



A children and young person's guide to fostering

www.merton.gov.uk/adoptionandfostering



Why should I read this booklet?

This booklet is to help you understand what foster care is and what being looked after by Merton means. It helps to talk to people about what you read. Your social worker, foster carer or teacher are always there to help explain things and to answer your questions. The fostering team makes a commitment to you that while you are being looked after, they will make sure that all the things they are able to do and help you with, will happen.

What does foster care mean?

Foster care is when you go to live with another family, when your own family is unable to look after you. Many children who are in foster care live with foster carers approved by the local authority fostering services. A child who is in foster care is often called a 'looked after child' because the local authority looks after them. Looked after children each have their own social worker who is responsible for making sure that they are well cared for.

Who are foster carers?

Foster carers are people who look after children and young people in their own homes when they are unable to live with their family. Foster carers are ordinary people who care about children and young people and want to help make sure they are safe.

Not all foster carers are the same: they may be single or married, black or white; they may or may not have children of their own. Foster carers may live in a house or a flat. They may have pets.

All foster carers, their families and their homes have been carefully checked to make sure that they can offer you a safe place to live. Merton fostering service will do their best to find you a foster carer who has a similar background to you, who will be able to look after you and make sure that you have everything you need. The foster carer's home will be safe and comfortable. You will have your own room unless you are sharing with your brother or sister and safe places to keep your special things.

Your carer will keep you healthy and make sure that you go to see the doctor, dentist and optician. You will be given information about your foster carer and their family before you go to live with them, this is called a 'profile'.

When you are looked after, your foster carer will care for you as if you were part of their family. They will look after you until you are able to return home or until other longer term plans are made. You will be able to talk to your foster carer about how you are feeling. They will understand how upsetting it can be living away from your family and friends.

Your foster carer will get to know you and help you do the things you like, and if you want something that is very important to you, they will do their best to help you. Your foster carer will help you with hobbies or leisure interests, so let them know what you like to do and they will make sure you can get to do all the things you enjoy.



What is a social worker?

A social worker is someone who is there to help you and do what is best for you. It is your social worker's job to help children, adults and families when they go through a difficult time. Every child or young person in foster care has a social worker. Your social worker will visit you to check that you are OK. They will ask you how things are going and tell you about any plans that affect you. Your social worker will also work with your family to try and make it possible for you to return home.

The plans that are made for you are called 'Care Plans' and these cover things like where you will go to school, who will take you to the doctors if you are ill and how often you will see your family. Your social worker will ask you how you feel about the plans being made for you. If you are worried or don't understand something tell your social worker so they can explain things to you. If you want to, you can see your Independent Reviewing Officer in private if something is troubling you.

How long will I be in foster care?

How long you will live with foster carers will depend on your situation. If you are in foster care because your parent is unwell, then as soon as your parent is better and able to look after you, you will return home. Sometimes, however, Merton Social Care and others agencies may be worried about whether your parents are keeping you safe from harm. This may involve asking magistrates or judges at court to make a decision about your care. Your social worker and everyone concerned with your care will be working with your family to ensure that it is safe for you to return home. Sometimes this can take a long time.

There will be regular meetings called 'Reviews' where your care and the plans for your future will be discussed; you will have a chance to say what you think at these meetings. If you cannot go home your social worker will discuss with you and your parents where you can live, this may be with relatives or other carers.

What about my wishes and feelings?

Foster carers will listen to what you want. However, if you feel unhappy about something and you think that we are not listening to you, you could get an 'Advocate'. An Advocate is someone with a lot of experience of working with children and young people and listening to their views.

They will listen to your concerns and will work with you to find ways to put things right. They will make sure that you are listened to in meetings, and can pass on your views and wishes to other people involved in making decisions. If you think you want an Advocate you can talk to your social worker or telephone an organisation called Reconstruct on 0800 389 1571.

Will I still be able to see my family and friends and stay in contact with people who are important to me?

Yes. Merton Social Care want to make sure that you stay in contact with your family and friends while you are being looked after by foster carers. Regular contact with your family and friends will be encouraged, whether by visits or phone calls. Where and how often you see your family will depend on your individual circumstances, particularly if there are any concerns about your safety. At the beginning of your stay with foster carers an agreement will be made about how often contact with your family will take place.

You will be encouraged to continue seeing your friends, but your foster carers will want to know where you are and who you are with to ensure you are safe at all times. You can stay overnight with your friends but only if parents, foster carers and social workers are satisfied that you will be safe, and this will need to be agreed in advance.

What if my foster family is a different religion to me?

Merton's fostering services try their best to place children with families who are from the same culture as them. Sometimes this is not possible. However, your foster carer will do all they can to make sure that you can attend your place of worship, keep up your customs, eat food that you are used to. Your social worker will try to put you in touch with people from your own community so that you don't feel cut off from your culture, they will also arrange for you to have a translator if you need one.

Do I have to change school?

Merton Social Care will try to make sure that you can stay at your own school, so that you can see your friends and carry on with activities that you enjoy. Merton's Virtual School will help if you are not happy with any of these arrangements. You should also tell your foster carer or social worker if there are any other problems at school. We know that your education is very important and your foster carer will go to parent's evenings and will help you with homework.

Will I have my own room?

Merton's fostering services prefer foster children to have their own bedroom. However on occasions young foster children from the same family, like your brother or sister may share a bedroom with you.

Will I get pocket money?

Yes. Your foster carer will give you pocket money. The amount you get will depend on your age. Your parents and your social worker will be asked their views about this. Your social worker and foster carer will tell you how much you will get and how often. You will be expected not to spend it on anything that will cause you harm and also to save a little from your pocket money each week.



What are the rules in a foster family?

