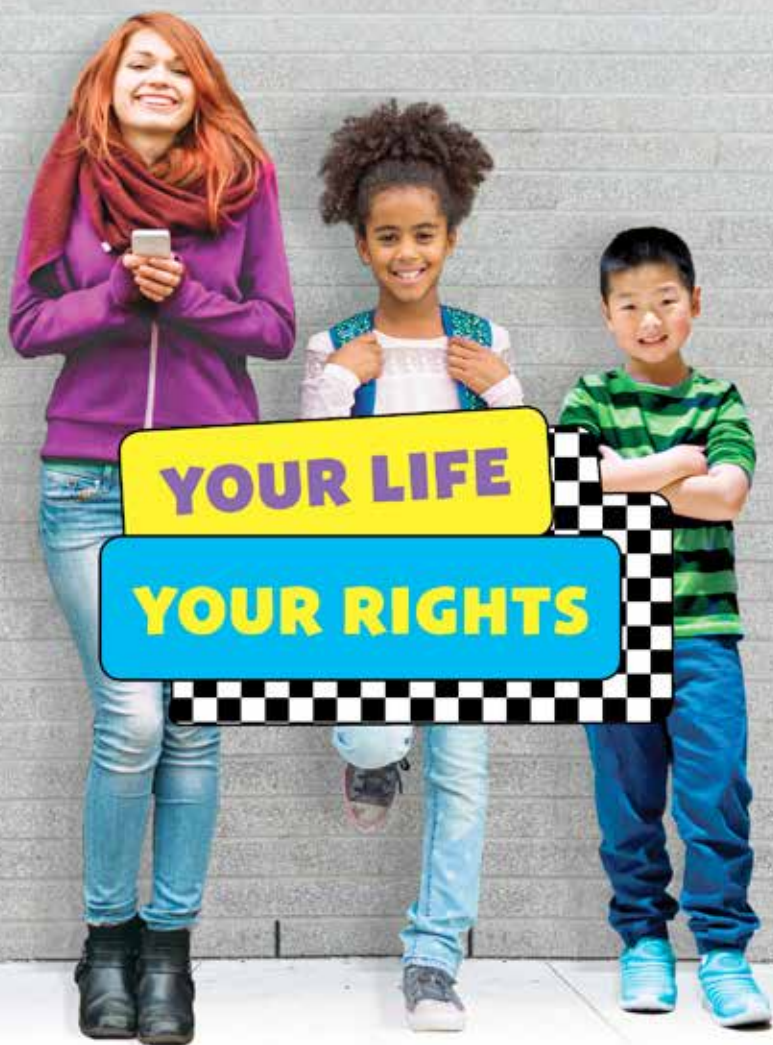


Your
GUIDE
TO BEING LOOKED AFTER BY CAMDEN



MY CONTACTS

Name of my Social Worker

Contact details

T:

E:

Name of my IRO

Contact details

T:

E:

IN AN EMERGENCY I CAN CONTACT:

**Looked After Children Team
Duty Worker**

(Day time) – 020 7974 7217/8

Emergency Duty Team

(Out of office hours) – 020 7974 4444

Other useful numbers at the back

Participation Officer
Elzbieta Chandrasena
T: 020 7974 1850



INTRO

**BEING LOOKED
AFTER**

WHY ME ?

HOW LONG ?

**WHERE WILL
I LIVE ?**

WHO ?

INVOLVING OTHERS

1. Introduction

When you first become looked after it can be a scary and confusing time and you may find it hard to make sense of all the changes that are happening in your life.

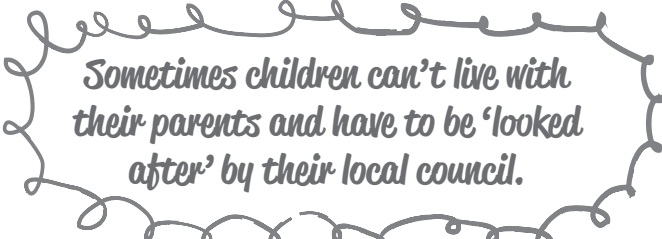
We are Children's Safeguarding and Social Work (CSSW) and we have written this guide to help you understand what happens when you become looked after and the people who will be involved in caring for you. Sometimes, knowing what to expect can make it easier for you to deal with the changes.

