

Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending. Carl Bard

Your leaving care
Handbook

Strength doesn't come from what you can do, it comes from overcoming the things you once thought you couldn't. Rikki Rogers
If opportunity doesn't knock, build a door. Milton Berle
Never give up on a dream just because of the time it will take to accomplish it. The time will pass anyway. Earl Nightingale
Nothing is impossible; the word itself says I'm possible! Audrey Hepburn

Introduction

Whether you are just starting to prepare to leave care or have already left care, you will have lots of questions and important decisions to make along the way. There can be a lot to learn and find out about when you are leaving care so this handbook is designed to give you some practical information, tell you about the help and support you can expect, and the different options available.

“ Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful ”

Albert Schweitzer

Values

It is extremely important to Stoke-on-Trent Council that children and young people have the best start to life as possible, therefore Children and Young People's Services and Stoke-on-Trent City Council have a number of values and aims to help you to have a happy and successful life in Stoke-on-Trent.

The Pledge

In August 2012, "The Pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers" was launched. The pledge is a number of promises that Stoke-on-Trent Council have made to make sure that children and young people receive all the help and support they need to be the best they can be. You can request a copy of the pledge from your worker, Children in Care Council or the Virtual School Website. If you feel that a promise is not being kept you can speak to your worker, get in touch with an advocate or OutLoud Children in Care Council.

Making Stoke-on-Trent the best city for care leavers

In 2012 the Next Steps Team launched a campaign to make 'Stoke-on-Trent the best city for care leavers.' The Next Steps Team has already made some great changes to help improve the lives of young people leaving care. This includes;

- Financial support for young people living independently and doing an apprenticeship
- A full time careers adviser working with the Next Steps Team
- An independent living training flat
- An extra support service called "Stepping Up" to help young people leaving care
- A housing officer working with the Next Steps Team

Next Steps have been working with the Jobcentre Plus so that young people can now apply for benefits one month before leaving care (if entitled) so young people do not spend their 18 birthday claiming for benefits. Also there will be a contact person at each Jobcentre.

If you have any ideas about how leaving care services could be improved further please contact your worker, the service user involvement worker or join your Tune In care leavers group.

Mandate for Change

Stoke-on-Trent City Council is also working on a Mandate for Change.

The Mandate for Change has the following aims:

- Make Stoke-on-Trent the place to bring business
- Support and develop existing businesses
- Make Stoke-on-Trent a great working city
- Work with people to promote independence and healthy lives
- Make Stoke-on-Trent a great place to live

Stoke-on-Trent Council is committed to listening to the voices of young people and making positive changes because we want you to have the best future possible. Please get in touch with us if you have any ideas about the 'Mandate for Change'

What happens when I am 16?

When you are 16 years old, your social worker will arrange to meet you to help you to plan for your future. This plan is called a pathway plan and it replaces your care plan. Information that was included in your care plan will be included in your new pathway plan.



Needs Assessment and Pathway Plans

At your statutory review just before your 16th birthday, your social worker will discuss the plan to complete your needs assessment and pathway plan. Your needs assessment and your first pathway plan should be complete within three months of your statutory review. Your social worker will sit with you and possibly your carers to help you to complete a needs assessment. The needs assessment will be about your abilities, your achievements and about your needs now and in the future. You can ask your social worker for a copy of your needs assessment if you would like to read it.

Once your needs assessment is complete your social worker will start to write your pathway plan with you. To make sure your pathway plan includes all of your hopes and goals your social worker will talk to you, your carers and/ or parents, and to other important people in your life. You can say who you would like to be part of your pathway plan and who you would prefer not to be.

The education and training part of the Pathway Plan is called an EPP. This replaces your PEP and will make sure you have the right plan and support for education and training from the end of Y11 onwards. Your ETE key worker (who could be social worker, PA, carer - whoever is best to support you) will work with you to get this plan complete by September of Y12.

