



Being in Care

Information for Children



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What if I don't understand the information in this booklet?



There is a lot of information in this booklet. You may have questions about some of the information. **Don't worry!** Your social worker will go through this booklet with you to make sure you understand everything. They will answer any questions you have.

You can also go over this booklet with a grown-up at home or at school, like your foster carer or a teacher.

If you have trouble reading the booklet because of the language, the size of the words or anything else, tell your social worker and they will help you.

What promises have been made to children in care in Hackney?



The Hackney Promise to Children and Young People in Care is a set of promises from Hackney Council to all children and young people in care in Hackney.

The Hackney Promise to Children and Young People in Care

We promise that when you become a looked after child or young person, we will look after you the best we possibly can.

1. Coming into Care

- We promise that we will be honest with you about the reasons for being looked after by the Local Authority and tell you about decisions that are being made.
- We promise we will share as much information with you as we can about your future carers.
- We promise we will listen to you about where and who you would like to live with. If we can't provide exactly what you have asked for we will explain why this is.

2. Being in Care

- We promise that we will listen to you and take time to get to know you and do our best to make sure you feel supported by us.
- We promise that, wherever possible, you will know about and be ready for any changes that are coming.
- We promise that we will talk to you and discuss if and how you can be supported to stay in touch with your family and friends.

3. Education

- We promise to listen, respect and support you in working out your dreams and ambitions and in helping you achieve them, including through making sure that you get good education opportunities that match your needs.

4. Getting well and staying well

- We promise to do our best to help you to get better when you are unwell and to help you to stay well.
- We promise to help you to learn to look after yourself as you get older.

5. Meetings

- We promise to make sure that your needs, thoughts and ideas are taken seriously, that you are at the centre of all meetings about you (even if you are not able to attend) and that you are supported to take part in a way that you feel happy with.

6. Your rights

- We promise that at every stage in your life, you will know what options are available to you to be able to make the right choices.
- We promise that we will help you to find someone who you can speak to if you are unhappy about anything, including anything that we are doing or have done.

7. Becoming an adult

- We promise that we will prepare you to become an adult and support you to make the decisions that are right for you.
- We promise that you will always have someone to talk to.



You can talk to your social worker to learn more about the Promise.

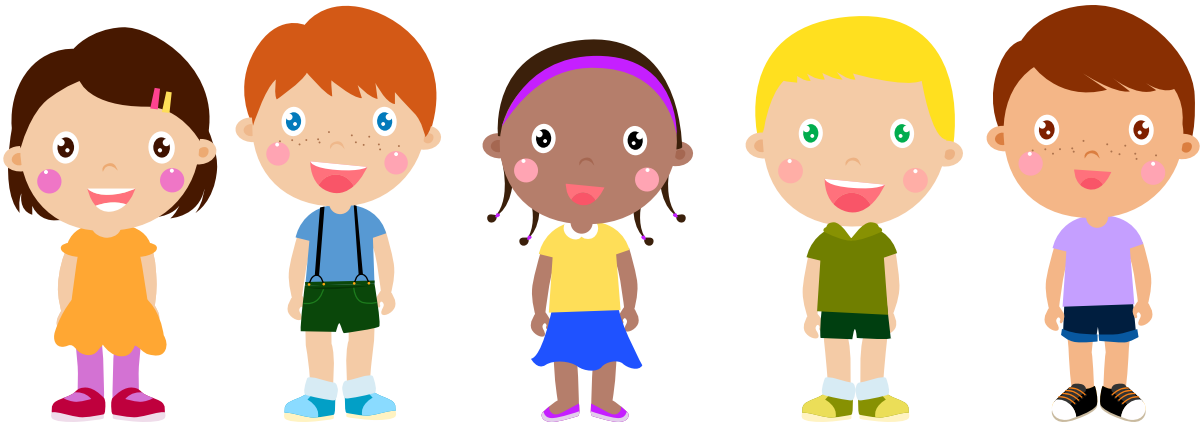


What is being in care?



Why am I in care?

The words 'looked after' are often used to describe being in care so you will hear this phrase sometimes. You can be in care because your parents or family might be unable to look after you or it might not be safe to stay at home. So we in Hackney Children's Social Care help to look after you.



We want you to:

- be safe, well looked after, healthy and valued
- be helped to learn, be listened to and asked about what is happening in your life
- be able to develop yourself and your skills, have confidence, be respected and have positive relationships
- have the same chances as others
- have clothes, money to spend and money to save in a bank account
- be able to spend time with friends and get involved in leisure activities
- be able to keep in touch with the people who matter to you.



