

# PRACTITIONER GUIDE

## Myth Busting Guide to Accommodating Children

This document is designed to provide information about children in care.

### What is a Looked After Child?

The term 'looked after' refers to situations where the state acts as the legal guardian for a child or young person. This includes:

- Children and young people compulsorily removed from their family and placed in the care of the state.
- Children placed in the care of the state on a voluntary basis.
- Children placed in 'out of home care' such as with foster carers, in residential homes, young offenders or secure institutions or at boarding school.
- Children residing with parents or other relatives but for whom the state is their legal guardian.
- Children for whom the state no longer acts as legal guardian but who continue to receive interventions from the state because of the status of having been looked after – described in the UK as 'care leavers'.

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.

Social workers do not have the power to remove a child from their parent's care, unless this is ordered by the court or the parent or a carer with parental responsibility agree that their child should be removed.

In situations where the Children's Court determines a child cannot be returned to a parent's care and there is no other family who can look after them voluntarily, children may be placed in care.

Carers may be relatives or part of the child's network or may be unknown to the child.



### Children may enter care for all sorts of reasons

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. These experiences can leave children with complex emotional and mental health needs, which can increase their vulnerability to abuse.

Children who are looked after may have more emotional and mental health needs, as well as more behavioural difficulties than most children. Their difficulties usually start before they become looked after.

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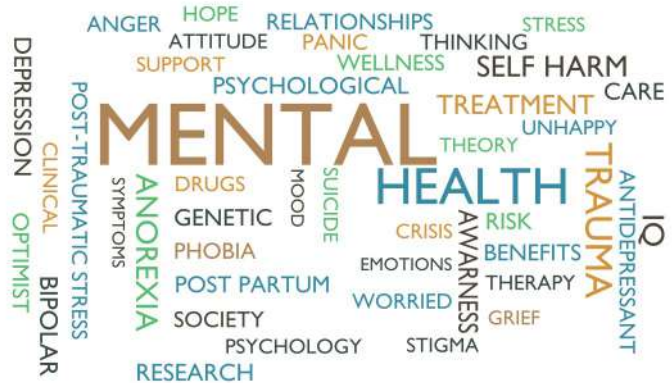
### Looked after children may experience multiple care placements

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.

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. The care system can struggle to provide effective management and interventions to address these problems.

The most common reason for a child to leave care is to return to their family.

Foster care is the most common placement type.



### Looked after children are more likely to go missing than their peers

Children may run away from care for all sorts of reasons. These include:

- 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.

### Useful websites

[NSPCC Learning: Looked after children](#)

[Children's Commissioner](#)

[Children's Commissioner Children in care: Supporting the wellbeing and aspirations of children in care, and supporting care leavers to achieve their full potential](#)

[Children's Commissioner: Teens in care and care leavers challenge perceptions and share successes on IMO](#)

[Become: The Charity for Children in Care and Young People](#)

[Hampshire CAMHS Children in Care](#)

[Three myths about being in foster care](#)