



Preparing for Independence and Staying Put

Preparation for Independence

Regardless of age, children and young people living in foster care will need to be supported and encouraged to develop skills to help them become as independent as possible. Young people should be encouraged to take responsibility for themselves and develop independence skills commensurate with their age, ability and understanding. Even young children can learn age-appropriate independence skills by watching their carer and being involved in day to day activities within the home.

As they reach the relevant ages and stages of development, there are some essential skills which we expect carers to 'teach' young people, for example, safety in the home, cooking simple meals, using a washing machine and keeping their environment clean. These young people should be involved in activities such as shopping through which, with the carer's help, they will grow to understand how to compare products and get value for money, how to eat well on a limited budget and use fresh produce rather than relying on expensive convenience meals. Regular opportunities for them to cook either for themselves or for their foster family and/or friends can enhance their catering as well as their social skills.

Carers need to be creative in supporting their young people in this way, finding opportunities within the everyday as well as trips and holidays. Carers need to have imagination and the ability to 'think outside the box', so that those children who lack motivation or confidence can see that the end result of becoming more independent can be rewarding and fun.

With greater independence comes the necessity for children and young people to develop skills to manage money. This is essential for so many reasons, not least because of the increased vulnerability that a lack of money or poor management of such can bring with the potential for exploitation or being drawn into criminal activities such as shoplifting. As a child matures, they should gradually be given the responsibility of paying for items out of their pocket money, for example, sweets and comics or, for older children, magazines, leisure activities and toiletries. If a young person has a mobile phone, many carers provide a weekly 'top up' as a way of ensuring that they can be contacted or get help if needed.

There is an expectation that young people will be involved in an informal 'programme' to acquire an ever-increasing range of skills, and this should be high on the agenda by the age of 15, regardless of gender. At this age they should, unless incompatible with their level of understanding, be encouraged to open a bank or building society account in their own name, having first discussed the practicalities with the carer, for example, what documents will they need to take to prove their identity and do they need an adult to act as guarantor.

Over a number of sessions, a Foster Carer should demonstrate to a young person how to manage their money using simple budgeting techniques. This should consider day to day expenses such as food, travel costs, entertainment and activities as well as considering longer term costs such as rent, utility bills and clothes. Comparing the income, a young person can expect to receive with the reality of a long list of essential outgoings is a good way to visually demonstrate the challenge of managing money. These discussions also provide an opportunity to talk about getting into debt and the importance of asking for help at an early stage.

Sound independence skills are essential for all young people, particularly so for those looked after given the potential future disadvantages that their adverse childhood experiences put them at. Many Local Authorities have systems in place to support and monitor the building of independence skills (such as Norfolk Children's Services Passport to Independence) which provide ways to evidence developing skills and identify where further support may be needed.

Leaving Care

AFA will support the carer to participate in preparing and reviewing a young person's Pathway Plan. The Foster Carers should also support the Personal Adviser, who is allocated to every young person as they approach 18+, to identify how they can provide practical, financial and emotional support to young people as they prepare to move on. It is very important to actively promote greater independence for young people, particularly in respect of:

- Living within their means
- Budgeting to allow for things to look forward to
- Remaining motivated in their studies or apprenticeship.
- Being engaged with activities, voluntary work or sport and, for example, looking for opportunities to move on from being a participant to becoming a leader, e.g. Cubs or Guides
- Learning to manage 'friends' who might come to the young persons' accommodation and won't leave
- Responsibility in relation to partnerships, being mindful of sexual health and contraception
- Recognising potential dangers and risks and learning how to manage risk for themselves
- Developing a support network, identifying people who they can contact if they are feeling lonely or need help
- Being resourceful and resilient, knowing where to get information or support when needed

Status of eligible, relevant, formally relevant and qualifying care leavers

The Children Act 1989 places a duty on Local Authorities for 'looked after' and previously 'looked after' children as they move on from the care system.

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

- Eligible child;
- Relevant child;
- Former relevant child
- Qualifying care leaver

The Local Authority has specific duties if a young person meets the criteria.

	Does the young person qualify?	What are they entitled to?
<p>Eligible Child <u>Schedule 2, Paragraph 19B CA 1989</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aged 16 or 17 • Looked after by children's services for a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14 • Currently looked after 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Personal Advisor • A Needs Assessment • A Pathway Plan • Receive all the care and support they normally receive until they leave care
<p>Relevant Child <u>Section 23A CA 1989</u> <u>Section 23B CA 1989</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aged 16 or 17 • Looked after by children's services for a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14 • Looked after for a period of time after their 16th birthday • No longer looked after 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Personal Advisor • A Needs Assessment • A Pathway Plan • Accommodation and maintenance • Financial support to meet education, training and employment needs
<p>Former Relevant Child <u>Section 23C CA 1989</u> <u>Section 23CZA CA 1989</u> <u>Section 23CA CA 1989</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aged between 18 and 21 OR between 18 and 25 if still in full-time education • Previously an eligible child and/or a relevant child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Personal Advisor • A Pathway Plan kept under regular review • Assistance with employment, education and training • Assistance with accommodation • Help with living costs
<p>Qualifying Care Leaver <u>Section 24 CA 1989</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aged between 16 and 21 OR between 16 and 25 if still in full-time education • Looked after by children's services on, or after, their 16th birthday and no longer looked after • Spent less than 13 weeks in care since 14th birthday, i.e. do not fulfill criteria for eligible or relevant child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help with living expenses and if they are in higher education they may also help with securing holiday accommodation <p>Advice and assistance from Children's Services, which may be paid in cash or vouchers</p>