Where will I live?



When you come into our care you will usually go to live with another family – a foster family - in their home. Foster carers have had to learn lots of things and be assessed so that Hackney Children’s Social Care know they can look after children well. Sometimes friends or relatives of children in care can be foster carers. They have been assessed just like other foster carers.

Sometimes children live in a house with other looked after children called a children’s home or a residential home. If you live in a children’s home, you will have a key worker. This is someone who works at the home and will support you. They are someone you can talk to, who will care about you and build a special relationship with you. In this booklet, when we say carer or foster carer, it might be a key worker who does the work we are talking about.



Even though you may be looked after by a foster carer or in a children's home, people might say you are looked after by Hackney Children's Social Care. This is just a way of saying being in care, and means that Hackney Council are responsible for making sure that all your needs are met.

Will I still see my family and friends?

You are usually still able to see your family and this is something that your social worker will talk to you about. We will make sure that you see your family in a way that is best for you. How this happens will depend on your age and the reason for you coming into care.

Staying in touch and seeing your family is sometimes called 'contact'. Contact may mean lots of visits, visits during holidays, or letters, phone calls and cards. Contact may also mean how you stay in touch with friends, not just family.

All contact arrangements will be talked about by the grown-ups who are looking after you, including your social worker, and you can tell us what you want to happen. The arrangements for who you will see, when and where will be written down in something called a care plan (see **What is a care plan?** page 25) so everyone knows what is happening.



What if I live outside of Hackney?

If you go to live with a foster carer or in a home outside of Hackney, you will get the same support as you would in Hackney. This means we will still listen to you, you will still have the same visits and contact with your social worker and your Independent Reviewing Officer (see page 14), and you will still go to school.

You might need extra support if you're living outside of Hackney, but we will make sure you get it.

We understand how important it is to keep in touch with your family and friends if you are living away from them and your social worker will speak to you about contact with people that are important to you so we can help you to stay in touch with them.

Can I go home?

Your social worker will always try to get you back home with your family if it's safe for you. Sometimes it can seem unfair not to be allowed home but you should have a safe and happy place to grow up in and your social worker will try to make sure this happens.





Can I stay overnight with friends?

Usually your carer will decide this with you. Sometimes they may discuss this with your parent and/or your social worker. They need to know the contact details of the person you want to stay with. They also need to know that they can contact you or your friend's family if they need to. Most of all, they need to know that you really want to visit your friend.

Some of the things they think about are:

- if they know enough about the people you want to stay with
- what you will be doing and how long you want to stay
- a court order or anything written in your care plan or placement agreement that stops you from being in a certain area or in contact with a particular person
- anything that has happened in the past, or is happening now, that means you can't stay over at a friend's.

Your carer should talk to your friend's parents about you staying in their home. They should know the phone number and address and check by phoning the number, as someone could give the wrong details. They will write the information down in their log book: where you are going, when you are coming back, what you are doing and who they have spoken to about it. This is to make sure you are happy and safe.

Who will support me?

It is important that all children have someone they can go to for help, advice and support.

These are some of the grown-ups that you will probably come into contact with while you are in care.



Hackney social work units

In Hackney Children's Social Care, workers are in units. Units usually have workers called:

- Consultant Social Worker or Practice Development Manager
- Social Worker
- Children's Practitioner
- Unit Co-ordinator

These people all work together as a team. A unit will support you and you will know the people in it. You can get in touch with someone in the unit when you need them. There are also psychologists (sometimes called clinicians) and family therapists who can help you to sort out problems with relationships and difficult feelings.

In this booklet we have used the words 'social worker' to describe consultant social workers, practice development managers, social workers and children's practitioners as this is what children usually call the Hackney worker that supports them while they are in care.

