



One minute guide

Role of the social worker for children in care



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When a child moves

The child's social worker needs to hold what is called a placement planning meeting when a child moves to a new home. This can either be done shortly before they move, on the same day or, within 72 hours. At this meeting you will talk about things such as health, education, any religious or cultural needs and arrangements for family time with important people in the child's life. You might talk about whether the child needs to change GP, or school. The decision to change school is not straight forward and can depend on whether there is the chance that the child might be able to return home. Changing school at the same time as moving home can also be too many changes in one go, and maintaining their current school where possible can be supportive and comforting for a child.

Something called a 'delegated authority form' will be completed which says who can make important decisions for the child whilst they are living in care.

If this is the child's first foster home, the social worker will hopefully also bring the child a 'My Bag' which includes things like a blanket, cuddly toy, and hygiene products. If they can't bring this when the child arrives, then they should bring the "My Bag" as soon as possible after the move.

How often will a social worker visit?

The social worker will visit at least once within the first week of the child moving. The law says a looked after child should be visited a minimum of every 6 weeks for the first year of moving to a new home. After a year, this becomes a minimum of every 12 weeks. Social Workers often call these visits a "stat visit", referencing the statutory timeframes the law sets out. A social worker can, and probably will, visit more often. This can depend on what support is needed or how long they have been the child's social worker. For example, a social worker may visit more often when first getting to know a child. A social worker will also need to see the child alone to hear their wishes and feelings - they might arrange to take the child out or visit them in school.

Looked After Reviews

A child in care also has a worker called an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). Their role is to chair a meeting called a Looked After Review. In the Looked After Review, the child's overall care plan will be discussed, including if they need any extra support and who will provide this.

The review meeting will be held within the first month of a child becoming looked after; and then 3 months later. Reviews are then usually held 6-monthly, or they can be held sooner if there is a change of care plan, for example, a child moves from a residential home to living with a foster family.

Children will always be asked their views before their meeting. Foster carers, and the child if it is right for them, will be invited to take part in these meetings, along with the parents and other professionals supporting the family. When children are part of care proceedings, their appointed Guardian may also attend. If the child is part of care proceedings, the Court will also be making decisions about their care.

Life story work

In Nottinghamshire, we all work together to support a child or young person's emotional needs. This includes how we do life story work. We know a lot of good life story work is being done with children, but it is not always formally recognised or a record kept of it. There can also be confusion or worries about how, who, and when this work should be started.

Life story work should be ongoing by both the social worker and the child's carers, not a one-off piece of work. For carers, this should include making memories and keeping these memories for children in the future – such as taking and displaying photos for children. We no longer expect a 'life-story book', unless this is what the child wants. We think that it is better to have regular conversations with the child and for all of us to answer their questions. As part of life story work, every child should understand why they are in care.

Who can I contact if I cannot get hold of the child's social worker?

Social workers are sometimes unavailable for full days – such as if they need to visit a child living elsewhere in the country. Most children's social work teams have workers called a Social Work Support Officer (SWSO). They can help with many queries and help solve difficulties on behalf of the social worker – such as problems with transport and family time. They can also find the right person to help if needed. The social worker will provide you with their SWSO's contact details.

Key contacts

Children, young people, parents and carers are advised to talk to the child's social worker if they have questions about the information in this one minute guide. Foster carers can also speak to their supervising social worker.