

A guide to the age assessment process

A guide by
young people
who have been
age assessed





Who are we?

We are from
the All4One group.

All of us are in the UK on
our own, living in
Greater Manchester.
We have all had experience of the
age assessment process.

We have created this guide to
help others going through the
age assessment process and to
change the way social workers
and the Home
Office carry out age
assessments.

We want to make a
positive change for others
in our situation.

What is an age assessment?

Sometimes people arrive in the UK without any documents showing their age.

If the Home Office or a social worker thinks someone who says they are a child might be older and they can't prove their age with documents then they might carry out something called an age assessment.

An age assessment is used to decide what date of birth the someone will have in the UK.

This guide will explain what an age assessment is and how you can get help if you need it.



Who is who in the age assessment?

Age assessing Social worker

- There should be two social workers in the age assessment. They might be different to the social worker who looks after you.
- They are there to ask questions in the age assessment and decide if they think you are a child
- They may be different to the social worker who looks after you.



Interpreter



- The interpreter is there to tell you what the social worker has asked in English and then interpret what you have said in your language.
- They should explain things clearly and in simple words.

Appropriate adult

- The Appropriate Adult should be independent and someone you trust.
- They should be there to look out for you and your best interests.
- They are there to speak up if you need anything - a break, water, to go to the toilet or if they feel you are not being treated properly.
- They are there to explain the process and give you extra support



Who else is involved in your care

Your social worker

- This is the person from the local authority who supports you in the UK. They should ask you what you need and meet with you regularly to make sure everything is okay.
- You should contact your social worker if you have any problems or worries.
- Your social worker might ask for an age assessment if they think you are older or younger than you say you are. They should speak with you about this and explain what this means.



Foster carer or accommodation staff



- You may be looked after in a family or in accommodation shared with other young people and staff who either stay there or visit.
- You should feel safe and happy where you are living. These people are there to look after you, or help you look after yourself. If you need help with learning how to cook, clean or shop you should ask them.
- If you are not being treated as a child you might be living in accommodation with adults. This guide will tell you why and how to get help with this.

Immigration solicitor (legal representative)

- This person will help you with your application to stay in the UK.
- They will ask you questions about your life and reasons for leaving your country so they can explain this to the Home Office.
- You should have an interpreter in these appointments if you need one and can have an adult you trust with you.
- If you are feeling worried or don't understand everything about your case you should ask them.



Public law or community care solicitor

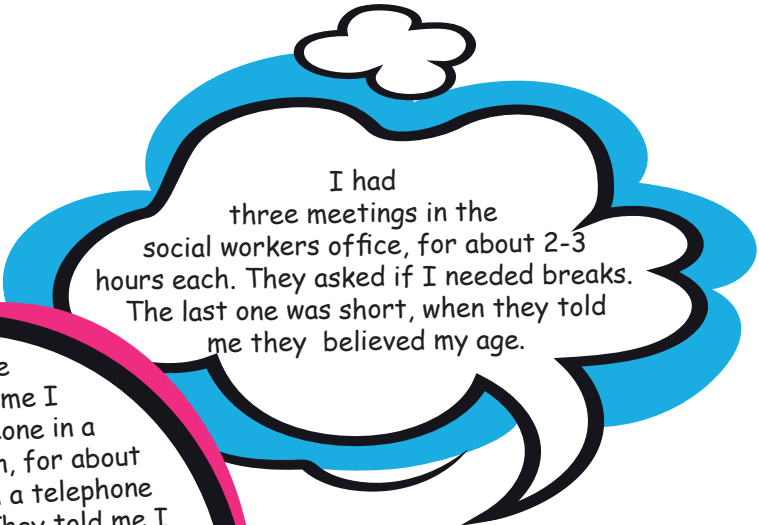
- You might have another solicitor who can help you if your age is not accepted.
- This guide will explain more about what happens in this situation.

Our experience and advice to you

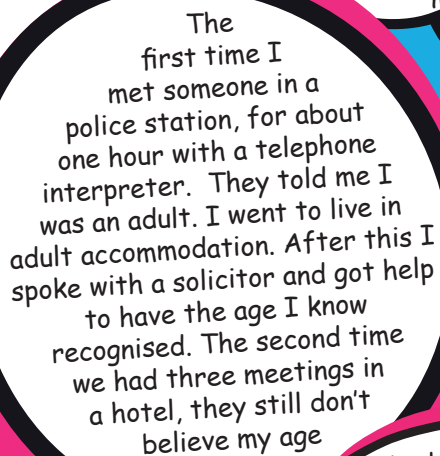
What happens at an age assessment?