Every foster family has its own rules just like other families. Some foster carers have firm rules about homework, bedtimes, swearing, smoking etc. Other carers have a few rules that they are very strict about, like the time you must come home, but will be flexible about other things.

Living in a family means that you have to share things and respect each other. Depending on your age you may be asked to help out with household tasks like setting the table or tidying your room. Like any parent, foster carers will tell you off if you have done something wrong and they may take away a favourite game, stop your pocket money or 'ground you' if you misbehave badly. However, they will also praise you when you have achieved something or done something good. Your carers will help you to learn things that are new, and help you to grow independently.

Are foster carers allowed to smack or physically punish me?

No. Foster carers are not allowed to physically punish you in any way. Foster carers are there to protect you from harm, not hurt you. If your foster carer is finding your behaviour difficult then this is something that needs to be discussed between you, your foster carer and your social worker. Just as foster carers are not allowed to physically harm you, you should not harm them or any members of their family. Your carers will try to understand the things that upset you and help you find ways to deal with them.

Who will help me if I am not happy?

If you do not feel happy for whatever reason at your foster home, then it is important that you tell your social worker or another adult who you trust. No one will be cross, and there are lots of other independent people you could talk to who can help sort things out.

If you ever want to make a complaint you should ask your social worker for a copy of the leaflet called 'Sorted'. Or you could telephone:

- The Merton Customer Service and Complaints Officer on 020 8545 3263
- Voice for the Child in Care on freephone 0808 800 5792, or
- Child Line on free phone 0800 11 11.

You could also contact 'Ofsted'. They are an organisation set up to monitor and inspect all children's services in the country. If you have a complaint you can contact them by writing to them at:

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate, Store Street
Manchester M1 2WD

Alternatively, you can call them on 0303 123 1231, or send them an email to **enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk**

The Children's Rights Director, Roger Morgan, works with the people who visit places and services that look after children and young people.

They spend a lot of time listening to what children and young people have to say, and telling inspectors and the Government what children and young people think about how they are looked after. You can write to the Children's Rights Director at:

Ofsted

Aviation House, 125 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

Or you call them on 0800 528 0731 or visit

www.rights4me.org/contact.cfm

and fill out the contact form.



We work closely with other departments and organisations to make sure that your needs are met. We hope that this booklet has been helpful and will remove some fears and worries you may have about foster care. If you would like us to explain anything else then please speak to your social worker or contact us at the address below.

The Fostering Team

London Borough of Merton

4th Floor Civic Centre

London Road

Merton SM4 5DX

Email: fostering@merton.gov.uk

Website: www.awayahead.org.uk

www.merton.gov.uk/adoptionandfostering

Request for document translation

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If you need any part of this document explained in your language, please tick box and contact us either by writing or by phone using our contact details below.

- Albanian Nëse ju nevojitet ndonjë pjesë e këtij dokumenti e shpjeguar në gjuhën amtare ju lutemi shenojeni kutinë dhe na kontaktoni duke na shkruar ose telefononi duke përdorur detajet e mëposhtme.
- Bengali এই তথ্যের কোনো অংশ আপনার নিজ ভাষায় বুঝতে চাইলে, দয়া করে ব্যক্তিগত (ব্যক্তিগত) টিক চিহ্ন দিন এবং চিঠি লিখে বা ফোন করে আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করুন। নিচে যোগাযোগের বিবরণ দেওয়া হয়েছে।
- French Si vous avez besoin que l'on vous explique une partie de ce document dans votre langue, cochez la case et contactez-nous par courrier ou par téléphone à nos coordonnées figurant ci-dessous.
- Korean 만일 본 서류의 어떤 부분이라도 귀하의 모국어로 설명된 것이 필요하다면, 상자속에 표시를하고 우리에게 전화나 서신으로 연락하십시오.
- Polish Aby otrzymać część tego dokumentu w polskiej wersji językowej proszę zaznaczyć kwadrat i skontaktować się z nami drogą pisemną lub telefoniczną pod poniżej podanym adresem lub numerem telefonu.
- Portuguese Caso você necessite qualquer parte deste documento explicada em seu idioma, favor assinalar a quadrícula respectiva e contatar-nos por escrito ou por telefone usando as informações para contato aqui fornecidas.
- Somali Haddii aad u baahan tahay in qayb dukumeentigan ka mid ah laguugu sharxo luqaddaada, fadlan sax ku calaamadee sanduuqa oo nagula soo xiriir warqad ama telefoon adigoo isticmaalaya macluumaadka halkan hoose ku yaalla.
- Spanish Si desea que alguna parte de este documento se traduzca en su idioma, le rogamos marque la casilla correspondiente y que nos contacte bien por escrito o telefónicamente utilizando nuestra información de contacto que encontrará más abajo.
- Tamil இந்தப் பத்திரத்தின் எந்தப் பகுதியும் உங்களின் மொழியில் விளக்கப்படுவது உங்களுக்கு வேண்டியானால், தயவுசெய்து பெட்டியில் அடையாளமிட்டு, கீழுள்ள அங்கலின் விபரங்களைப் பயன்படுத்தி எழுத்துமூலமாக அல்லது தொலைபேசி மூலமாக அங்களைத் தொடர்புகொள்ளவும்.
- Urdu اگر آپ اس دستاویز کے کسی حصے کا ترجمہ اپنی زبان میں حاصل کرنا چاہتے ہیں تو دیئے گئے باکس میں صحیح کا نشان لگائیے اور ہمارے درج ذیل رابطے پر یا تو ٹیلیفون کے ذریعے یا پھر تحریری طور پر رابطہ کریں۔

Large print

Braille

Audiotape

Your contact:

Name.....

Address.....

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Telephone.....

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