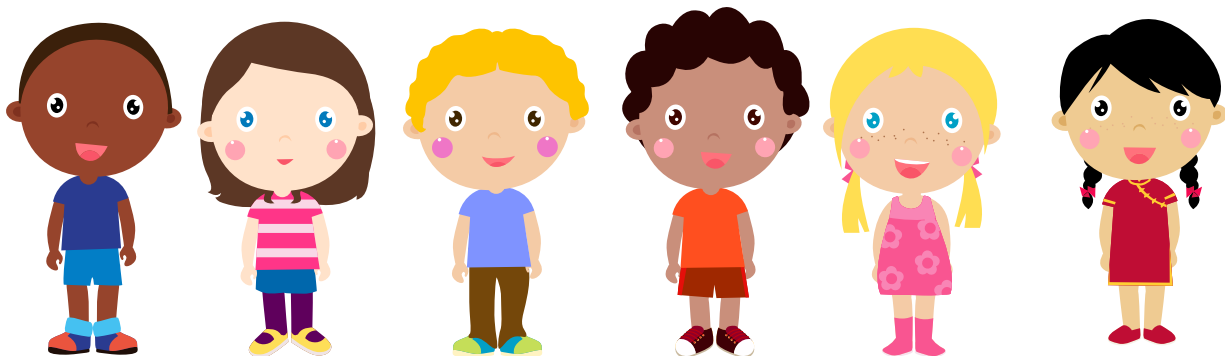


Your social worker will:

- visit you at least every six weeks
- talk and work with your family and carers
- work with you in planning your future
- make sure your wishes and feelings are listened to and make sure you understand the decisions made about your care.

You can write the names of the people in your unit in this table.

	Name	Telephone number	Email address
Consultant social worker			
Social worker			
Children's practitioner			
Unit co-ordinator			
Clinician or family therapist			
Independent reviewing officer			



Foster carers

Your foster carer will:

- look after you day-to-day
- talk with you about family, health, school, friends, clothes and money
- help you say what you want at meetings
- talk with you about your wishes, hopes and fears for the future
- be there for you when you are upset and celebrate when you are happy
- encourage you to do well at school and at other interests you have
- help keep you healthy
- treat you the same as any other member of their family and respect your individuality.



Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)

Everyone in care has an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).

Your IRO is part of Hackney Children's Social Care but not the same part as your social work unit and they cannot be a person who is already working with you.

The job of your IRO is to make sure you are being well looked after and that your unit social workers are doing everything they need to do to help you. This includes thinking about how you can speak to or see your family and other important people in your life and making good plans for your future. It's also the job of your IRO to make sure that you understand the plans that are being made for you and that your views and wishes are listened to.

Your IRO has to:

- be in charge of your Looked After Child reviews (sometimes called LAC reviews). These are explained in **My Review** on page 26. We will try to make sure you have the same IRO at your LAC reviews. This is so you can both get to know each other.
- meet you before your LAC review to see what you want to say at it
- make sure your care plan (see page 25) is right for you and approve any changes to it
- write down and send out any recommendations from your LAC reviews so everyone remembers what they've agreed to do.
- make sure that everything in your care plan is happening as it should be
- make sure that everyone is focused on your needs
- make sure things are done when you need them to be done.

Advocates

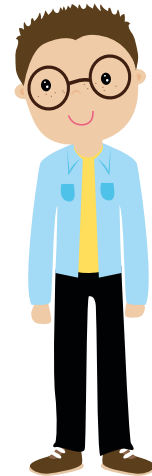
An advocate is someone who makes sure your views and feelings are heard and that you are fully involved in decisions that are being made about your life.

Advocates can also help you speak up for yourself or put your views across for you. An advocate can go to a meeting with you, or even go instead of you. They can support you with making a complaint to fix a problem (see **What do I do if I'm not happy?** on page 22).

What you say to your advocate is private unless they think you are in danger. If they think you are in danger they will take action to keep you safe and tell you who they have passed the information on to.

Hackney Children's Social Care has its own advocate called the Children's Rights Officer (CRO).

If you think you would like to know more about how an advocate could help you or to speak to the Children's Rights Officer, speak to your carer, social worker or IRO.



Independent visitors

Independent visitors are volunteers who become friends with and support children and young people up to the age of 18. They don't work for Hackney Children's Social Care, and they are interested in how you're getting on and what you like to do. Most importantly, they're there to listen to children, support them and have fun. All independent visitors are checked to make sure they're right for you. Speak to your social worker if you'd like to know more about independent visitors.



What happens when I'm in care?



What might change while I'm in care?

Being in care is already a big difference for you. We try to avoid making changes as much as possible but sometimes things have to change. This can be because:

- where you live might change because you were moved in an emergency or needed somewhere to stay for a short time. You might then move to another foster home or children's home if this is best for you.
- how everyone gets on in the foster home doesn't work out right so you can move to another foster home where relationships can be better.
- your social worker may change because they go to another job or because responsibility for a child moves to another unit (see **Who will support me?** on page 12).
- you may have to change schools because you move away from the area you have been living in.