Every age assessment will be different, but during an age assessment there should be two social workers, an interpreter (if needed) and an appropriate adult. The social workers will ask you questions about your life and your family to decide if they accept your age or not.

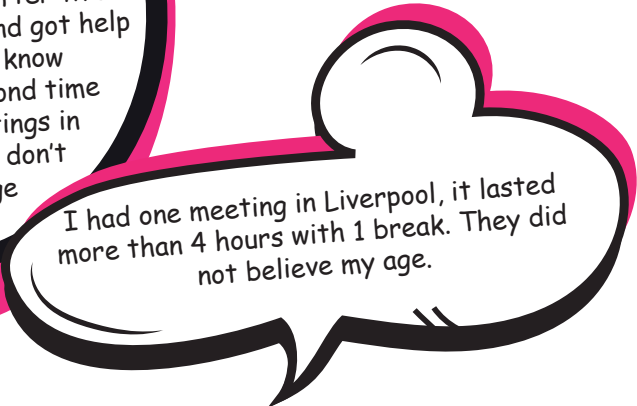
Our experiences



I had three meetings in the social workers office, for about 2-3 hours each. They asked if I needed breaks. The last one was short, when they told me they believed my age.



The first time I met someone in a police station, for about one hour with a telephone interpreter. They told me I was an adult. I went to live in adult accommodation. After this I spoke with a solicitor and got help to have the age I know recognised. The second time we had three meetings in a hotel, they still don't believe my age



I had one meeting in Liverpool, it lasted more than 4 hours with 1 break. They did not believe my age.

What questions were asked: We were all asked lots of different questions, over and over, these are some of the main things we were asked about:

My family and childhood

How I am looking after myself in the UK

Why I left my country and came to the UK, and who helped me

Which countries I travelled through

My journey to the UK

About my village and my religion

Education and work in my country

The Home Office age assessment process:

- When you first arrive in the UK if the Home Office think you appear to be a lot older than you say you may be treated as an adult and moved into accommodation with adults.
- If you want to have your correct age recognised ask someone to help refer you to a social worker to carry out something called an "age assessment."
- Speak to your immigration solicitor if you have one, otherwise ask friends or people from your accommodation if they can help you speak to an organisation that can help such as the Refugee Council or Red Cross.

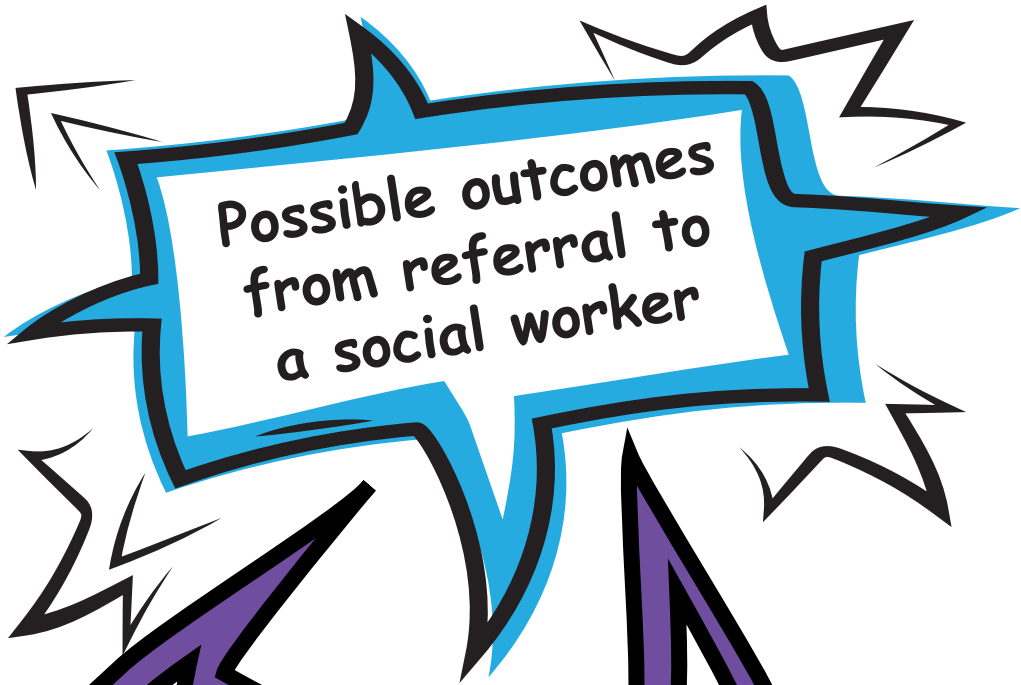


I want to be a famous cricketer.

