



Preparing for Leaving Care

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Preparing for Independence

Fostering Young People can be a balancing act between looking after them and helping them to become more independent. All Looked After Children will need to leave Local Authority Care and gain the skills they need to become independent in a supported way. Regardless of the age of the young person, they need to start developing skills so that they can become as independent as possible and should be encouraged to take responsibilities when they are able to do so.

Foster Carers should build opportunities to practice skills such as cooking, shopping and cleaning into their family's routine appropriate to the age and development of the child. This may start with a task such as preparing snacks or drinks or may be fun activities such as cake making. This can progress gradually to meal planning, shopping and preparing food for themselves and /or others.

As far as they are able, children and young people should be given choices about what they want to buy from their pocket money. As they get older, they should also be given increasing responsibility for receiving and spending other aspects of their allowances such as clothing or personal allowances which cover items such as toiletries.

Foster Carers should support all children and young people to open a bank or building society account in their own name and encourage them to learn about managing money and saving through discussion and practice e.g. saving for a special event or holiday.

Listed below are some areas to think about with young people when preparing them for independence:

- Budgeting, managing money and savings.
- Self-care, staying healthy.
- What food to buy, how to cook it and keep it.
- How to use a washing machine and iron.
- Housework and cleaning.
- DIY such as decorating and home maintenance.
- Thinking about their futures; what do they want to do, employment, further training, and how can they achieve this?
- Accessing advice and support from others – for example making a GP appointment or making a job application.
- Leisure activities and other interests.

It is important that Foster Carers and professionals involved with them support the young person to develop their self-esteem and resilience to enable them to work towards living independently.

It often seems easier and quicker to do things for children and young people, but this will not prepare them for adult life. However, teaching children and young people to undertake tasks should not prevent them from having the rest, relaxation, and the nurture they need.

Leaving Care Services

If Foster Carers are caring for a young person who is 15 years and 9 months or older, there will be additional services to help them to support and prepare the young person for independence including having a Personal Adviser.

The statutory definition and requirements that require the local authority to stay in touch with the young person, undertake a needs assessment prepare and keep the Pathway Plan under review, appoint a Personal Adviser and provide accommodation and assistance to meet their needs in relation to education, training or employment are covered by Regulations 4 to 9, 42, 43 and 44 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010.

Eligibility

All young people who are over 16 and leaving care fall within one of the following categories:

- 1. eligible child;**
- 2. relevant child;**
- 3. former relevant child; OR**
- 4. other qualifying care leavers**

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Eligible Young People

They are aged 16 or 17, have been Looked After for a period or periods totalling at least 13 weeks starting after their 14th birthday and ending at least one day after their 16th birthday, and are still in care. (This total does not include a series of pre-planned short-term placements of up to four weeks where the child has returned to the parent). There is a duty to support these young people up to the age of 18, wherever they are living.

The statutory definitions and requirements to undertake a needs assessment, prepare a Pathway Plan, keep the Pathway Plan under review and appoint a Personal Adviser are covered by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

Relevant Young People

They are aged 16 or 17 and are no longer Looked After, having previously been in the category of Eligible Young Person when in care (that is, they have been Looked After for a period, or periods, totalling at least 13 weeks starting after their 14th birthday and ending at least one day after their 16th birthday). However, if after leaving care, a young person returns home for a period of 6 months or more to be cared for by a parent and the return home has been formally agreed as successful, they will no longer be a "Relevant Young Person".

A young person is also "Relevant" if, having been in care for three months or more, he or she is then detained after their 16th birthday either in a hospital, remand centre, young offenders' institution or secure training centre. There is a duty to support Relevant Young People up to the age of 18, wherever they are living.

Former Relevant Young People

They are aged 18 or above and have **left care having been previously either "Eligible", "Relevant" or both**. There is a duty to consider the need to support these young people wherever they are living.

If the Former Relevant child pursues higher education in accordance with their Care Plan, there is a duty to pay a higher education bursary.

To the extent that the Former Relevant child's welfare requires it, 'other assistance' must be provided which may be in kind or, in exceptional circumstances, in cash.

These duties continue until the former relevant child reaches 21 or, where the child's pathway plan sets out a programme of education or training which extends beyond their 21st birthday, they continue for so long as the child pursues that programme.

These duties continue up to the Former Relevant child's 25th birthday.

Qualifying Young People

They are aged 16 and over and under the age of 21 (up to 25 if in education), and:

Subject to a Special Guardianship Order (or were when they reached 18) and were looked after immediately before the making of that Order,

At any time after 16 (but whilst still a child), were (but no longer are) looked after, accommodated, or fostered.

