning a musical instrument or going to Scouts or Guides, we will do our best to make sure you can keep attending these.

If there is an activity or hobby that you are interested in doing you can let your carer or your Social Worker know so that they can find out what is available in your area.

Your social worker can also apply for a leisure pass which gives free membership at Lambeth's leisure centres (as well as some leisure centres not in Lambeth if they are nearer to you).



# Will I see my friends? Can I do sleepovers?

**We want you to keep your old friends and make new ones. If you're not sure what the rules are where you live about inviting friends round, talk to your carers or ask your Social Worker.**

## Sleepovers

It is possible to spend the night at one of your friend's houses, but you do need to talk to your carers about this.

They are going to need to know where you are and who you are with, so they will need to speak to the parents of your friend. Remember, their job is to keep you safe, and sometimes that will mean saying no.

## Getting what you need

Your carers are given some money to provide you with what you need.

They should provide you with enough good food and clothing and toiletries for your everyday needs.

Routine school/college trips and visits should be paid for by your carer. In most placements, you should be going on an annual holiday.

## Pocket money and savings

You should have some responsibility for looking after your own money. Your Social Worker will be responsible with your carer for deciding on the exact amount of pocket money and savings. Your carer is expected to help you learn about savings and will help you open a savings account at a bank or post office.

# If someone is hurting or bullying you

**Being bullied might be someone pushing you, hitting you, teasing you, talking about you or calling you names.**

Bullying can happen at school, home or online. No one has the right to hurt you or make you feel bad, and if you are being bullied you don't have to put up with it.

If you are being hurt or someone tells you that they are going to hurt you, even if they are looking after you or they work for Lambeth Council, then please tell someone you trust as soon as you can.

Examples of people you could tell are, your:

- Carer
- Parent
- Teacher
- Key worker
- Advocate
- Social Worker
- Children's Rights Officer
- Independent Reviewing Officer
- Guardian



**You could also contact:**

**Lambeth's Out of Hours  
Emergency Social Work  
Service**

**0207 926 5555**

**(5pm-9am and all day weekends)**

**Child Line**

**open 24 hours a day**

**Free Phone 0800 1111**

**We will look into what  
you say very carefully and  
take what you say seriously  
to make sure that you  
are safe.**

# What are my rights?



**Barnardo's**

**All children who are looked after can have the support of Lambeth's Children's Rights Service. This is run by Barnardo's and is not part of Lambeth Council.**

The role of the Children's Rights Service is to listen to you if you are unhappy or unclear about something to do with being looked after and advocate on your behalf.

## **The Children's Rights Service will:**

- Listen to you
  - Tell you your rights
  - Meet with you one to one to listen to your concerns
  - Support you to express your views, wishes and feelings and ensure they are heard
  - Support you to have your say and speak up in meetings
  - Involve you in decisions being made about you
- Support you in making a complaint

If you would like to contact the Children's Rights you can get in touch through the following ways;

**Free Phone: 0800 085 8287**

Email: [Advocay2@barnados.org.uk](mailto:Advocay2@barnados.org.uk)

# Visions of success (VOS)

**When you're in care it can sometimes feel like a lot of decisions are being made about you and you don't get a say.**

If you like having fun, meeting new people and want to challenge and even change the way that Lambeth run children and young people's services, you can join Vision of Success (VOS) which is Lambeth's Children in Care Council.

VOS is a group of young people who are in care and leaving the care of Lambeth. They meet once a month over tasty meals, discussions and games to discuss a variety of subjects, and they get to tell Lambeth Council what they think about its policies and how they care for young people. The young people represent and speak on behalf of other children looked after to make a difference by creating ideas to improve services and outcomes. They do this by working as a team and co-operating with each other.

VOS meet with Lambeth Council's Chief Executive (the top boss of Lambeth Council!) once every six months to talk about important issues facing children in care as well as meeting with elected Councillors including the Corporate Parenting Board once every two months.

They also help to do training with Social Workers and Foster Carers and to sit on interview panels for new staff and services for looked after children.

We are always looking for more young people to join. If you want to be part of a group who continue to make lots of great changes in Lambeth they always welcome new members. Ask your Social Worker about joining or contact our Participation Officer on 0207 926 7084.



# What do I do if I have a complaint about Children and Young People's Services?

There will be times in your life when things can go very well and there may be other times when things can go wrong. If you are not happy about something to do with your care then it is your right to make a complaint.

Some of the things that can make you unhappy could be that:

- You feel you haven't been treated fairly
- You are unhappy with your care plan
- You are not happy where you are living
- Decisions being made are taking too long, which is making you worry and no one is telling you what is happening
- You are not allowed to do the same things as your friends
- You are not happy that everyone knows your business

You can complain to Children and Young People's Service in different ways:

Phoning:

**020 7926 9777**

Writing to:

Complaints Manager  
Children's Services  
London Borough of Lambeth.  
Civic Centre. 6 Brixton Hill.  
Brixton, London SW2 1EG

**It is your right to make a complaint and by telling us about it, this will help us make things better for you and help to improve our services.**

Ask your Social Worker for a copy of the *Comments, Complaints and Compliments* leaflet.



It is your right to be treated fairly and unless you tell someone that you are unhappy, things may not change. A complaint can help to make things better for you and maybe even other young people like you. A complaint is not about getting you or other people into trouble, it's about making sure that you are being listened to

# My contacts



**When you enter care, your Social Worker should give you a Contact Card. This card has contact details for people you may want or need to contact such as your Social Worker, their manager and your Independent Reviewing Officer. It also has some helpful numbers such as the out of hours emergency number, Childline and Children’s Rights Officer.**

You can also use this section of the booklet to write down important contact details for people you can talk to:

1. Social Worker:

Telephone number:.....

Mobile:.....

Email:.....

2. My Social Worker’s Manager:

Telephone number:.....

Mobile:.....

Email:.....

3. Independent Reviewing Officer:

Telephone number:.....

Mobile:.....

Email:.....

4. Designated Teacher:

Telephone number:.....

Mobile:.....

Email:.....

5. Emergency Duty Team:

Telephone number:.....

Mobile:.....

Email:.....

# Useful telephone numbers and websites



## Barnardo's

Children's Rights Service / Advocacy Service

**Free Phone: 0800 085 8287**

Email: [Advocacy2@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:Advocacy2@barnardos.org.uk)



## Lambeth

Lambeth Out of Hours Emergency  
Social Work Service Phone:

**020 7926 5555**

Email: [helpandprotect@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:helpandprotect@lambeth.gov.uk)

(5pm-9am and all day weekends)



## childline

ONLINE, ON THE PHONE, ANYTIME

[childline.org.uk](http://childline.org.uk) | 0800 1111

ChildLine open 24 hours a day

**Free phone: 0800 1111**

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)





If you would like this information in large print or in another language,  
please contact us on

**0207 926 5263**

or by writing to:

Lambeth Children's Services,  
London Borough of Lambeth, Civic Centre 2nd Floor,  
6 Brixton Hill, Brixton, London SW2 1EG