‘Staying Put’

The transition to adulthood is, for many young people, a turbulent time. Many care leavers have to experience a move from their Foster Carers as they reach 18 after which time they are no longer “looked after”. As a consequence, many have to cope with independent living before they are ready, often with limited support.

The Staying Put initiative supports young people to remain with their Foster Carers beyond their 18th birthday. Such an arrangement gives the young person additional time to prepare for adulthood, supporting them to move at a pace that best meets their needs. Outlining the purpose of Staying Put, the DfE guidance states;

“The intention being to ensure young people can remain with their former Foster Carers until they are prepared for adulthood, can experience a transition akin to their peers, avoid social exclusion and be more likely to avert a subsequent housing and tenancy breakdown” (DfE, DWP and HMRC Guidance, May 2013).

Under Section 98 of the Children and Families Act 2014, which introduced Section 23 CZA into the Children Act 1989, Local Authorities are required to facilitate, monitor and support Staying Put arrangements and to have a Staying Put policy in place. Under the Fostering regulations, Fostering Agencies are also required to have a Staying Put policy.

The aim of a Staying Put arrangement will be specific to each young person and should be set out within the Pathway Plan as well as the Staying Put written agreement. The scheme is designed to equip care leavers to succeed by ensuring they:

- Can experience a transition to adulthood similar to that of their peers, in a supportive family environment
- Do not have to leave their former foster family before they feel ready
- Maximise their opportunities for education, employment or training and achieving their potential
- Develop the necessary emotional and practical skills before they have to live independently

AFA’s policy sets out our approach to working with carers, young people and Local Authorities to support these arrangements, so that the transition to adulthood can be undertaken in a measured and sensitive manner.

What is Staying Put?

The term Staying Put is used to describe the arrangement where:

- A young person who was looked after immediately prior to their eighteenth birthday (as an eligible child) continues to live with their former Foster Carers
- The carers were acting as Foster Carers to the child immediately prior to the young person’s eighteenth birthday (that is, the carers were approved as Foster Carers in accordance with the Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 and the child had been placed with them by the local authority, or through an Independent Fostering Agency)
- The young person is deemed an eligible child, within the meaning of paragraph 19B (2) of Schedule 2 to the Children Act 1989, immediately before they reached eighteen
- The local authority considers that the Staying Put arrangement is consistent with the welfare of the young person

- The Staying Put arrangement is set out in the young person's Pathway Plan
- A proportion of the allowance paid to the "Staying Put" carer/s is paid by the Local Authority Children's Services under section 23C of the Children Act 1989.

The "Staying Put" arrangement extends until:

- The young person leaves the Staying Put arrangement; or
- The carer ends the Staying Put arrangement or
- The young person reaches their twenty-first birthday and is still living in the arrangement; or
- The young person completes the education or training they are studying on their twenty-first birthday, if they have been continuously living with their previous carers since their eighteenth birthday.

Staying Put arrangements are not foster placements, as the young person is no longer a Looked after Child. Therefore, the Fostering Regulations, Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards no longer apply. A change in the law means that from 1st April 2018 Children's Services must offer help to all Care Leavers up to the age of 25 even if they are not in education.

Staying Put Arrangements

Planning a Staying Put arrangement should be informed by the needs and wishes of the young person and monitored by the LAC Reviews and Pathway Planning process in place ahead of their 18th birthday. Where Staying Put is in the best interests of the young person, AFA will work with the Foster Carer and the placing authority to support the planning process.

However, planning also needs to be informed by, and sensitive to, the needs, wishes and circumstances of the Foster Carers. This includes making sure that Foster Carers understand the changes that will take place in the funding and support arrangements under Staying Put. It is not appropriate for placing authorities to negotiate directly with AFA carers or vice versa. It is essential that any discussions or negotiations relating to Staying Put arrangements are handled sensitively and involve AFA, to ensure that all potential issues have been considered.