If you want to know more, you can ask your foster carer, key worker or your social worker or Independent Reviewing Officer.

You can also visit BackChat, our website for looked after children at: www.backchatonline.org.uk



2. What does being looked after mean?



Sometimes children can't live with their parents and have to be 'looked after' by their local council.

You might be being looked after because:

You are accommodated: this means your parents have allowed CSSW to look after you for a while but they will still be responsible for making important decisions about your care (known as parental responsibility). However, they will make an agreement with your social worker about how you should be cared for.

You are looked after under a Care Order (also known as being "in care"): this means the court has decided that it is better for you to live away from home and CSSW will be responsible for your care until you are 18. We will share responsibility for your care with your parents but will take most of the important decisions about your life such as where you will live.

If you are accommodated, your parents will have the right to take you home at any time. However, if we think that this is not safe for you, we may go to court to get an order so that you remain looked after.



3. Why am I being looked after?

There are lots of reasons why children are looked after and it's different for each child...

- Sometimes, parents may not be able to look after their child for a time because they are ill or because of a family crisis.
- Some children have no parents to look after them, for example because they came to the United Kingdom alone.
- Some children become looked after because they are being neglected or hurt at home and social workers think it would be safer if they became looked after.

You have a right to know why you are being looked after. You can ask your social worker to explain why you can't live with your parents and why CSSW has made the decision to look after you. It's important that you understand you are not to blame for the situation; sometimes parents need help to look after their children.



4. How long will I be looked after for?

CSSW believes that children should only be looked after for as long as is needed...

...and every looked after child will have a permanence plan that says how they will be cared for in the future.

Most children are looked after for a short time while social workers help parents to sort out any problems at home. If the plan is for you to return home, your social worker will let you know when this is likely to happen but please remember it may not be possible to say exactly how long it may take.

Some children are being looked after because they were neglected or hurt at home and if social workers think things will not change quickly enough for it to be safe for the child to go home, we may decide that it is best for them to remain looked after up to their 18th birthday.

If this is your permanence plan your social worker will explain why you cannot return home and what arrangements we will make for your future care: this may be adoption or living with a family member or a foster carer up to the age of 18.



5. Where will I live?

We will find you somewhere to live (known as a placement) and we will always try to choose the best placement for you so that you can stay close to your family and friends and carry on going to your school.

If you have brothers and sisters who will also be looked after, we will do our best to make sure you all live at the same placement.



There are three types of placement options that we can choose from:

1.

Family and friends care

The first placement we will try to arrange for you will be a family and friends care placement with a family member like grandparents, aunts, uncles, older brothers and sisters or a family friend who knows you well.

We will hold a special meeting called a **family group conference** involving all your family. The meeting will help them decide if there is anyone in your family who can look after you and will help them make plans for you to go to live with them. CSSW will work with your family and friends carer to provide them with support so that they can look after you.



2.

Foster care

If we can't find a suitable family and friends carer, we will look for a foster carer who will look after you in their own home as part of their family. Section 8 of this booklet has more information about what it's like to live in foster care.

Foster carers are people who have been specially trained to care for looked after children and who have been approved by the council because they have the right skills and qualities to do this.

SKILLS



3.

Residential children's home

Some older children may be placed in a residential children's home because this may be a better option for them. CSSW chooses residential homes they place children in very carefully, making sure that the home will provide the best environment for you.