Where a local authority looked after, accommodated, or fostered a young person, and they are deemed as Qualifying for advice and assistance, the local authority has a duty to take reasonable steps to contact them with a view to advising and assisting them.

This includes financial assistance in relation to expenses incurred in living near the place where the young person is, will be, or is seeking work or where they will be receiving education or training; or where the person is in full time further or higher education, is under the age of 25 and qualifies for advice and assistance, or would have done if they were under 21, assistance in relation to securing vacation accommodation

The Needs Assessment

Care leavers should expect to receive the same level of care and support as others would receive from a reasonable parent. Their Social Worker should consider what advice, assistance and support is appropriate taking into account the young person's:

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- **health needs.**
- **education or training.**
- **need for accommodation and financial help.**
- **race, religion and culture; and**
- **family relationships (including the need to maintain these).**

The young person must be fully involved in discussions and plans for their future, and their social worker must also consider the views of any person with Parental Responsibility.

The young person must be provided with a written statement containing details of the Needs Assessment including the expected timetable, the other people involved in the Assessment and the procedure to follow in the event of disagreement.

The Assessment must be completed within 3 months of becoming an 'eligible child' or 'relevant child'. The time runs from the date that Children's Services were made aware of the young person and not the date that the assessments began.

The young person must be fully involved in discussions about their future and plans for their transition to independence and adulthood.

The Pathway Plan

Every young person should have an assessment no later than 3 months after their 16th birthday that identifies their needs as they move towards independence. Foster Carers are asked to contribute to this and to help the young person to achieve tasks and gain skills that they will need in adulthood. These tasks and other elements will form a Pathway Plan that in time will replace their Care Plan.

This Pathway Plan will include educational and employment arrangements, support and accommodation plans including financial help.

This doesn't mean that the young person has to leave Foster Care as being looked after within a family might be an important part of their independence especially if the young person, for example has a disability or if they are planning on moving to university.

The Pathway Plan will cover the following key areas:

- Health.
- A plan for education, training or employment.
- Support to develop and keep appropriate family, social and sexual relationships.
- A programme to develop practical skills to live independently.
- Budgeting and money management.
- The young person's accommodation needs including any adaptations required for a young person with a disability.
- What is needed to provide the young person with support.



Ensuring the plan is accurate and comprehensive and contains sufficiently detailed contingency plans is fundamental to a young person transitioning to adulthood.

Training and support should be available to foster carers from Fostering Services on developing independence in young people including those with a disability or additional need.

Foster Carers should be aware of corporate parenting principles and in their role to support, as well as advocate on behalf of, their foster young person.

In addition, each local authority publishes a 'Local Offer' for care leavers, advising of the support and assistance available up to the age of 25. Be mindful also that the Local Offer will change and develop over time.

What does a Personal Advisor do?

Section 3 Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires Local Authorities to provide personal advisors to care leavers up until they reach the age of 25.

A Personal Advisor acts as a central point to ensure a young person leaving care is provided with the correct level of support. Personal Advisors should have a working knowledge of the issues a care leaver might face as they make their transition into adulthood, and the legal framework in relation to this.

A Personal Advisor's role is to:

- provide advice (including practical advice) and support to the young person;
- participate in reviews of the young person's case,
- liaise with the responsible authority in the implementation of the pathway plan,
- co-ordinate the provision of services and take reasonable steps to ensure the young person makes use of such services,
- remain informed about the young person's progress and wellbeing,
- keep full, accurate and up to date records of contacts with the young person and services provided,
- provide information about financial capability-how to manage day to day finances,
- provide housing options available to the care leaver,
- support in finding further education, employment or training,
- keep in touch with the young person.

The Pathway plan is the responsibility of the allocated social worker. The Personal Advisor should 'participate' in the Pathway Plan and they should be involved in the review of the plan.

As a Needs Assessment should to be undertaken and Pathway Plan completed and agreed within a maximum of 3 months from the date that a young person obtains Eligible Child status, it is crucial that a Personal Advisor is appointed as soon as possible following the attainment of this status. This is to ensure that the Personal Advisor has met the young person, become familiar to their needs, wishes and feelings, and of course the services that they will require as they transition to adulthood and beyond.

Children's Services often transfer case responsibility to a Leaving Care team when a Young Person is approaching their 15th birthday. This can create some stress for some Young People as they think they need to leave their current placement or conversely can lead to some Young People enthusiastically looking forward to leaving and getting to their own accommodation, often before they are emotionally and practically ready.