Your pathway plan will help you to think about and write down your plans for the future.

This will include:

- Health
- Education
- Identity
- Family and social relationships
- Emotional and behavioural development
- Self-care skills and presentation
- Finances
- Accommodation

Remember it's your plan

It is important that you take part in writing your pathway plan because it is your plan for the future. It will help you to think about what is important to you, what you want for yourself in the future and who is going to help you to achieve the things you want. The pathway plan will help you to set achievable goals with lots of support so you can get out of life what you really want.

Top Tip Make sure any agreements for support or help are written into your pathway plan and then you can refer back to it to make sure you get it.

Your social worker and/or personal adviser will help you to review your pathway plan every six months until you are 18 years old. This will help you to keep your plan up-to-date and to discuss any changes or support that you may need. You should always receive a copy of your pathway plan after every review.

When you are 17 years and 6 months old your social worker will introduce you to your personal adviser. A personal adviser is the person who will support you when you leave care and help you to review your pathway plan from 18 until you are 21 or 25.

What do I need to do to prepare for leaving care?

Independent Living Skills

There are many ways that you can help to prepare yourself for leaving care. One of the most important things about leaving care is knowing how to look after yourself. This know-how is often called independent living skills and includes:

- Budgeting
- Cleaning your home
- Health
- Accommodation
- Family and relationships
- Education, training and employment

When you meet your personal adviser you will be given an independent living skills handbook called 'Get ready for adult life.' This handbook will provide you with all the information on the skills and abilities you need to live independently. The handbook also provides you with activities and work sheets, so you can identify the areas you need to work on and practice your new skills.

You can ask your carer, worker or a volunteer to help you complete the handbook.

Top Tip Ask your carer if you can help with the food shopping, help to cook the family meals and find out how your carer manages the household finances including how they pay their bills.

Training Flat

There are lots of things you and your carer can do to help you prepare for the practical side of leaving care but it can be much harder to prepare emotionally.

Many young people worry about leaving care. They feel scared about living alone and are often quite afraid of feeling lonely. Don't be worried if you feel this way too, it is okay to feel worried and it is really important that you talk to someone you trust about any concerns you have and the way you are feeling.

To help you to practically and emotionally prepare to leave care we have set up a training flat.

You can ask to stay in the flat for a number of weeks. This will give you the chance to find out what it is really like living on your own. During this time you will be able to practise budgeting, cleaning and maintaining your daily routine without someone living with you. Support will be provided by your carer and workers and this will be agreed as part of your training flat support plan and pathway plan. Staying in the flat will help to identify anything that you may need help with before you leave care. This experience will help to build your confidence and make sure you are ready for living independently. For further details, ask your worker for an information pack.

What happens when I am 18 years old?

Once you are 18 years old, you legally become an adult. This means that you will no longer have a social worker and can no longer be in care. However, this does not mean you are on your own! To give you support and to help you to leave care there is a specialist team called the 'Next Steps Team.' This is the team where the personal advisers (PA's) work.

What does the Next Steps Team do?

Next Steps is a team of personal advisers who provide support to young people preparing to leave care and to young people who have left care. The team also includes a careers adviser, a housing officer and a service user involvement worker.

The careers adviser supports young people aged 16 and above with education, training and employment.

The housing officer supports young people with housing applications and any housing problems.

The service user involvement worker is a care leaver who supports young people to become involved in volunteering with the local authority to make services better for young people. The service user involvement worker also organises activities and events, and helps young people with education, training and employment.

The Next Steps Team also has a Practice Manager who supports the team day to day and a Principal Manager who oversees everything.

The level of leaving care support that you are entitled to depends on the amount of time that you have spent in care, how old you are and your plans for education and training. The Children (Leaving Care) Act (2000) describes four categories of children and young people, each of which has different entitlements under the law. These are eligible, relevant, former relevant and qualifying.

In April 2011 a new category of entitlement was created for young people who are care leavers aged 21-25 years old, known as 'former relevant pursuing education or training.'