You will always know as soon as possible about any change and we want to know what you think and how you feel about it.

Will I still go to school?

Yes you will. We want all our looked after children to get the right education so that they can do as well as possible.

Your education is very important when planning with your social worker and carer. There is a group of people who work with Hackney Children's Social Care called the Virtual School. They make sure every looked after child gets the education that they need.

It isn't a school like yours as they work in offices but they are teachers and can help you and your foster carer if you need it.

- They can talk to your teachers.
- They can make sure you get help in class.
- They run brilliant trips in the school holidays for children who are in care.

Any arrangements or help you need will be written down in something called a Personal Education Plan (PEP) which is part of your care plan. Sometimes when children are in care, everything can feel different and the Virtual School teachers can help you manage the changes in your life, find words to talk to friends at school and help make sure you are learning well.

You can say what you want to be written in your Personal Education Plan – things you like doing at school and things that are difficult or things you might want help with.



Exceptional People in Care (EPIC) awards

Children in care achieve amazing things. The Virtual School makes EPIC awards to children in care who do something really good. There is a ceremony once a year and children get certificates and prizes.



What about my health?

We want to make sure you are healthy and you will be asked to see a nurse or doctor when you are in care, as well as have regular dental checks. This is to check that you are well and feel okay. They will explain to you what they are doing and why, and you can say if you don't want them to do something. Your social worker, carer or parent will have to give permission and someone will be with you.



It is important to keep our heads (what you think) and hearts (what you feel) healthy. This is your emotional health and your social worker, or, if you have one, your clinician or family therapist can help you think and talk about anything you want to, like things that have happened and things that are happening in your life now. You might want to think about how you feel, how you behave and how you want to feel in the future.



CAMHS

If you are living outside of Hackney, we will make sure you get the support you need to stay healthy. If you are very upset or worried about something, you might also get help from an organisation called CAMHS. This stands for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. CAMHS has people you can speak to who will help you with your emotional health. You can speak to your social worker if you would like help from CAMHS, or another grown-up might think it's a good idea for you and talk to you about it.



What is life story work?

When there have been changes in a child's life, it is important that we remember the places and people that are important. This will help you understand and know about your past. This is called life story work. Your social worker and carer will talk to you about this.

Life story work might involve making a book all about you, sticking photos in it, writing down where you were born and where you have lived, who the important people in your life are, things you like to do. You can keep things like birthday cards or memories from religious festivals or holidays.



What are my rights and how can I get heard?



Will the things I tell people looking after me be kept private?



If you're in care, you might not have been safe or happy in the past. The most important thing for people who are looking after you is that you stay safe. If you tell a grown-up looking after you something that you want to keep private, the law says they have to keep it private unless they think that you or someone else may be at harm or in danger. In this case, they must tell your social worker.

Everyone involved will make sure that only the people who need to know the information are told, but keeping you and others safe is what everyone wants to do first.

When information about you is written down on forms or in plans, these are kept on a computer or on paper. Only certain people can see the computer records as they have passwords. Paper records are kept in locked cupboards.

There are laws that say that you can see what is written down about you and Hackney Children's Services have rules to let you do this. Your social worker can tell you more about this if you ever want to see what has been written about you.

What are my rights in care?

Everyone has basic human rights to be kept safe from harm and protected from discrimination. As a child, you also have extra rights that include the right to education and the right to be listened to and to have a say in decisions about your life.

These come from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and they apply until you are 18 years old.

Because you're in care, you have some special rights. These include:

- the right to see people who are important to you (unless there's a good reason not to)
- the right to see information about you held by Hackney Children's Social Care
- the right to make a complaint
- the right to a solicitor to make sure that your voice is heard in court.



Who is the Children's Rights Officer?

The Children's Rights Officer works in Hackney Children and Young Person's Service. They are a trained advocate. Advocates are people who support others, especially helping them make their views clear to other people.

They can help you with lots of things:

- The Children's Rights Officer can help you tell your social work unit or other workers anything you need to say.
- They can help you get things fixed.
- They can explain your rights to you.
- They can help you make a complaint to Hackney Children's Social Care.
- They can give you information about support you might want or need, like legal support.
- They can give you advice.
- They can come to meetings with you.