When a Young Person Reaches 18

Staying Put

Local Authorities must provide information to the young person and foster carer about the possibility of extending a young person's living arrangements when they are 18.

If this is an option for the young person, the first Looked After Review following their 16th birthday should consider a Staying Put arrangement. This will mean assessing the implications for both the young person and their foster family.

Following the young person's 18th birthday, the legal basis on which they live in the foster home changes (the legal term is that the young person becomes an 'excluded licensee' lodging in the home) – this does not mean that the young person will be treated differently than when they were fostered.

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Finances will change also and so it is worth clarifying these changes when you are considering becoming a Staying Put carer. The young person may be working or receiving benefits or an educational bursary so will need to fund their personal expenditure themselves and, in some cases, may be required to contribute towards the placement costs.

A living together agreement is usually drawn up between the local authority, the young person and the Staying Put carer to make sure the day-to-day arrangements of the placements are all agreed. A staying put arrangement is outside of fostering regulations and if the foster carer is not able to (or decides does not wish to) continue fostering they may be asked to resign from their fostering service. If further advice is needed about this issue, please contact Fosterline.

Supported Lodgings

Where a young person cannot “stay put” with their Foster Carers but they would benefit from support to build their independence skills when they leave Foster Care and receive support in a family home environment then Supported Lodgings may be considered as an option.



Every Young Person is different, but they may need help with:

- getting into education, training or work
- managing money
- learning to cook and do housework
- attending appointments
- building confidence
- finding a home

Support and training is provided for Supported Lodgings Carers along with payments to cover the costs of hosting a young person

If you think you can help give a young person the help and support to get to grips with the adult world, get in touch with your local supported lodgings team at your local authority or other local provider.

Although Fostering Regulations do not apply in Staying Put and Supported Lodgings situations there will be certain checks carried out. The Local Authority will need to assess and consider the appropriateness of these checks to ensure the young person remains living in a safe home.

Other Accommodation Options

Other options for supported living may be available in the young person's local areas including foyers, parents and child units, supported living units alongside the young person applying for their own council tenancy when they reach 18 years old. Most councils have a system where Carer Leavers who are assessed as ready to live independently receive a priority status.

Disabled young people or those with additional needs may be able to access residential support including residential colleges with additional support to meet their needs.

Role of a Foster Carer, Staying Put or Supported Lodgings Carer

The role of a Foster Carer, Staying Put or Supported Lodgings Carer in moving a young person towards independence is to help the young person to develop the skills and knowledge to live independently, provide support and encouragement particularly when they face challenges and care about them and their future.

This will mean different tasks with different young people but knowing there is someone at home, looking out for them, helping them to develop, encouraging them to work with professionals, caring for and about them whilst they are getting to grips with adulthood can make a real difference to them establishing a positive start to adulthood. The average age of an adult leaving home who has not been in the care system currently is age 25 so young people who have been in Foster Care often leave home many years earlier. Help and support for care leavers when making their transition to living independently is likely to lead to better outcomes.

Shared Lives

Shared lives schemes support young people and adults with learning disabilities, mental health problems or other needs that make it harder for them to live on their own.

The schemes match someone who needs care with an approved carer. The carer shares their family and community life and gives care and support to the person with care needs.

Some people move in with their shared lives carer, while others are regular daytime visitors. Some combine daytime and overnight visits.

Shared lives schemes are available across the country and are an alternative to traditional kinds of care, such as care homes. The schemes are also known as adult placements.

The service runs in a similar way to a foster placement, but this service is specifically designed for adults and young people.

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Foster carers who wish to provide this type of support will need to be reassessed and should request details of the process, timescales and financial implications from the shared lives/adult placement provider.

This gives the young person opportunities to create links and develop their identity in relation to the family and the wider community. Shared Lives services are fully focused on choice and independence for the young person. The young person is encouraged to get involved in the decision of where they live and the support they need. Shared Lives services may also offer a dedicated short-term and respite service for disabled young people or those with additional needs.

Local Offer for Care Leavers

Section 2 Children and Social Work Act 2017 instituted a requirement for each Local Authority in England to publish a 'Local Offer for Care Leavers'. The Local Offer must contain information about services offered by the Local Authority for care leavers:

- as a result of its functions under the Children Act 1989; and/or
- made available to assist in or prepare for adulthood and independent living.

See www.careleaveroffer.co.uk to find out the local offer in your area.

Finances

Please see our Factsheet on Finance for further information.

benefits advice and support is available to fostering household who live in England for enquiries@fosterline.org or call referral by visiting [s.](#)

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