You can then use the tables on the following page to find out which category you fit in to. Once you know which category you are, you can then find out your rights and entitlements. It's really important that you understand what support you are entitled to, but unfortunately it can be difficult to work out which category you fit into, but don't worry even professionals struggle to remember it all. If you're not quite sure, don't give up; ask your worker who will help you to understand it. Or visit Voice online at <http://www.voiceyp.org/young-peoples-zone/are-you-care-leaver>. Here you can complete a quick online survey which will help you to work out category you fit into.

Eligible

You are eligible;

- if you are 16 or 17 years old,
- have been in care for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14
- and are still in care on your 16th birthday and at least 24 hours after

Entitlement

You are entitled to;

- the full cost of your accommodation and living costs to be paid for by the local authority to your foster home or residential home
- a social worker and/ or a personal adviser
- a needs assessment
- a pathway plan and six monthly reviews
- an education pathway plan (EPP) and six monthly reviews
- advice and support
- statutory visits one every 6 weeks if you have just come into care and once every 3 months if you have been in care for a year or longer
- statutory reviews chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer every 6 months until you are 18
- an initial health assessment by a qualified medical practitioner, then a review health assessment every 12 months until you are 18

Relevant

You are relevant;

- if you are 16 or 17 years old,
- have been in care for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14
- and have left care after your 16th birthday

Entitlement

You are entitled to;

- the cost of your accommodation, paid directly from the local authority to the accommodation provider
- and living costs to be paid to you by the local authority called income maintenance payments
- a social worker and/ or a personal adviser
- a pathway plan and six monthly reviews
- an education pathway plan (EPP) and six monthly reviews
- assistance with education, training and employment
- advice and support
- Visits from your social worker /personal adviser within 7 days of you moving to a new property and then two every months
- financial support with equipment and costs for education and training

Former relevant

You are former relevant;

- if you are aged 18-21
- or up to 25 if continuing in further/higher education or training
- have previously been eligible or relevant , or both

Entitlement

You are entitled to;

- a personal adviser
- a pathway plan and six monthly reviews
- an education pathway plan (EPP) and six monthly reviews
- assistance with education, training and employment
- a leaving care grant
- advice and support
- Visits from your personal adviser within 7 days of you moving to a new property and then two every months
- financial support for equipment and costs for education
- a higher education bursary of £2000 if in higher education (University)
- vacation accommodation costs if in higher education or residential further education.
- Access to local health, dental and optician services

Former Relevant Pursuing Education or Training

You are former relevant young person pursuing education or training;

- if you are aged 21-25
- have previously been eligible or relevant and former relevant
- have told the local authority that you want to return to education or training

Entitlement

You are entitled to;

- an assessment for support and if this support is agreed, it may include;
- a personal adviser
- an education pathway plan (EPP) and six monthly reviews
- advice and support with education and training up to 25 years old.
- financial support with equipment and costs for education and training
- vacation accommodation costs if in higher education or residential further education.

Relevant

You are qualifying young person;

- if you are under 21 (or 25 if in education or training)
- have been looked after or accommodated in a variety of other settings such as custody
- or have returned home and stayed there for six months or more after your 16th birthday
- or if you are under a special guardianship order

Entitlement

You are entitled to;

- advice and support
- financial support if assessed as needed
- the local authority keeping in touch
- advice and support with education, training and employment
- advise and support with education and training up to 25 years old
- financial support with equipment and costs for education

What are my rights as a care leaver

Your rights and entitlements

What will my personal adviser (PA) do?

