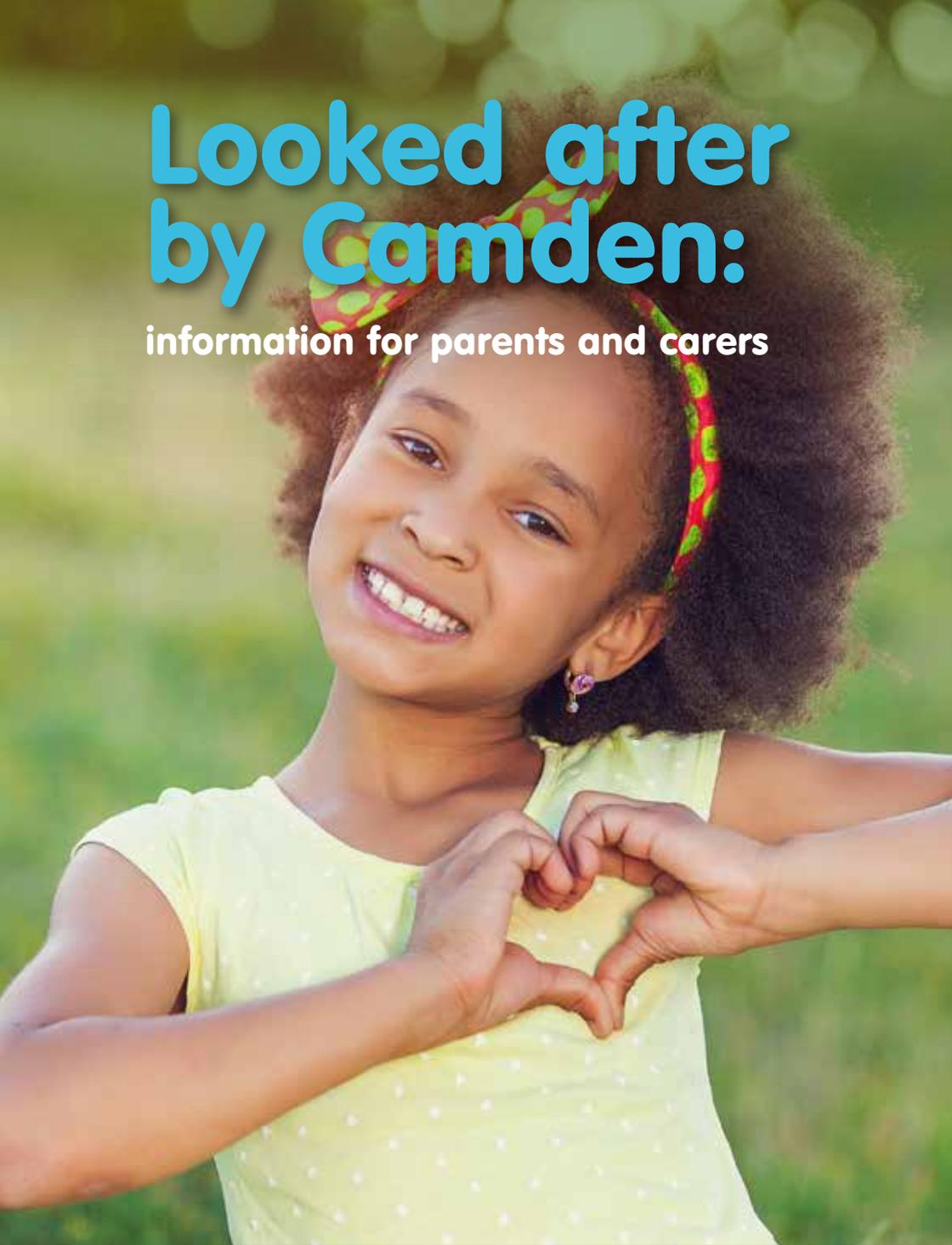


Looked after by Camden:

information for parents and carers



Introduction

Children's Safeguarding and Social Work (CSSW) aims to support families so that children can remain living with their family, but sometimes, children cannot live at home and may need to be looked after by us.

When we look after your child, we will make sure that you remain

involved in their lives and share responsibility with us for their care. This booklet explains how we will work with you to achieve this.

