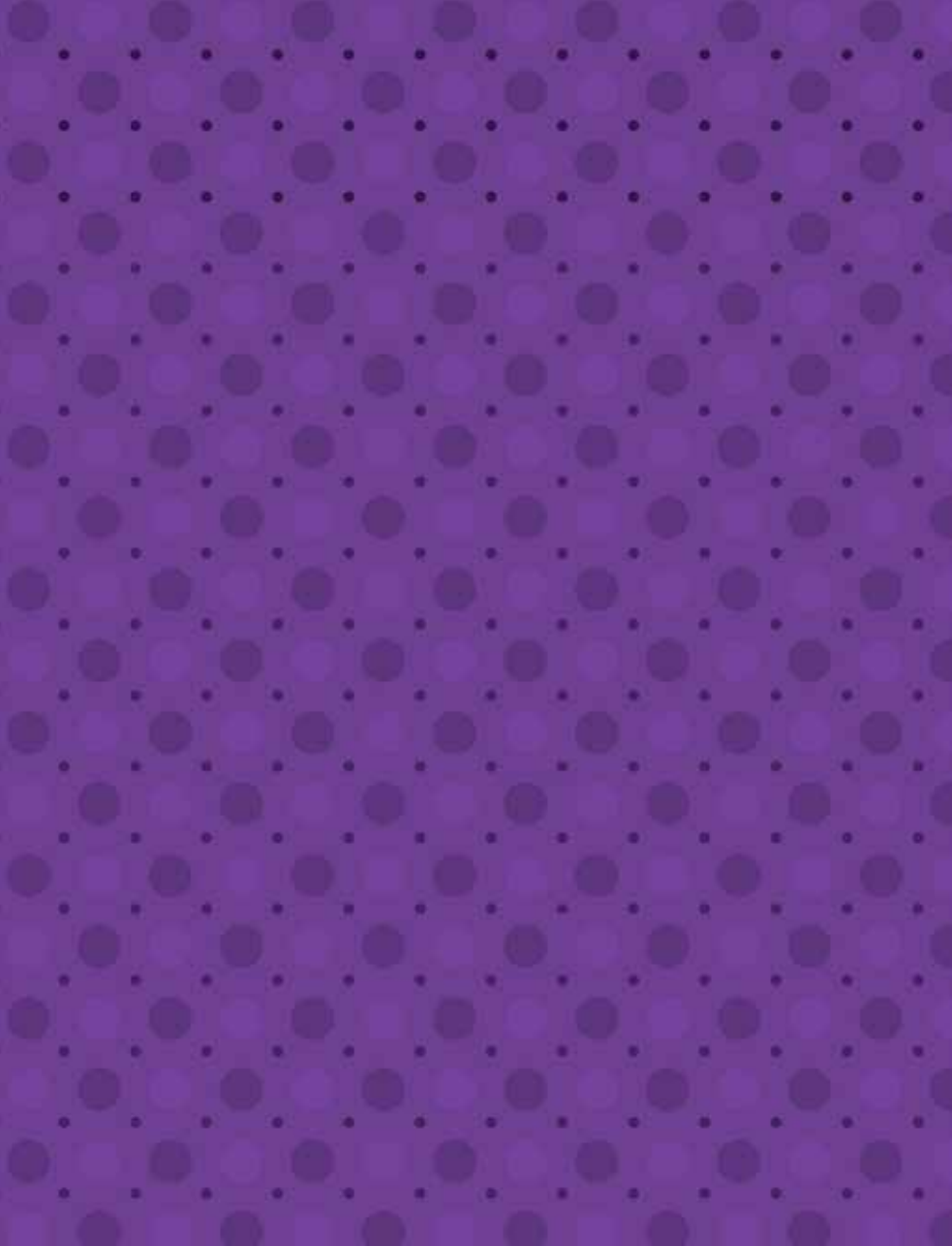




**Your file
of facts**





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Welcome

This file of facts has been created to give you information and advice about what to expect when you begin to live away from your family, when you come into care. It contains information about what happens in the first few weeks of care and what happens when you become a care leaver.

Before creating this file we asked young people for their thoughts and ideas about what would have been useful information to have when they first came into care.

Their ideas and suggestions have been put together to make this guide a useful resource for you.

Our thanks to all those young people who gave up their time to help us produce this file.

The promise

The Children in Care Council (CICC) offers a place where young people in care can have their say on issues that matter to them, and can make sure that they are heard by the people who make decisions.