Your personal adviser will:

- Attend your last review meeting before you leave care.
- Support you to find you somewhere suitable to live
- Support you in setting up an income and to manage your money
- Visit you at your new home within 7 days of you moving to a new place.
- Visit you at home at least every two months
- Organise a pathway plan review meeting every 6 months.
- Work with you and others to make sure the plans in your pathway plan happen.
- Support you in looking after your health. This will include helping you to register with a Doctor and Dentist in the area that you live in and encourage you to have regular health assessments and dental checks.
- Make sure you receive advice and guidance about education, training and employment.
- Help you to learn the skills and knowledge that you need to live independently, making sure that you are paying your rent and bills and keeping your home clean.
- Help you to stay in touch with your family.

Careers adviser

The careers adviser is part of the Next Steps Team and works with young people aged 16-21 years old. The careers adviser can support you with the following things;

- Advice on education and training opportunities including college courses, training providers and apprenticeships.
- Support with application forms, interview skills and job searches.

You can ask your worker for an appointment with the careers adviser.

Staying in touch

The law says it's our duty to stay in touch with you until you are at least 21 years old. We want to give you all the help and support you need to be happy and settled but in order for us to help you, you need to do your part by keeping in touch. This means contacting us if you change your phone number or address and making sure you attend reviews and appointments. Being able to work together means better results for you.

Sometimes young people feel that they do not want any support after their 18th birthday. We don't recommend this as you may miss out on lots of help and support that you are entitled to. It's really important we stay in touch as we want to know that you are safe and well. So if you feel you don't want face to face contact we will respect your wishes but please call, e-mail or text to say you're well.

Stepping Up

Stepping Up helps to prepare and support young people leaving care. The service is run by Arch North Staffs and works in partnership with the Next Steps Team. Stepping Up can provide you with one to one support and help you with all sorts of things including;

- preparing for leaving care
- managing your money and bills
- support with finding or attending education, training and employment
- building confidence and self-esteem
- self-development programmes with the opportunity to gain qualifications

Speak to your worker or contact Stepping Up directly at steppingup@archnorthstaffs.org.uk or 01782 683735 / 01782 683753.

The Virtual School

The Virtual School is part of Stoke-on-Trent Local Authority education services and are responsible for making sure that children and young people in care and leaving care, aged between 0-25 years do well in education and training.

The Virtual School want to ensure that all children and young people receive excellent education and support to help them enjoy and achieve and find long term employment in the future.

The Virtual School Website - <http://tinyurl.com/d832sf2>

The virtual school website is a new website for children, young people, carers, parents and professionals. Online you can find all of the information included here and lots more, including up-to-date information about education, training and employment opportunities and links to other useful websites. You can check the website out at <http://tinyurl.com/d832sf2> and if you can't find what you are looking for speak to your worker or contact the service user involvement worker on 07717714056. We can then help to answer any questions you might have and add new information to the website.

Work Experience

The Local Authority is dedicated to offering opportunities for work experience and apprenticeships to young people in care and leaving care in every directorate of the Council.

So if you are struggling to find employment due to a lack of experience check out the information included under Education, Training and Employment section of the website about the different opportunities available within the Council.

Apprenticeships

Stoke on Trent City Council operates a successful Apprenticeship Scheme which offers apprenticeships to young people aged 16-24.

We offer an opportunity to study towards one of the below NVQ Level 2 subjects whilst gaining valuable on-the-job experience in a relevant department.

- Business Administration
- Children's Care, Learning & Development
- Activity Leader
- Exercise & Fitness
- Leisure Operations
- Horticulture

There are many benefits to being an apprentice with Stoke on Trent City Council, including;

- You will be employed on a 12 month contract and will work 37 hours per week.
- The current rate of pay for our apprenticeships is £100 per week.
- You will be entitled to 27 days holiday and 8 bank holidays per year.
- You will learn valuable skills and knowledge from experienced staff.
- We will provide support to help you apply for internal job vacancies.
- You will be allocated a mentor to support you in the workplace.

All of our apprenticeship vacancies are advertised on our main job's vacancies page at <http://www.stoke.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/jobs/apprenticeships/>.

For further information on any of the above apprenticeships please contact Katie Archer on 01782 238196 or Duncan Gilchrist on 01782 235583.