Living Together Agreement

The details of a Staying Put arrangement should be based on an explicit 'living together' agreement setting out the expectations of all parties, clarifying roles and responsibilities. It should cover:

- Preparation for independence, expectations, goals and targets
- Finance, including discussion on young people having credit cards, loan agreements and mobile phone contracts registered at the carer's address
- Income and benefit claims
- Friends and partners visiting and staying
- Staying away for nights/weekends and informing carers of travel arrangements and whereabouts
- Education, training and employment
- Having a provisional timescale for moving on
- Issues that can impact on younger foster children in placement, including safeguarding, role modelling and time keeping
- Arrangements for resolving any unacceptable behavior or problems that may potentially lead to the arrangement ending
- Specific issues connected to the needs of the young person.

It should be noted that the legal framework will change the arrangement from one of Foster Carer - foster child to that of landlord - tenant, with the young person lodging in the carer's home. However, with a focus remaining on the positive relationships between the young person and the carer, on a day-to-day basis this should not impact on the care and support the young person receives.

DBS Checks

When a young person reaches the age of 18, and there continues to be foster children in the home, a DBS check will need to be carried out. As an adult member of the household, the previously looked after young person will now need a DBS check and a risk assessment if the DBS check highlights a potential risk. It is the responsibility of AFA to complete the DBS check and the process for completing this will begin when the young person reaches 17 ¾ years.

Support for AFA Carers providing Staying Put arrangements

Financial Support

Financial support for a Staying Put arrangement is agreed between a Local Authority, the young person and the carers. Although AFA will support carers to ensure there are clear financial arrangements in place, it does not have any responsibility for providing on-going financial support once the young person reaches 18.

A placing authority is responsible for setting the level of Staying Put allowance paid to the carer. Carers should expect allowances to be made up of 3 elements – a payment by the placing Authority, a payment from Housing Benefit and a contribution from the young person.

As payments come from a range of sources there are different rules governing the tax and benefit implications for payments made to carers. Whereas all fostering payments are disregarded for tax and benefit purposes, this is not the case for all Staying Put payments. Carers will need to find independent advice on tax, national insurance and benefits, for example, through Fostering Network.

In addition, AFA's insurance policy for carers will no longer apply to Staying Put as young people 18+ are no longer looked after. Carers should advise their insurance provider that another adult is living in the household, if this is a requirement of their insurance policy.

Placement Manager Support

The level, frequency and nature of Placement Manager support will depend on the carer's situation. for example:

Where an AFA carer is providing a Staying Put arrangement and also has another child in placement, then the AFA Placement Manager will continue to visit on at least a monthly basis and will provide regular supervision for the carer.

Whilst the main focus of this supervision will be the needs of the child looked after, supervision will also discuss the Staying Put arrangements and advice, guidance and support can be given. Whilst a Placement Manager would not normally attend a Staying Put review meeting, this can be considered if requested.

When an AFA carer is providing a Staying Put arrangement, doesn't have a child in placement but remains registered as a Foster Carer with AFA, the Placement Manager will maintain contact with the carer and can be contacted for advice, guidance and support. Where an AFA carer is providing a Staying Put arrangement and is no longer registered as a Foster Carer

with AFA, then formal contact, supervision and visits by the Agency will cease. However, prior to ending visits the AFA worker will provide a list of relevant organisations and sources of support to give to the carer and the young person who is Staying Put.

Training

Attendance at training for a carer providing a Staying Put arrangement will be based on their current registration. For example:

- If a Foster Carer is providing a Staying Put arrangement and remains registered with AFA (regardless of whether they have a foster child in placement), then the carer must attend regular training in order to meet the requirements for continued approval as a Foster Carer
- Where a carer is providing a Staying Put arrangement and is no longer registered with AFA then there is no requirement to attend training

Annual Review and Approval

Foster Carers who are providing a Staying Put arrangement and remain registered with AFA will continue to need an Annual Foster Carer review, regardless of whether there is a child looked after in placement. The impact of the Staying Put young person on the fostering household will be considered during the review process and when looking at potential matches for any unfilled placements.

- Where carers providing a Staying Put arrangement are approved to care for one child, and no longer have a spare bedroom as the Staying Put young person is occupying this, approval will continue but carers will be classed as “on hold” as they are not in a position to take a foster placement
- If a carer does not have a placement for more than 12 months and there are no immediate future plans for a placement, then their status as registered carers with AFA will be reviewed and may be terminated.

For further advice

<https://childlawadvice.org.uk>

<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/policy-practice/practice-information/staying-put>

<https://www.fosterline.info/news/tips-for-staying-put/>

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/201015/Staying_Put_Guidance.pdf

Connected Policies or Guidance

Name of Policy / Guidance	Relevant for
Record Keeping and Confidentiality Policy	All staff and Foster Carers
Expectations of Foster Carer’s Behaviour Policy	Foster Carers, Placement Managers
Safeguarding Policy	All staff and Foster Carers
Foster Carer Handbook	Carers, Placement Managers

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