OLDER



6. Who will look after me?

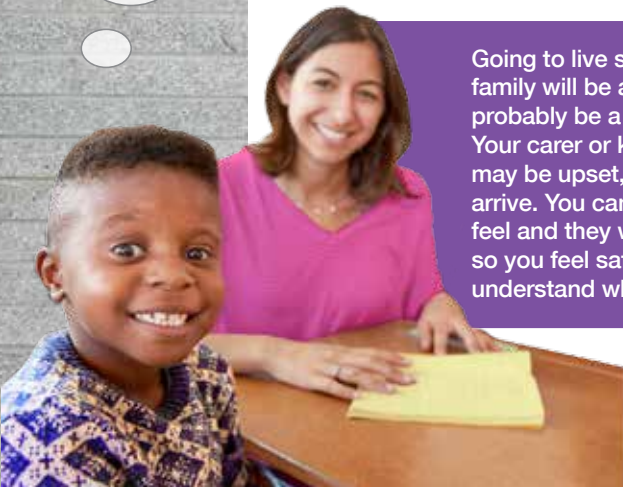
Your foster carer or key worker at the children's home will look after you in the same way your parents would.

They will make sure all your daily care needs are met and that you are happy, safe and secure and getting the support you need. Your carer or keyworker will be allowed to make most decisions about your day to day care and will be the person that is in contact with your school. They will be able to give permission for things like school trips so you won't have to keep asking your social worker for permission.

Big decisions such as where you go to school and where you live will be made by your social worker in partnership with your parents. If you are accommodated, your parents will still be involved in making most decisions about your care.

REALLY!

Going to live somewhere away from your family will be a hard thing to do and you will probably be a bit frightened and confused. Your carer or keyworker will know that you may be upset, angry or sad when you first arrive. You can talk to them about how you feel and they will try to help you settle in so you feel safe and comfortable and can understand why you are being looked after.



7. Other people involved in your care

For more details about social workers see section 10.

Your Social Worker

Your social worker is responsible for making plans for your care and making sure that your experience of being looked after is positive. They will try to make sure that you have the same opportunities to do well at school and enjoy life as other children.

SCHOOL OPPORTUNITIES



Independent Reviewing Officer

You will have an Independent Reviewing Officer who chairs all your looked after review meetings. They will make sure CSSW are looking after you properly and that any decisions made about your care are the right ones for you.

For more details about Independent Reviewing Officers see section 11.

Special Nurse

A special nurse for looked after children will make sure you have regular medical checks and give advice to your social worker, carer or key worker about helping you stay healthy.

Virtual School Head

CSSW has a special council officer called the virtual school head who is responsible for making sure looked after children can do well at school. They will give advice to your social worker, your foster carer or key worker and your school so that they can support your education and help you do well.

Supervising Social Worker

If you are being looked after by a family and friends carer or a foster carer, they will have their own supervising social worker from the Fostering team who supports them so that they can provide you with the best care possible.



**F O S T E R
C A R E**

**R E S I D E N T I A L
C A R E**



**YOUR
S O C I A L W O R K E R**

Y O U R I R O

8. Living in foster care

Most children who are looked after by CSSW live with foster carers.

Social workers in our Fostering team will choose a foster carer whom we feel is best able to look after you. We will look for a carer who has a similar ethnic background, culture and religion to you and where you will fit in with the family.

You may have one or two foster carers and you may be living with other looked after children, but you will generally have your own bedroom so you will have some privacy. Where possible, you will be able to visit your foster home before you move there so you can see what it's like. It will be strange at first living in a different house but your foster carer will explain the "house rules".

Every family has rules about things like bedtimes, helping with chores, when you can watch TV or going into other people's bedrooms and your foster carer will have similar rules. This way you know what to expect from everyone and what is expected of you.



Your foster carer will:

- Talk to you when you are upset and help you to sort out any problems
- Make sure you are treated as part of their family and that you feel comfortable living with them
- Encourage you to celebrate your background and keep up special cultural or religious activities
- Support you to do well at school and help and support you with homework
- Work with your social worker to make sure you see your family and friends regularly – if this is what you want
- Help you keep in touch with friends, including having friends over or visiting them at home
- Talk with you to make sure your wishes and feelings are known
- Make sure that you are comfortable, you have your own bedroom and are well fed and clothed
- Keep you healthy by making sure you have regular checks with doctors, dentists and opticians.