Accommodation - what happens when I am 16?

Being in Care

During the time you are in care you will usually live in one of three different types of accommodation. These are foster care, residential care or after your 16th birthday, supported accommodation if you, your social worker and carers think you are ready. When you are 16 or 17 you are not able to claim benefits so the local authority pays for your accommodation and living costs until you are 18 years old. The only 16 and 17 year olds in care that can claim income based benefits are young parents and disabled young people.

Foster Care

Foster care is where you go to live with people who will look after you as part of their family. Foster carers are adults who have been trained to care for children and young people. You may live with a foster carer for just a short time or until you are ready to leave care. Some young people stay in contact with their foster carers even when they have left care.

Residential Care

Residential care is where you go to live in a house or a larger building with other young people in care. There will be a team of professional staff that do not live at the residential home but work shifts there instead. You will usually have your own room and share living spaces such as the kitchen, lounge and laundry area with the staff and other young people. You may live in residential care for a short time or until you are 18 years old.

Supported/ Semi-independent Accommodation

You and your social worker may decide at 16 or 17 years old that you no longer want to live in foster care or residential care and you are ready to try living on your own in a ready kitted out flat or a house. Although you will be living alone or perhaps sharing with another young person, you will receive support from the housing provider support workers and your social worker or personal adviser.

If you decide to leave care at 16 or 17 years old and are subject to a care order, your social worker will continue to work with you until you are 18 years old. When you are 17 years and six months old you will have a personal adviser who will begin to support you too. If you were accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act (1989) when you came into care then you may not have a social worker but will then have a personal adviser from the Next Steps Team. You can ask your social worker for advice about what this means.

Remember that deciding to leave care early is a very big decision and you should give yourself plenty of time to think it through and ask advice from your carers, family and social worker. It may be that the people that support you might not think you are ready, so it is important to think about the areas you need to work on and then work towards improving them. The supported accommodation you go to live in will only be available until you turn 18 years old. Your social worker or personal adviser will help you to decide where you are going to live after you are 18.

“ Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time ”

Thomas A. Edison

Post 18 Accommodation Options

What happens when I am 18 years old?

Leaving Care

The main difference after you turn 18 is that the local authority will no longer continue to pay for your housing and living costs. Your personal adviser will help you to work out where your money will come from to pay for your accommodation and living costs. This could be from work, education grants and/or benefits (if you are entitled) and you are expected to claim these to help support yourself. Please see the section on money for more information.

On your 18th birthday you are legally an adult. This means that you will no longer be able to live in foster care, residential care or supported accommodation. By this point, you will have discussed with your carers, family and workers which accommodation option best suits your needs and your wishes for the future. This will be clearly written down in your pathway plan. To help you make this decision, we have included information about the different options below.

Suitable Accommodation

The government says that wherever you go to live after you leave care must be “suitable.” This means that the accommodation you are offered should meet your needs.

For example;

- It should be near to your education or work place, or close to main transport routes
- Has been checked by the local authority that the landlord or housing provider is suitable
- That the property meets health and safety regulations
- Takes into account your feelings and wishes, as far as reasonably practical.

If the Council has arranged your accommodation, they must review it after 28 days and at least every 3 months after that. Your PA must visit you within a week of you moving to your new accommodation and at least 2 months after that, including pathway plan reviews.

Independent Living

Independent living means living on your own in a rented property and having your own tenancy agreement. A tenancy agreement is contract between you and the landlord which gives both you and your landlord certain rights. For example, you have the right to occupy the property and the landlord has the right to receive rent to pay for letting the property to you.

You will be responsible for making sure that your rent is paid to the landlord and that you pay your utility bills such as your electric, gas, water, TV license and food.