 You can call the Children's Rights Officer on **020 8356 2444** or email at **childrensrights@hackney.gov.uk**

Who is the Children's Commissioner?

The Children's Commissioner for England is responsible for making sure that children who are in care have a say on things that are important to them. If you want to know more about your rights in care, Hackney's Children's Rights Officer can usually support you, but The Commissioner and their team can help you if you want.

 Visit their website at www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk
call them on **0800 528 0731** or email at
advice.team@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

What do I do if I'm not happy?

We need to know if you are not happy about anything that is going on in your life. You might feel worried about telling someone or think you will get into trouble or not be listened too. We will always listen to you and try to make things better. You might be unhappy about something that we can't change but we will help you understand why we can't change it and we will keep talking with you.

You can tell any of these people how you feel and they will help you:

- your friends
- a teacher
- your foster carer
- your social worker
- your advocate
- your Independent Reviewing Officer
- a helpline like Coram, Tel: **0808 800 5792**

Web: www.coramvoice.org.uk/young-peoples-zone
or **Childline**, Tel: **0800 1111**

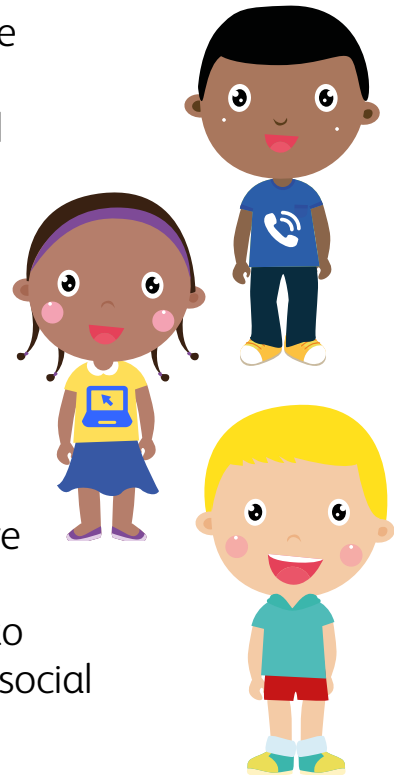
Web: www.childline.org.uk/pages/home.aspx



Coram Voice and Childline support and advise children in care. They have some useful information on their website and you can call them if you want to speak to someone.


If things don't get sorted out and you're not happy or you think something is not right you can make a complaint by calling us on **020 8356 5800** or emailing **children.complaints@hackney.gov.uk**

Most children in care are helped to make a complaint by an advocate. At Hackney we have the Children's Rights Officer (see page 21). If you would like the Children's Rights Officer to help you make a complaint, talk to your carer, social worker or Independent Reviewing Officer.



What do I do if I'm happy?

You can tell us if being in care is good too. We would love to know if what is happening for you is making you happy.

 You can call us on **020 8356 5800** or email us at **children.complaints@hackney.gov.uk**




Hackney Gets Heard

This is the name of the Hackney Children in Care Council. Hackney Gets Heard is a group of children in care who:

- meet up and have fun, for example going bowling, having barbeques
- talk to Hackney Children's Social Care about policies and rules and how they can make things better for children who are in care
- give social workers their views about how things are run and what should happen so that children's rights, thoughts and feelings are considered in decisions that are made.



When you become looked after by Hackney Children's Social Care, you automatically become a member of Hackney Gets Heard and you can join in with any of the events and regular meetings that are held.

 More information and contact details can be found at www.younghackney.org/getinvolved/get-involved/hackney-gets-heard.php

Your carer or social worker can also tell you more about how you can get involved.



Plans, meetings and reviews



When you're in care, the people who support you and care about you need to meet, plan and discuss how you are doing. These are some of the plans, meetings and reviews that happen.

What are care proceedings and care orders?

Care proceedings happen when a court is asked by Children's Social Care whether a child should become 'looked after' by Hackney Council.

Care orders are rules that the court says everyone has to stick to. If your social worker feels you should become looked after, but your parents don't agree, the social worker can go to court to get a care order so we then share responsibility for looking after you with your parents. Your parents and Hackney Children's Social Care will plan together how to keep you safe and where you live.

What is a Placement Planning Meeting?

When you first become looked after, you, your parents or family, your carer and someone from your social work unit will meet to make sure all the important arrangements have been made. This helps everyone get to know each other. This may happen before you move in but, if not, it will happen within the first 5 working days (a working day means Monday to Friday). This meeting is called a Placement Planning Meeting.