MY
PEOPLE



9. Living in residential care



Some older children and young people may live in residential units and children's homes.

These are normally large houses where several children and young people live together with a team of social workers, youth workers and support workers who are specially trained to help them. There will be workers there throughout the day and overnight and each child or young person will have a named worker who works closely with them called a **keyworker**.

If you live in residential care, your keyworker will make sure you are safe and well cared for and that your needs are met. They will listen to any problems you have and help you to sort them out. Your keyworker will also work closely with your social worker and will attend any meetings to do with your care.



If you live in a children's home you will attend school or college near the home just as you would if you were living at home.

10. Your social worker

If you are looked after, you will have your own social worker.

This is a person who has been specially trained to help children and their families when they are going through difficult times.

Your social worker's job is to make sure that everyone involved in your care is doing what's best for you and that you are receiving the best possible care. They are responsible for working with your parents to make plans for your future such as where you will live, when (or whether) you can go home and helping you plan for when you leave care and become independent.

To do this your social worker will visit you and your carer (normally at your placement) every 6 weeks or every 3 months if you are in a permanent placement. This is to check you are being well cared for. During this visit, they will ask you how you are and whether you are happy with your placement or if there is anything troubling you. They will always try to see you on your own so you have a chance to say how things really are and let them know if you are unhappy.



Your social worker will:

- Listen carefully to what you say and help you to express your thoughts and feelings
- Help you to take action to change things
- Make sure that you are being kept safe and well cared for by visiting you at your placement
- Help you put your views across about your care, health, or education
- Tell you all about your rights as a looked after child
- Make sure you can contact them or give you the name of another person you can contact if they are on holiday
- Return your phone calls or reply to messages and emails as soon as possible
- Help you keep in touch with family and friends
- Support you if you want to make a complaint
- Let you know if they are leaving and who your new social worker will be.



11. Your Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)

Every looked after child has an allocated IRO who will remain working with them for the whole time they are looked after.

Your IRO is responsible for making sure:

- Your care plan is the right plan for you
- Any decisions CSSW makes about your care are in your best interests
- You get the best care possible
- Any problems about your care are sorted out quickly
- Everyone who is involved in your care is doing their job properly.

Your IRO will make sure that you make your wishes and feelings known and that you have an opportunity to get your voice heard. If you want to make a complaint, your IRO will be the best person to help you.



**YOUR CARE
PLAN**

**YOUR CARE
PLAN REVIEW**

**YOUR
EDUCATION**

YOUR HEALTH



**FAMILY
FRIENDS**

12. Your care plan

Your care plan is a very important document that sets out how CSSW will look after you.

Your care plan includes information such as:

- Where you will live and who will look after you
- How your carer will make sure you get the best care
- What will happen to you in the future (your permanence plan)
- How we will look after your health
- What school you will go to and what support you will get to do well
- Arrangements for seeing family members and other important people in your life
- How we will make sure you can keep up with hobbies and interests.

CSSW's duties, children's rights and our pledge to you

CSSW has special duties to carry out for looked after children and must provide a certain standard of care called the corporate parenting standard. You have a right to know what these standards are and to complain if we don't meet them.

We have written a special promise to you called a pledge and you can read it at: www.backchatonline.org.uk




13. Reviewing your care plan

We need to make sure that your care plan is always the right plan for you and that you have a chance to say whether you are happy with how you are being looked after.

To do this we will hold a special meeting called a **statutory LAC review** where we check that the plan is right and make changes if we think this is needed. The first meeting is held 28 days after you become looked after, then 3 months after that then every 6 months.

Your Independent Reviewing Officer is in charge of the meeting and you, your parents and your social worker and carer or keyworker will attend. Other people who work with you such as teachers will be asked to send a report on your progress and normally do not attend the meeting unless they need to.