The CICC is trying to help improve the lives of children in care by letting those in charge know what life in care is really like. At least twice a year, the people who make decisions about children in care, including staff and elected councillors, go to a CICC meeting. They are very keen to hear what young people in care have to say.

What can I contact the CICC about?

If you live in care, you can contact the CICC about any issue that concerns your life in care. This could be about your education, for example, or about your social workers, or where you live. The CICC can help and support you to talk about whatever issue you want, and can put you in touch with people who can give you more information and support.

If you want the CICC to hear your views, or if you would like to become a member, you can ask your carer or reviewing officer, or email voiceandinfluenceteam@wiltshire.gov.uk

Wiltshire Council has worked with the Children in Care Council to produce a promise to all children and young people about what they should expect from Wiltshire when they live in care.

We promise

- A choice of home where you can stay until you are ready to move on from care
- To keep you together with brothers and sisters whenever we can, and to help you stay in close contact with your family if that's what is right for you
- To listen to your views, act on them when we can and be honest when we cannot
- That your social worker will work hard for you to solve problems
- To tell you what your rights are and what you are entitled to
- That you will be involved in decisions taken during your looked after child review
- To involve you in decisions about school and to help you get to school so that your education can continue
- To arrange transport for you that is reliable and gets you to school and important meetings on time

- To invite you to group activities with other children living in care, and those leaving care, to help you feel more confident
- That we will deal with bullying quickly and efficiently
- To support you when you need help with school, leaving school and preparing for employment and training.



Living in care

When you live in care it might be because your parents have agreed that you should live away from home for a while, or the court may have decided that social care should look after you, or there may be no other adult who can look after you.

When you are in care you could live with foster carers, or in a children's home.

Sometimes you can live with a family member or friend who can be approved as your foster carer.

Foster carers are ordinary people who have been specially chosen and trained to care for young people who are not able to live with their own families. When you live in foster care you live in the carer's home and they look after you.

There are many different types of foster carers – some live on their own, others have their own children.

All foster carers are there to make you feel comfortable and will give you the help and support you need.




Being in foster care can last a short or a long time. How long you stay will depend on what is best for you. No matter how long you are in foster care it is normal to miss your family and friends and even your pets. You can usually stay in contact with your family and friends – you can write to them, send text messages, telephone them, or visit them (unless there is a particular reason why you can't).

If you are in a children's home you will live with other young people who are also in care. You will be cared for by a team of friendly staff, but you will have a named person sometimes called a 'key worker' who will be your allocated worker and will be your special link person.

Moving into care can feel scary. Having to live with people you don't know a lot about is hard. You should have the chance to visit your foster carers or children's home before you move in. If this happens it is called a planned placement move. You should be given some information about the foster carers, or a 'profile' of them. You should ask your social worker for this.

You may have come into care without any time to plan and this is called an emergency placement. It may be the case that you stay in your emergency placement only a few days or weeks before a planned placement can be found for you.



If you have committed an offence the court can, in some special circumstances, place you into the care of the local authority.

When you come into care there is usually a meeting with your foster carer, your social worker, your family and you to agree how you will be cared for. The meeting will discuss things like bedtimes, coming in times, pocket money and when you will see your family.

Your social worker's job is to help you move into care, explain why you are in care, and to work out a care plan with you and your family. This might include the court if it is involved.

Your social worker must visit you while you live in care, in your foster placement or children's home. They must see you within the first week of coming into care and then every six weeks.

You can ask for your social worker to visit you more often if you need to see him or her. Your social worker should make sure that you are seen alone and that your wishes and feelings about where you are living and your care plan are known and understood.

Your social worker should make sure that you can see your family and other important people and they should contact your school to let them know what is happening and to arrange a meeting to discuss your education.

You will be given a Reviewing Officer (RO) who will meet you and run your reviews. They are independent of the social work team and their job is to make sure that your plan is right and that everyone is doing what they are asked to do.

Your social worker should also arrange for you to have a health check.

Top tips for living in foster care

Here's what some young people with care experience thought it would be useful for you to know.

- Your life is still your life
- Keep seeing your friends
- Have someone to talk to
- Remember you are important and your family still loves you
- School is really important.

What is a review?

In the first few weeks of coming into care a review meeting will be arranged to talk about the overall plan for you and the arrangements for your care.

This plan is called your care plan.