I hope they achieve their rights



(Hopes for the future, ALL4one group member)



Possible outcomes from referral to a social worker

(i)

The social workers agree to accept your age. You are looked after as a child by them.

(iii)

The social workers think you are an adult. You should get legal advice from a solicitor on this very quickly (see section on challenging an age assessment).

(ii)

The social workers want to assess your age. They should provide you with suitable housing and support whilst doing this. (See next page on process).

Local Authority age assessment process

Is an age assessment needed?

There should be a reason to doubt your age, not every young person should be age assessed.

You can ask your social worker why they are assessing your age.

Yes?

Social services will carry out an "age assessment" to decide whether or not they accept your age.

Age assessment happens.

Two social workers will meet with you and ask you questions about your family, your life and how you know your age to decide whether they accept your age. You should have an interpreter you understand and an independent adult you trust.

No?

Your age is accepted. You continue to be looked after by social services as a child.

Your age is not accepted - they think you are older than you say you are. You should get legal advice on this very quickly. The social worker should explain why and give you a copy of your assessment. You may then be moved into adult accommodation. You should not be made homeless.

Possible outcomes

Your age is accepted. You continue to be looked after as a child.

How to challenge an age assessment

If the social workers don't accept your age find a solicitor to see if they can help you.

They will:

- Check if the assessment has been carried out properly; and
- If you can challenge the decision
- They may ask you to think about other evidence you could get to help support your case e.g. a letter from college, your foster carer or organisation supporting you.

Challenging an age assessment:

Your solicitor will send a "letter before action" to the local authority challenging the decision that you are not the age you state you are.

Possible outcomes

1) The social workers decide to accept your age. They will look after you as a child.

2) The social workers carry out another age assessment.

3) The social workers refuse to accept your age. You should speak to your solicitor again as soon as possible.

Challenging an assessment in court

Your solicitor will advise you whether you should take your case to court for a judge to decide your age or order the local authority to carry out another age assessment. This can take a very long time. You will need to prepare a written statement with your solicitor and you might have to speak to the judge to give evidence in court.

Possible outcomes in Court

1) The judge does not accept your age. This might happen with or without a hearing. Speak to your solicitor about whether you can appeal this decision

2) The judge says the social workers must carry out another age assessment

3) The judge accepts your age. You should be looked after as a child.

Our advice to you during the age assessment



Believe in yourself, even if you are put under pressure.



Make sure you know who everyone is in the room and what their role is.



Don't feel rushed to answer questions. Sometimes you will be asked questions many times and it is confusing.



It can feel awful at the time and sometimes like you are being treated like a criminal, but other people have been through this, felt like this and survived it.



You may get asked questions you're not expecting, if you don't know the answer that is ok.