Before the review happens, your social worker will ask you to complete a consultation form so that you can write down your views about your care and whether you are happy where you live. At the meeting you will be able to speak out and let everyone know how you feel about being looked after.

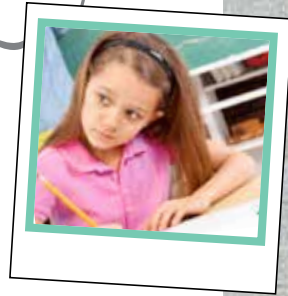


If this sounds scary, we can arrange for an independent person known as an advocate to attend with you to support you to speak or speak on your behalf.

14. Your education

Your education is very important to us and we want to make sure that you have the same opportunities to learn as other children.

Looked after children can face a lot of problems such as changing schools and trying to keep up with school work when your family are facing many problems.



To help you overcome any difficulties, we will do the following:

- When you become looked after, we will try to find a placement near your current school so that you don't have to change schools. If this is not possible, we will find you a place at a good school that can support your education that is near to your placement.



- You will have a **Personal Education Plan (PEP)** that sets out how we will help you to meet the targets your school sets, including any extra support you might need to catch up if you have missed school while you moved to your placement.
- Your school will have a teacher (**the designated teacher**) who is responsible for children who are looked after and who will make sure that your school is giving you the help you need to do well.
- Your foster carer or keyworker and your social worker will work with your school to make sure you are getting the support you need and your foster carer or keyworker will keep in touch with the school and attend parents evenings to find out about your progress.
- Every term there will be a meeting between you, your carer, your social worker and the designated teacher which will review your PEP to make sure you are meeting your targets and getting the help you need.



There's more information about your education at www.backchatonline.org.uk



15. Your health and wellbeing

We need to make sure that you are healthy, so when you first become looked after, you will have a check-up called a health assessment to find out if you have any health problems and if you need any treatment.

The assessment is carried out by a special doctor who advises CSSW on the health of the children who are looked after by the council.

The doctor may ask you or your parents about any health problems you may have had, any medicines or treatment you receive and whether you have had your immunisations. If the doctor thinks you need any treatment, this will be included in your health plan.



Your health plan is part of your care plan that says how we will look after your health. Your social worker will be given a list of recommendations of how to look after your health including any medicines you need to take and any doctors' appointments you need to keep.

Every year (or every 6 months if you are under 5) you will have a review health assessment with a specialist nurse for looked after children to make sure you are healthy and if CSSW needs to do anything else to keep you healthy. The nurse can also give you advice on how to stay healthy.

Your foster carer will make sure you follow a healthy diet and lifestyle and will bring you to the GP if you are poorly and to the dentist and optician for check-ups.

Your emotional wellbeing is important. If you have difficulties managing your emotions talk to your carers, social worker, IRO or the specialist child and adolescent mental health team.

STAY
HEALTHY



**There's more information
about your health at
www.backchatonline.org.uk**

16. Seeing family and friends

When you are looked after, CSSW must make sure you stay in touch with your family, friends and other people in your life who are important to you.

These are called contact arrangements and who you have contact with, how and when will be written into your care plan.

Contact can be a visit to you at your placement or a day out, and can also include telephone calls, emails or text messages. You can have contact with your parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents, aunts, uncles or cousins. Your social worker will talk to you about the best ways to stay in touch. Your social worker will ask you about who you want to see or stay in touch with and will make any arrangements for regular contact. If there is anyone you do not want contact with please tell your social worker; we would never make you have contact with anyone you didn't want to see.



Supervised contact

Sometimes you may have “supervised contact”; that means your foster carer, social worker or a special family worker will be present while you have contact with certain people. This may be because we are concerned that it would not be safe for you to be left with that person without someone else being there to make sure things are okay.

Sometimes we may feel that it is not safe or in your best interests to have contact with someone and we will not allow them to get in touch with you. Your social worker will always let you know if we will not allow anyone to have contact with you.