What is a care plan?

Information about how we will look after you and what you need is all written down in something called a 'care plan'. Your care plan will have different sections that have important information about you, like your health, education and what you like to do in your spare time. It can include things like what you like to eat or watch on TV, how you get to school, and which grown-ups will make decisions about where you live.

It is important that you tell everyone what you want to be written down in your care plan.

You can write things down, speak to someone, record a message or even make a video and give it to your foster carer or social worker. Your social worker and carer will explain your care plan to make sure you understand it. We know it can be hard to speak up sometimes but you should always say if you don't understand what is being said or want to hear again what is written in your care plan.

My Review

Your review is a meeting to find out how things are going for you. It is often called a LAC review. LAC means 'looked after child'. **The review is for you and about you.** This includes where you are living, your education and health, your free time, your contact with your family and plans for you in the future.

At your review you will meet your Independent Reviewing Officer (see **Who will support me?** on page 12) and from then on your reviews will happen every 3 to 6 months. Your Independent Reviewing Officer will always ask to speak to you before the review starts to discuss how you would like the meeting to happen and what you would like to talk about.

This table can be completed by you or your social worker to remind you of your first few review dates.

	When?	What time?	Where?
First LAC review			
Second LAC Review			
Third LAC Review			



Why do I have review meetings?

The reason for LAC review meetings is to give you and the people helping you a chance to discuss your living arrangements and everything else that affects your life. Any changes to your care can be discussed at your review and it is important that your views are listened to.



How can I have my say?

This is your meeting, so it is important that your views are heard! Your social worker will talk about the plans with you before the review and you can tell them how you feel.

If you feel unable to come to the review, your social worker or your advocate will let people know what you think and feel.

Another way to get your views across is by filling in the consultation form. This is a paper form that you will be sent before the review meeting. This is for you to write down or draw pictures of all the things you want to be talked about in the meeting. Anyone that you trust can help you fill this in if you don't want to do it on your own, like an advocate.



Before the meeting, your Independent Reviewing Officer will offer you the opportunity to talk to him or her on your own about the meeting and about the plans that have been made for you.

These are some ways you can share your views:

- speaking at your meeting (you can stay for all or part of it)
- talking to your social worker when they come and visit you
- talking to your Independent Reviewing Officer before your meeting
- asking for an advocate
- asking someone else that you trust to help you share your views
- putting your views in writing or drawing pictures on your consultation form before your meeting

Where will the review meeting be?

It is important that your review takes place somewhere you feel comfortable (usually where you live) and you have a say in this. Your social worker will ask you where you would like your review to take place and will let your Independent Reviewing Officer know. Sometimes it might be suggested that your review take place at Hackney Children's Social Care's office or at school, but it is important that this only happens if you are happy about it.

It's really important that you are at, or contribute to, your review so that your social worker and Independent Reviewing Officer can hear what you think when they are talking about important decisions for your life.

You don't need to stay for the whole of your review meeting if you don't want to.



Who comes to my reviews?

You have a say in who comes to your review meeting. This will always include someone from your social work unit, your carer and usually your parents. Sometimes a teacher from your school might want to come to share some information about how you are getting on, but if there is someone else that you would like to come or someone who you do not want to come, then let your social worker or Independent Reviewing Officer know.

You can also have an advocate with you at your review if you would like.



What happens at the meeting?

Before the meeting, your social worker will have written a report and you should be able to see this before the meeting happens. The report covers things like your health, how you are getting on at school, what other activities you are doing, if things are okay where you are living and if you are happy with the contact you have with your family.

Your Independent Reviewing Officer will start the meeting by asking everyone there to say who he or she is to make sure everyone knows one another. They will then make sure that the meeting starts by talking about the things that are most important to you.

The Independent Reviewing Officer will give everyone a chance to talk about how things are, the plans that have been made and any changes that might need to be made.

The Independent Reviewing Officer will write notes at the meeting of what has been recommended.



What happens after my review?

Your Independent Reviewing Officer will write up the recommendations of the meeting within 5 working days and will send these to your social worker. If your social worker doesn't want any changes to be made, these recommendations become decisions.

Your Independent Reviewing Officer will write up the notes of your meeting and make sure that everyone is sent a copy. They will write you a letter after your review meeting and if you would like a copy of the notes and decisions then you can let your Independent Reviewing Officer know.