If there is anything in this booklet that you don't understand, please ask your child's social worker to explain.

Why we look after children and how long

The law allows local authorities to look after children if:

- the child's parents/carers are ill or temporarily unable to look after their child for some reason;
- the child has no parents/carers or anyone else to care for them;
- there are serious concerns about the way the child is being cared for by their parents/carers.

We only look after children for as long as is needed, and in most cases, this will be for a short time while social workers work with parents to sort out the problems that led to the child becoming looked after.

Sometimes CSSW may take the view that things are unlikely to improve at home quickly enough and it is best for the child to remain looked after until they are 18.

We will always explain to you why we need to look after your child and how long this arrangement is likely to last. If we feel your child needs to remain looked after up to 18, we will discuss the reasons for this with you as well as our long-term plans for their care.

How children become looked after

The law says that we can only look after your child if you agree to this or if a court makes an order that lets us take over their care. Your child's social worker will explain why we need to look after your child, the consequences of giving your consent and what will happen if you do not give your consent.

Looked after by consent

If you agree to your child being looked after, you will be asked to sign a consent form to show that you have been given all the relevant information and that you fully understand the consequences of your decision.

You will still hold all the rights and responsibilities for your child's care (known as parental responsibility) and will have the right to make major decisions about how they are looked after, and CSSW will work with you to reach an agreement on all aspects of their care.

You will also have the right to remove your child from care but we hope that this is something on which we can agree. However, if we have any concerns about your child returning home, we may apply to the court for

a care order so that they can remain looked after.

Looked after on a care order

If we are very concerned about your child's safety or welfare or believe them to be at immediate risk, and we cannot get your consent for them to be looked after, we may apply to the court for a care order that allows us to look after them. This process is known as care proceedings and more information about this can be found on page 10.

When your child is looked after on a care order, you will share parental responsibility for your child with Camden, but social workers and carers will take most of the decisions about your child's care. However, we will always consult with you about how we will look after them and explain why.

People involved in your child's care

- Your child will have an allocated **social worker** who is responsible for overseeing their care and who will also work with you to try to sort out any difficulties that caused your child to become looked after so that your child can return home. If this is not possible, the social worker will look for an alternative carer for your child.
- Your child will also have an **Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)** whose job is to make sure Camden is looking after your child well and that decisions made by CSSW are in your child's best interests.
- Your child will always have a named person who is responsible for their day to day care. If they are placed in **foster care**, this will be their **foster carer** and if they are placed in **residential care** or in Camden's semi-independent housing pathway accommodation they will have a **key worker**. All the people involved in the care of looked after children have been approved by Camden as suitable to care for children who are living away from home.



Where your child will live

If your child cannot live with you, we will make sure they have a safe, comfortable home (known as a **placement**) with carers who can look after them well. Where possible, we will try to place the child in Camden or nearby.

These are the placement options that we will look at:

- CSSW believes that if a child cannot live with their parents then it is best for them to live with a member of their extended family or a family friend who they know. We will always consult with you to look at whether there is anyone known to you who could look after your child on our behalf (known as a **family and friends carer**).
- If there is no-one who can become a family and friends carer, we will look for a suitable foster carer who would be best placed to look after your child. We will always try to place your child with a foster family that has a similar background to you and your child, and make sure that anyone caring for your child lets them keep up with their religious and cultural practices.
- For older children, where foster care may not be the best option,

we will look at placing them in a residential children's home where they will have a key worker to help them to learn the skills they need to become more independent.

- Young people aged 16 and 17 who become looked after will be given a place in Camden's Pathway semi-independent accommodation where they will have a key worker who works with them to help develop the skills they will need to live independently when they leave care at 18. They can remain living in Pathway accommodation until they are able to take on the responsibility of managing their own tenancy.

You have a right to know where your child will be living. However if we believe that this may put your child at risk of harm, we may choose to withhold the address of their placement. The social worker will inform you of the reasons for this decision.

To make sure that your child is safe in their placement and is receiving the best care possible, the social worker will visit them regularly so that they have an opportunity to say how they feel about living away from home and how they are being cared for.