Normally your foster carer will be able to give permission for you to go to see your friends or even stay overnight on a “sleepover”. Sometimes if we have concerns about your safety your social worker may have to give permission. You can talk to your foster carer and social worker about this.



MONEY

GETTING

INVOLVED

MOVING ON

EXTRA

SUPPORT



17. Money

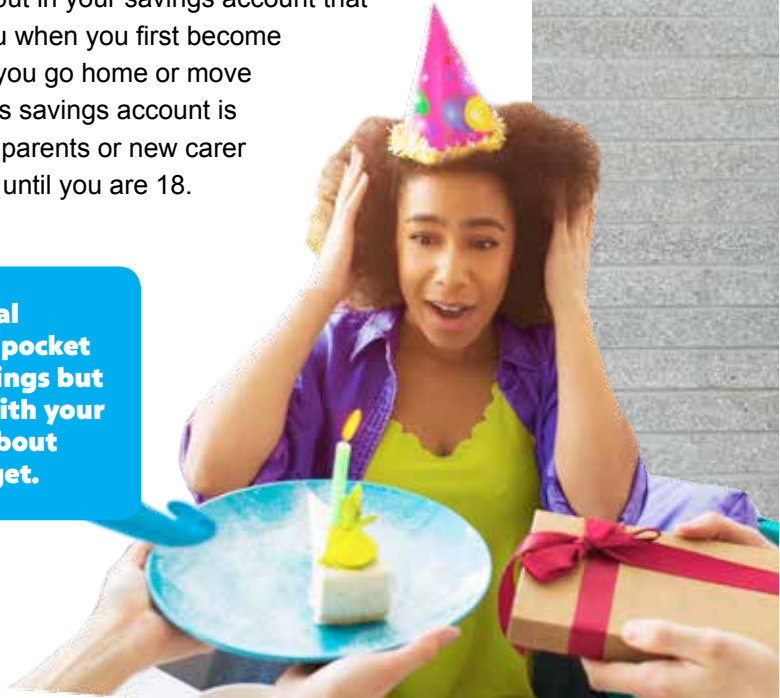
Your foster carer or residential home is paid an allowance to look after you and meet your everyday needs such as food and clothing.

The following allowances are also paid to foster carers for children they look after:

- A weekly pocket money allowance that can be given to you to spend or saved for you depending on your age
- Birthday and Christmas allowances to buy you a present or pay for a party or special outing
- £10 a week to put in your savings account that is set up for you when you first become looked after; if you go home or move placements, this savings account is passed to your parents or new carer to keep for you until you are 18.



Some residential homes provide pocket money and savings but not all; check with your social worker about what you may get.



18. Getting involved

When you are looked after, it is really important that you get involved in planning for your care and for your future life.

You can do this by:

- Attending your LAC review meeting and PEP meetings
- Meeting with your social worker regularly to discuss your wishes and feelings
- Completing consultation forms so that you can get your views across.



The Children's Safeguarding and Social Work **Participation Officer** invites all looked after children to get involved in designing and improving your services. You can do this by joining the **CSSW Children in Care Council**; this group regularly meets with senior council officers and councillors to make sure the views of looked after children are taken into account when making decisions on services.

There are also other opportunities to get involved in matters that affect looked after children in CSSW and across London; ask your social worker for details.

You can contact the Participation Officer on: 020 7974 1850



19. Moving on

Changing placement

When you become looked after, CSSW aims to find you a placement that will last for as long as you need it, but sometimes a looked after child may need to change placements. Normally this is a move to a more suitable, long-term placement or a return home, but sometimes it may be because a placement doesn't work out.

If you are changing placements, we will try to make sure you know in advance so that you can prepare for the move. Normally any changes will be discussed at your LAC review first so you know why and when the move is happening.



Your social worker will talk to you about the move and help you make any arrangements, including visiting your new placement before you move there so you can see what it's like. They will also make sure you can take all your stuff with you.