This meeting is run by someone called an Independent Reviewing Officer (often called an IRO) whose job it is to run the meeting and to make sure that you are helped to understand your care plan and to make changes to the plan if it is not working.

Before the meeting your IRO will contact you and talk to you about the meeting and what you would like to discuss. You can also text, telephone, use MOMO, email or simply write down what you want to talk about at your meeting and send it to your IRO.



Your IRO will make sure that the arrangements for your care are discussed including arrangements to take care of your health, education and plans to see your family.

It is really important that you attend your reviews so that you can give your views, hear what people think, and take part in decisions about your care plan.

If you would like someone to support you at the meeting by speaking on your behalf, that is fine too. This person is called an advocate and your IRO can sort this out for you.

Your meeting will last about an hour and you will receive a written report of what was said at the meeting and what has been agreed.

If you are unhappy or uncertain about something in your care plan then your IRO can help you to sort this out.

Your next review takes place three months later and then every six months after that while you remain in care.

If you want to have an earlier review because you feel that your care plan is not working or it is taking too long to decide, then you can contact your IRO who will arrange an early review. You can also ask your social worker, foster carer or key worker to contact your IRO and arrange an early review.

Being healthy

It's important that you are healthy and can speak to your doctor, optician, or dentist whenever you need to.

When you first come into care, your social worker will talk to you about having a health check with a doctor used to working with children. This is called a health assessment.

What happens at my health assessment?

Everything that happens in the health assessment is done with your consent. If you are not sure, or don't want to have a health check, you don't have to.

If you do decide to go to your health assessment it will be private and you can talk to the doctor about anything that may be worrying you about your health. Health includes things like your feelings, or if you smoke.

Your doctor will ask you about your health and check your body, for example your eyes, mouth, height and weight, and listen to your heart and lungs. If there are any parts of the health assessment you don't want to take part in or discuss you can tell your doctor who will understand.

What happens after my health assessment?

Once you have had your health assessment your doctor will write a health care plan for you and your carers so that if you need to have other health appointments everyone knows what you need, where you need to go and who will support you.

Your Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) will check with you at your review that everything is okay with your health.

How often do I need to have a health assessment?

Every year you will be offered an appointment with a nurse to review your health care plan to make sure everything has been done to help you be healthy.

This is a special, dedicated time for you to talk about your health. The nurse will offer to weigh and measure you if you want them to, but you do not have to be weighed or measured.

The nurse for children in care will write a new health care plan for you. Usually you will see the same nurse every year and you could ask to see him or her before your next health assessment is due, it's up to you.

Your education

You have the right to an education and by law you have to receive some sort of education from the age of five to 18 years. All young people are entitled to full time education up to the age of 19 years.

When you come into care it is important that your education is not affected and that you are given the help and support you need to enjoy school and achieve your potential.

To make sure that you are supported in education your social worker will arrange to meet with you, your school, your family and your carer to draw up a Personal Education Plan, sometimes called a PEP.

The PEP helps teachers, carers and social workers understand what a looked after child or young person thinks about how they are doing at school and what needs to happen to make it easier to do well.

When you help to write the plan, you will understand better what teachers and carers are trying to do to support you at school.

Not all young people who are in care find education easy, and they sometimes find it hard to stay in school and take their exams. Everyone will try hard to work together to help you stay in school, to take exams and have a good start when you leave education, either by going to college or university or getting a job you enjoy.

The PEPs and the targets set for you will be checked regularly with you, your teachers, carers and social workers.

The PEP makes sure that everyone involved in your education (including you) knows what to do to make sure that you are settled in school, learning and, if you need it, getting the right support.

Young people who live in care in Wiltshire have a special team called the Virtual School. The Virtual School can help if things at school are not going well. It can help to make sure that any changes or moves are done properly and it can offer extra support to you. You may have someone called the Virtual School Officer (VSO) come to your PEP meeting to talk to you about the best way to make sure that you feel happy at school and do well.





Your voice

Mind of my own

Mind of My Own (MOMO) is a tool that you can download onto a phone, tablet or computer. It allows you to send a message to your social worker, Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), or other member of staff whenever you want to. MOMO is really useful when you are thinking about a meeting or review that is coming up. Your social worker can help you to download it.

Advocacy and complaints

An advocate is an independent person who will listen to your views and give you advice, guidance and support to make sure that you are heard.

Advocates have helped young people to sort out problems with many different things, such as bullying, pocket money and

arrangements to see family. Advocates will also support young people when they feel that they need to make a complaint.