How we look after your child

Standards of care

When your child becomes looked after, Ca mden becomes their “corporate parent” and the council must meet the following standards of care:

- ✿ acting in the child’s best interest and taking their views into account
- ✿ providing them with a stable home
- ✿ promoting their health and education
- ✿ helping them to access services they need
- ✿ help them develop and maintain good relationships
- ✿ if we look after them up to 18, preparing them for adulthood.

Care plan

To make sure we meet these standards, your child will have a care plan that sets out what we will do to make sure they are well cared for. The plan is drawn up by their social worker but you will be asked for your views.

The care plan covers the following:

- ✿ where your child will live, who will look after them and how their day to day care needs will be met;
- ✿ where your child will live in the future and who will be looking after them; this is known as their permanence plan;*
- ✿ how your child’s health and education needs will be met;
- ✿ where they will go to school;
- ✿ arrangements for contact with you and other members of the family, including siblings;
- ✿ how they will be encouraged to continue with any hobbies or activities they enjoy.

*If a child cannot return home, CSSW may make need to make arrangements for them to move to a longer-term placement or to be adopted; we will ensure that decisions on your child’s long term care arrangements are made as quickly as possible and that you are kept informed of these decisions.

Reviewing the care plan

Your child’s care plan is regularly reviewed at a special meeting known as a statutory looked after children (LAC) review. The purpose of the meeting is to make sure:

- ✿ your child is being cared for properly and that the plan is the right plan for them;
- ✿ if your child is to return home, what progress is being made in terms of making the necessary changes
- ✿ if your child will be looked after up to 18, any progress towards identifying a permanent placement.

The social worker will make sure you are invited to the review and that you have an opportunity to have your say. A few days before the meeting, they will ask you will be asked to complete a consultation form so that we can find out your views and this should help you prepare what you would like to say in the meeting.

If you are worried about speaking or if you have a disability that means you need help to take part in the meeting and have your say, you can ask the social worker about getting an advocate to speak on your behalf.

The social worker will also let you know what will happen at the meeting and before it starts, your child’s IRO (who chairs the meeting) will meet with you to discuss what you want to say. Normally, only the IRO, the social worker, the child and their parent and carer or keyworker attends the LAC review, with other professionals such as teachers sending in reports, but the social worker will confirm with you who will be attending.

On rare occasions, CSSW may decide that you should not attend the review or should only attend part of the meeting. This may be due to concerns for your child’s welfare or because the meeting may be disrupted due to family conflict. If this happens, the IRO will write to you to explain why the decision has been made.

You will always receive a record of what was discussed and agreed at the meeting even if you did not attend or only attended part of it, and this record will include your child’s updated care plan.

Contact

You have a right to see your child while they are looked after (known as contact) and we will make sure arrangements are in place to make this happen. The social worker will discuss arrangements with you and agree how often contact will take place and where.

Most of the contact you have will be face to face but we may agree to other forms of contact such as by telephone. Although it will be tempting to contact your child at any time via social media, we do ask that you stick to the agreed contact plan.

To keep children safe during contact, we may insist that a foster carer

or a specialist contact worker is present; this is known as supervised contact. We only do this if we have good reasons to believe that this is necessary to safeguard your child and the social worker will discuss this with you.

Sometimes, we may need to limit the amount of contact you have but we will only do this if we think we need to help your child settle in their placement. Very rarely we may apply to the court for an order to end contact if we think your child may be at risk during contact. We will always give you notice of this so you can arrange for legal representation in order to challenge this in the court.



Your child's health



When your child becomes looked after, you will be asked to agree to them receiving medical treatment as needed and to health professionals sharing information about their health with CSSW. The reason for this is to make sure we are able to ensure they receive the right treatment for any health issues they have.

You will be asked to consent to your child having a medical assessment with Camden's LAC health team and which is regularly reviewed; this is to make sure we have all the information we need about your child's health so that we can look after them well. All looked after

children will have a health plan that is part of their care plan and which sets out any actions that carers will need to carry out to make sure the child is healthy.

We would appreciate it if you could provide us with as much information as possible about your child's health. We may also need to know about your health history as this may be important when considering your child's future health.

We will always keep you informed about your child's health and notify of any illnesses or accidents.

- ✿ If your child is looked after with your consent, you will be asked to consent to any treatment but if we think consent is being withheld unreasonably and this is negatively affecting your child's wellbeing, we may seek legal advice.
- ✿ If your child is looked after on a care order, your child's social worker will give consent for any treatment but will inform you of any decisions made.