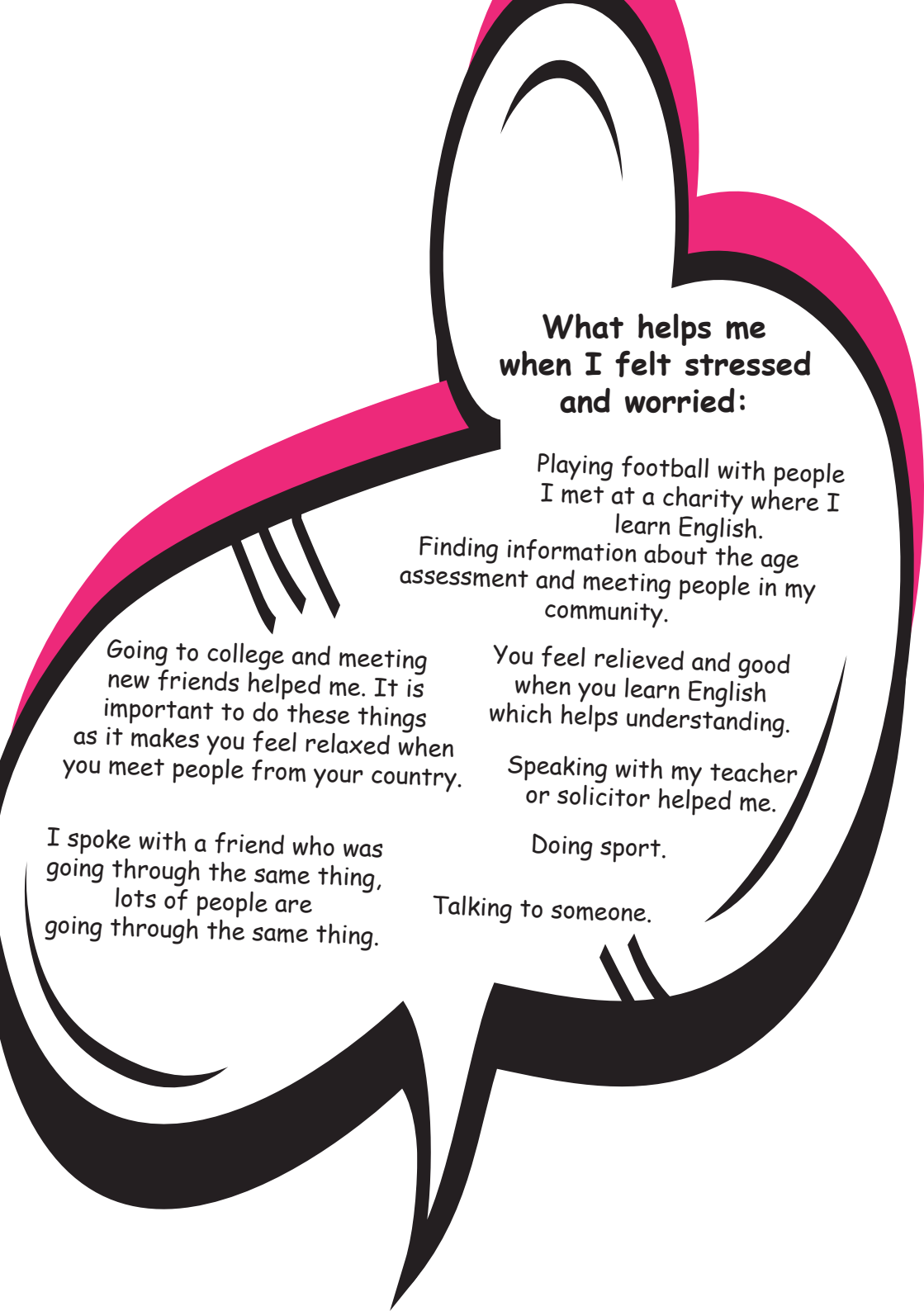
Know what your rights are - you can have a break and someone you trust there.



Speak with adults you can trust, especially if you're feeling stressed.



If you don't understand the interpreter don't be too scared to say something. It is better to say something, or it may cause problems later.



**What helps me
when I felt stressed
and worried:**

Playing football with people
I met at a charity where I
learn English.

Finding information about the age
assessment and meeting people in my
community.

You feel relieved and good
when you learn English
which helps understanding.

Speaking with my teacher
or solicitor helped me.

Doing sport.

Talking to someone.

Going to college and meeting
new friends helped me. It is
important to do these things
as it makes you feel relaxed when
you meet people from your country.

I spoke with a friend who was
going through the same thing,
lots of people are
going through the same thing.

Write here what you think
you can do when you feel
stressed and worried

I would like to be in
the future a
computer engineer
and I hope for
everyone to get
them dreams



(Hopes for the future,
ALL4one group member)

What to do if your age is not accepted:

- Try not to worry too much even though you may feel scared. The most important thing is to speak to someone as soon as possible so that you can try to get your age accepted.
- Tell your immigration solicitor, they might be able to help you.
- Contact a public law/community care solicitor.
- Try and find charities that can help in your area, such as the Red Cross or the Refugee Council.
- Speak to your housing manager if you are in adult accommodation.
- Speak with your foster carer or support worker to see if they can help you find a solicitor.



NOTES:



11 horizontal lines for writing.



Greater Manchester
IMMIGRATION AID UNIT

Thank you to the young people from the All4One group. This guide was created in the hope it can help other young people going through age assessments and can change the way they are carried out.

A huge thank you to Adam Flint for helping with the illustrations and to Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer for the design and production of the guide.

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To find out more about the All4One group or our work on age assessments contact Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit (GMIAU) on 0161 740 7722 and info@gmiau.org
www.gmiau.org
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