Independent visitors

Any young person who is living in care can have an Independent Visitor (IV) if they would like one, and if everyone thinks it is in their best interests.

If you are matched with an independent visitor you can expect to meet them regularly throughout the time you are in care. They will befriend you and become a reliable person in your life – someone with whom you can talk, share interests and (hopefully!) have fun. There is a ‘pool’ of independent visitors who are all different. If you are interested in having an independent visitor we will talk to you first about the sort of person you would like to be linked up with and try to find someone who is right for you.

Most independent visitors meet up with their young people every three or four weeks, but it may be more or less often depending on what you agree together. Some examples of the things that young people do with their visitors include going to a café, playing snooker or sport, or simply trying something new...You and your visitor can talk to each other about what you might like to do when you meet up.

If you would like help to get your voice heard, or if you want to know more about Independent Visitors (IV), you can:

Tell your Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), Personal Adviser (PA), carer or social worker.

Ask for an advocate

Submit a MOMO statement

Email voiceandinfluenceteam@wiltshire.gov.uk.



Leaving care

Your starter for 10

Ten things the law says you are entitled to when leaving care

1 An assessment of your needs

You have a right to have your needs assessed before you leave care to make sure that you leave at a time that is right for you. You should know what support you will be getting and understand what your options are if things do not work out for the best.

It is important to know that you can stay in care until you are 18, unless you agree that you are ready to leave before.

2 My Care Plan

Sometime after your 15th birthday you should be involved in putting together a My Care Plan, and you should be in agreement with what it says. By the time you are 16 years and 3 months old, the My Care Plan should be in place, explaining the help you will be getting in preparing to leave care and the support you will receive after you have left.

It should tell you how the council will help you achieve the things you want in life, such as a place of your own, doing well in school, having your own money to spend, going on a training course, or getting the job that you want. The My Care Plan is very important to you, as it will say exactly what help you should be getting before, during and after you leave care. Once agreed, it should be kept to by all those who have signed it.

When the time comes for you to leave care, you should be able to look after yourself, keep yourself healthy, continue with your learning, enjoy and achieve things in life, stay in touch with family and friends, and be confident about who you are.

3 A Personal Adviser

Children's services should make sure that you have a Personal Adviser (PA). This could be your current social worker or another worker. It is their job to keep in touch with you, check that you are alright and help you in getting what you need. To do this they must make sure that your My Care Plan is followed, reviewed and kept up to date.

4 A place to live

Your local authority must make sure that you have somewhere 'suitable to live'. This means that it has to be right for you and, above all,

safe. It is important that wherever you prefer to live, you make sure that your local authority puts this into your My Care Plan. In some cases it will be possible for you to continue living with your foster carers. This is called Staying Put. Your social worker and PA will talk to you about this. You can decide to return home if this is what you and your family wish.

5 Financial support

Until you are 18, children's services must arrange for your financial support to help you pay for the things you need to live on, like food, clothing, travel, hobbies and your accommodation. They have to make sure that you are not any worse off than if you were on benefits. Once you are 18, and if you are not in employment or full-time education, you can claim benefits. However, your local authority should continue to give you financial help for things like the costs of your education and training, if that is what they have agreed to do. In order that children's services keep to their promises, they should make sure that all agreed support is written into your My Care Plan.

6 Maintaining relationships

Your Personal Adviser should help you to keep in contact with relatives and also friends you have met whilst in care.

7 Involvement in decisions

You have a right to be involved in all major decisions, including when you leave care, where you go to live and what support you receive.

8 Having your say if you are not happy about something

Although you have left care you are still entitled to let children's services know and, if necessary, to complain if you are not satisfied with the support you are getting.

Remember: You also have the right to have an advocate to help you do this.

9 Seeing your files

The law says that you have a right to see written information that is about you. This includes children's services files and many young people would like help in getting access to these.

10 Knowing about services you can use

You have a right to be told, and to be given information, about all the services that you are entitled to use once you leave care. This includes training, employment, further and higher education courses, and housing advice.

At what age can I...?

The law allows us to do things at specific ages. This does not mean that they are good for us or that we should do them, but legally at the age of:

10 years you can

- be convicted of a criminal offence
- open a bank or building society account if the manager agrees.

12 years you can

- sign your own passport if you are getting a new one.

