

# Safeguarding 7 minute briefing: Supporting looked after children

## Supporting Looked After Children

Providing a secure, caring environment can help looked after children overcome their early life experiences. NSPCC research has identified five priorities for change to improve the emotional and mental health of looked after children.

1. Embed an emphasis on emotional wellbeing throughout the system.
2. Take a proactive and preventative approach. .
3. Give children and young people voice and influence.
4. Support and sustain children's relationships.
5. Support care leavers' emotional needs.

## Further information

Many looked after children have previous experiences of violence, abuse or neglect. This can lead to them displaying challenging behaviour and having problems forming secure relationships. Some find it hard to develop positive peer relationships. Looked after children are more likely to go missing than their peers. Children may run away from care for all sorts of reasons - wanting to return home to their family, being unhappy or bored in their care placement, feeling like they didn't have enough control over their own lives. Children who go missing are at greater risk of physical abuse, grooming and sexual exploitation

## What else should I consider?

Children may enter care for all sorts of reasons. But many enter because they have been abused or neglected. These experiences can leave children with complex emotional and mental health needs, which can increase their vulnerability to abuse. Many children move repeatedly in and out of care, or between placements. Placement breakdowns can have a detrimental impact on a child's emotional wellbeing and mental health. It can also prevent them forming stable relationships with the adults who could help protect them

## Key Findings

Certain groups of children are more likely to be in care than others.

- Abuse and neglect are the main reasons that children are taken into care.
- Foster care is the most common placement type.
- The most common reason for a child to leave care is to return to their family.
- A number of looked after children experience multiple care placements in a year.
- Children in care have below average outcomes across a range of measures, although they make better progress in some areas than children in need, a closer comparison group.

## Who is a Looked after Child (LAC)?

A child who has been in the care of their local authority for more than 24 hours is known as a looked after child.

Looked after children are also often referred to as children in care, a term which many children and young people prefer.

Looked after children generally are:

- living with foster parents
- living in a residential children's home or
- living in residential settings like schools or secure units.

## Why does a child become a LAC?

- The child's parents might have agreed to this – for example, if they are too unwell to look after their child or if their child has a disability and needs respite care.
- The child could be an unaccompanied asylum seeker, with no responsible adult to care for them.
- Children's services may have intervened because they felt the child was at significant risk of harm. If this is the case the child is usually the subject of a court-made legal order.

A child stops being looked after when they are adopted, return home or turn 18. However local authorities are required to support children leaving care at 18 until they are at least 21. This may involve them continuing to live with their foster family.

## National Profile

In 2018/19, there were approximately 102,000 looked after children in the UK. The total number of looked after children in the UK has increased every year since 2010. In the last five years the population of looked after children in the UK has increased by 10%. (NSPCC Statistics briefing: Looked After Children published March 2021).

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