Going home

If you are going home to live with your parents, this will be agreed at your LAC review meeting and your social worker and parents will work together to make the arrangements for your return. After you leave care, you will still have a social worker to support you to settle back at home for as long as we think you need this.

Leaving care

If you will be looked after by CSSW until you are 18, we will help you get ready for when you leave care and move on to live in your own home. From the age of 16:

- Your social worker will carry out a special assessment to find out what support you will need so that you can move on to adulthood and live independently.
- You will have a pathway plan that sets out what support you will receive from CSSW to help you live independently and follow education and training opportunities that will help you get on in life.
- Your foster carer or key worker will help you to learn the skills you'll need when you are an adult and living in your own home, for example shopping, cooking and managing your money.
- Between the ages of 16 and 18 you will have an opportunity to move into CSSW Pathways semi-independent accommodation if you want to and your social worker agrees you are ready for this step.

Once you leave care at 18, CSSW will continue to support you as long as you were looked after by CSSW for more than 13 weeks from the age of 14.



Details of our Leaving Care service can be found at: www.backchatonline.org.uk/pages/care-leavers/stuff-to-know

20. If you're not happy or you need support

Letting us know

Sometimes you might feel that people aren't listening to you or taking your views into account or you may feel unhappy about where you live or how you are looked after. You and your social worker may disagree about what's best for you. When this happens, it's really important that you let a trusted adult know how you feel so that we can put things right.

If you're not happy with the service you get from us you must let your foster carer or social worker know. You can also talk to your **Independent Reviewing Officer** about any problems, especially if you feel you can't tell your carer or social worker, so make sure you have their contact details.

These people will do their best to try and sort out any problems or will help you get in touch with the right person if they can't. Normally any problems will be discussed at your LAC review meeting if this isn't too long to wait. Please remember that CSSW has a duty to do whatever is best for you and it may not be possible for us to act on your wishes if this isn't in your best interests.



Making a complaint


If your foster carer, social worker or Independent Reviewing Officer can't help you sort out any problems, they will help you to make a complaint to our Children's Complaints Unit.

They will look into your complaint and make recommendations on what needs to be done to improve things.

Getting an advocate

If you are worried about speaking up at a meeting and you need help to get your views across, or you want someone who can support you to make a complaint, you can ask your social worker or Independent Reviewing Officer about getting an advocate.

This is a person who can speak for you and help you make decisions and take action to sort out problems.



Your social worker or Independent Reviewing Officer can put you in touch with an organisation called VOICE who are able to give advice and support to looked after children.

Independent visitors

Most children who are looked after have family who they are in touch with regularly and who give them support.

If a child does not have regular contact with family members or friends, and if their social worker thinks it would benefit them, CSSW can make arrangements for the child to have an independent visitor.

This is an independent person who has been specially trained to befriend and support looked after children so that they have a trusted adult they can talk to other than the professionals who work with them. If your social worker and Independent Reviewing Officer believes having an independent visitor would help you, they will talk to you about this and about how they will find the right person for you.





USEFUL CONTACTS

Camden Children in Care Council (CiCC)

T: 020 7974 1850

A voice for children in care to discuss important issues for being in care

Camden CAMHS Looked After Children and Refugee team

T: 020 7974 5814 / 3370

Emotional wellbeing and mental health support

Coram VOICE

T: 020 7833 5792

Advocacy service for young people

The Children's Commissioner Office

T: 0800 528 0731

Advice and assistance for children in care

Ofsted complaints

T: 0300 123 4666

Camden Children's Complaints

T: 0800 393 561

FREEPOST RSLT-RJBR-TXAA
Town Hall
Judd Street
London WC1H 9JE

USEFUL WEBSITES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Become

General help, advice and care fact sheets
www.becomecharity.org.uk

Kooth

Emotional wellbeing and mental health online help
www.kooth.com

For more information:
www.backchatonline.org.uk