14 years you can

- be employed for more than two hours per day outside school hours but not overnight
- work up to five hours on a Saturday and two hours on a Sunday and five hours during school holidays.



16 years you can

- get a National Insurance (NI) number
- open an Individual Savings Account (ISA)
- choose your own GP
- work full time
- have sex with another person aged 16 or older with their consent.

17 years you can

- learn to drive all vehicles except medium or heavy goods vehicles
- join the Army, Royal Navy or Air Force with parental permission
- donate blood without parental consent.

18 years you can

- leave home without parents' consent
- get married without parental consent
- vote
- have a tattoo
- own houses and land and hold a tenancy, or apply for a mortgage.

Legal stuff – what R U talking about!



27.

Legal stuff – what R U talking about!

When you come into care, from time to time you will hear your social worker talk about section 20, section 31, Children Act 1989, Full Care Order, legal proceedings, Police Protection, Emergency Protection Order. You might read these things in reports or letters.

This page explains what all that means

Children Act 1989: This is the main part of the law that social workers must follow. It is called primary legislation. It tells your social worker what they must do to make sure you are safe and well looked after when you come into care. It also tells your social worker what they should do to make sure they are making the right decisions about your care and future. Some parts of this Act have been changed over time to alter what needs to be done to support you but much of it still applies.

Section 20: This is part of the Children Act. It means that even though you live away from

your parents they still are the only adults who can make decisions about you and your future. Your social worker can only make suggestions to your parents about what is best for you, but your parents hold the power to make important decisions about you – this is called parental responsibility. As you get older, parents still have this power but they cannot use it in the same way as you start to have more say in your own life.

Legal proceedings: If your parents and your social worker cannot agree the best way to keep you safe and look after you then they can ask a judge to decide what to do next. Asking a judge to make a decision means that your social worker has started legal proceedings. To help the judge make the decision he or she has to ask other people to speak to you and your parents to try and understand what has happened in your family and if you could return home or if you should stay in care. This is called an assessment; it will usually be written by your social worker and it can sometimes take a long time to do. The people who are working to support you will be able to be part of the assessment and your views have to be included as well.

As part of legal proceedings, where there are serious concerns about your safety and how well your parents can look after you, your social worker may apply for a **Care Order (CO)** and an **Interim Care Order (ICO)** may be made.

This gives time for more work to be done so that decisions can be made which are best for you.

Section 31: This is part of the Children Act. It means that your social worker has gone to court (see legal proceedings) and a judge has granted a Care Order (CO). This CO means that your parents cannot make the important decisions about you without your social worker agreeing. Your parents and your social worker share the job of making decisions about you, but it is your social worker who has the final say.

Police Protection

This means that the police can stop you going home until they are sure that you are safe. It can last only a very short time, and then a social worker must become involved. They will then listen to your views and take them into account when making decisions about what should happen next. You may be able to return home or you might be found somewhere else to stay.

Emergency Protection Order (EPO)

This means that your social worker can stop you going home while they make sure that going home will be safe. The EPO lasts for seven days and if your social worker wants your stay in care to be for a longer time, they must ask your parents for permission, or ask a judge to make a Care Order (see section 31).

Websites, addresses and numbers

Other places to go for support

Children's Commissioner (Help-at-Hand) – promoting and protecting the rights of children
Freephone 0800 528 0731

help.team@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk
www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/help-at-hand/about-us

Coram Voice – helping children and young people to hold to account the services that are responsible for their care

0808 800 5792
www.coramvoice.org.uk

Become – the charity for children in care and young care leavers

0800 023 2033
advice@becomecharity.org.uk
www.becomecharity.org.uk

Childline – free contact 24 hours a day for children and young people to talk about anything that is worrying them. Includes 1-2-1 Counsellor Chat

0800 1111

www.childline.org.uk

Motiv8 – young peoples' drug and alcohol service. A free and confidential service for young people living in Wiltshire

The line is open 9am until 7pm Monday to Friday


0800 169 6136

Kooth – free, safe, online support for children and young people

<https://kooth.com/>

On Your Mind – signposting to sources of support for emotional health and wellbeing in Wiltshire

www.onyourmind.org.uk



And finally... have you got access to **Mind of My Own (MOMO)**? Telling people what you want and need can be difficult. MOMO apps help you organise your thoughts and make it easier to tell your worker what you think. Your worker will get a better insight into what's going on, from your point of view. Download the app and say what you want when you want to.

<http://mindofmyown.org.uk/young-people/>