Your child's education

Camden has a duty to make sure looked after children do as well as they are able at school and reduce any disruption to their education.

To do this:

- ✿ We will always look for a placement close to your child's current school so they can continue to attend.
- ✿ If they need to change schools, we will make sure they have a new school place within 20 days.
- ✿ Your child's school will have a designated teacher who is responsible for supporting looked

after children at school and who will work with us to make sure they are making good progress.

- ✿ Your child will have a Personal Education Plan that sets out their targets for achievement and what support they will receive to help them and which is regularly reviewed.

We will always keep you informed of your child's progress at school and if they need to change schools we will let you have details of their new school.

Care proceedings

Sometimes, CSSW may consider a child at risk of harm because of the care they are receiving at home and that it is better if they are looked after away from home. CSSW can only remove a child from their parents care without parental consent if they have an order from the court known as a care order.

Before CSSW can apply to the court for a care order, we must work with

you to try to help you look after your child to a good standard and avoid going to court. When we apply for a care order, we need to prove to the court that we have done everything we can to support you to improve your care of your child and that there is no option but for Camden to take over the child's care. This process is known as care proceedings and there are there are certain steps we have to take as part of this.

✿ Step 1: Pre-proceedings

letter: The social worker will write to you letting you know that we are considering applying to the court for a care order. This letter will set out the specific concerns that CSSW have about your child's care and what needs to change to improve things and avoid going to court. The letter will give you the date of the pre-proceedings meeting (see below) and advise you about getting legal representation. A list of local solicitors can be found on page 12 of this leaflet.

✿ Step 2: Pre-proceedings

meeting: This meeting is normally held within 10 days from the date of the pre-proceedings letter and gives you an opportunity to meet with the social worker and other professionals working with your child to discuss the concerns and make a plan of what needs to be done to avoid care proceedings. You will be able to bring along an advocate or a legal representative to this meeting.

✿ Step 3: Letter of issue:

If CSSW believe that you have not carried out anything that was agreed at the pre-proceedings meeting and there are still concerns about your child's care, CSSW will instruct the Council's Legal Services to send out a letter of issue that will notify you that the council intends to issue

care proceedings. Once you receive this letter you may be entitled to receive legal aid.

It is important that you work with social workers at steps 1 and 2 to try to resolve issues in order to avoid care proceedings. In emergencies, CSSW may send out a letter of issue immediately without going through Steps 1 and 2 if your child's immediate safety is at risk but the social worker will notify you if this is the case so you can arrange legal representation.

If CSSW do issue legal proceedings, you need to be aware that in order to support the application for a care order, social workers will submit a report to the court that will contain detailed information about your personal history and family life.

Equally, if a member of your family comes forward to be assessed as a foster carer or special guardian for your child, a detailed report about their personal history and circumstances will also be submitted to the court in order to make a decision on whether they are suitable to look after your child.

It is important that you and any family member being assessed as a carer for your child are aware that this information will be shared with anyone who is party to the proceedings, including anyone else who has parental responsibility for your child.

Getting legal advice

You can get legal advice about your rights regarding your child's care from a law centre or solicitors and you may be entitled to legal aid to help with costs. For further information, visit these websites:

Citizens Advice Bureau

camdencabservice.org.uk

Family Rights Group

frg.org.uk

You Gov

gov.uk/if-your-child-is-taken-into-care/care-proceedings

Local solicitors

Camden Community Law Centre
2 Prince of Wales Road, NW5

Osbornes, 9 Pratt Street, NW1
020 7485 8811

ACA Law, 168 Kentish Town Road, NW5
020 7485 6677

Avadis & Co, 7 Ferdinand Street, NW1
020 7267 8864

Lewis Nedas, 24 Camden High Street, NW1
020 8003 8307

Hodge Jones & Allen, 180 N Gower Street, NW1
020 7874 8300

Complaints and concerns

If you are not happy with any aspect of the service you or your child is receiving, or you are worried about the care being given to your child, you can speak to your child's social worker who will try to help you resolve any problems. If not, the social worker can explain Camden's complaints procedure and put you in touch with our Complaints Unit.

You can also contact the Complaints Unit at:

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

or call 0800 393 561