Staying Put

Staying Put gives young people the option to stay with their foster carers, past their 18th birthday. This does not mean that you would stay in care because no one can be in care once they are adult at 18 years old. However ‘Staying Put’ means you can rent a room with your foster carer and pay your foster carer to cover your living costs. Young people usually stay with their foster carers for a short period of time after their 18th birthday and for a specific reason. For example, if you needed to improve your independent living skills or you want to finish your college course before you leave care, this may be an option for you.

It is important to remember that choosing to ‘Stay Put’ will have to be a decision made by both yourself and foster carer because ‘Staying Put’ means important changes for carers too. Your worker would also have to speak with their manager with the reasons that you would like to ‘Stay Put’ and get their managers’ agreement. You can find further information in the ‘Young People’s Guide to Staying Put’. If it is not suitable for you to stay with your foster carer then Supported Lodgings may be another option for you.

Supported Lodgings

Supported Lodgings are a bit like foster care. People and families in the community known as “hosts” offer to rent a room to a young person. Young people stay with their hosts for a short period of time to help them gain skills or confidence to move on to independent living. A plan of action will be discussed between you, your worker and host and this will be clearly written down in your pathway plan.

You would be responsible for paying your share of your living costs to your host. All agreements would be written down in a Supported Lodgings agreement.

Specialist Accommodation

Specialist accommodation is for young people who may have a disability or need support with mental health problems. The accommodation could be a self-contained flat with support available 24 hours a day. If this applies to you, your social worker and personal adviser will discuss the different types of specialist accommodation to help you find the best one for you.

Shared Accommodation

If you don't feel ready to live alone, there is the option of sharing accommodation with other young people. This means that you will have your own bedroom but share other living areas like the living room, kitchen and bathroom. You may just share with one person or a number of other young people. Shared housing includes a named support worker who will offer practical and emotional support whilst you are living there. If you think this might be an option for you, speak to your worker for more details.

North Staffs YMCA

The North Staffs YMCA Youth Campus is regarded as one of the best YMCA centres in the country. It has 36 brand new independent living quarters including four flats for young people with disabilities, four two-bed apartments and 28 single bed units, all with individual kitchens, living spaces and bathrooms for those who are ready to move on from the main accommodation. The youth campus also includes a new sports and activity centre, which provides learning and sports facilities for young people and the community. The YMCA is a great option for young people who do not wish to live alone and prefer to move into independence gradually, with lots of support.

“ Accept responsibility for your life. Know that it is you who will get you where you want to go, no one else ”

Les Brown

Going back to live with your family

Depending on the reasons why you came into care, you might consider returning to live with your mother, father or another member of your family when you leave care. If this is something you are considering it is important to talk to your social worker, personal adviser and the members of your family that you are planning to live with.

Don't forget that if you go back to live with your family there are different rules that apply to claiming benefits so you need to look into this first before making a final decision.

What happens if something goes wrong with my accommodation?

It is important that you discuss a back-up plan or a contingency plan with your personal adviser to make sure that if something goes wrong with your accommodation, you know where you can go to for help. For example if there is a flood in your home, is there anybody that you could stay with overnight?

Sometimes there are other problems with accommodation such as unpaid rent. It is important that you pay your rent regularly and if you are unable to pay your rent, you need to contact your landlord and get advice from your personal adviser straightaway. Do not ignore the problem as it will only get worse and it could mean you losing your home.

You also need to make sure that you look after your property and that you do not cause any nuisance to your neighbours. This means that you are responsible for making sure that there is no noise late at night and your garden is kept clean and tidy. It is also your job to make sure that anyone who visits you does not cause any nuisance because you will be held responsible. Sometimes it is hard for young people who are living alone as other young people will want to take advantage of you having your own place. You need to be strong and make sure that you only allow people who you know and trust into your home. If you have any problems you need to speak to your personal adviser as soon as possible.

Emergency Accommodation

If you do have any problems with your accommodation you need contact your personal adviser straightaway. Hopefully you will never lose your accommodation but if you do, you need to get into contact with your personal adviser.

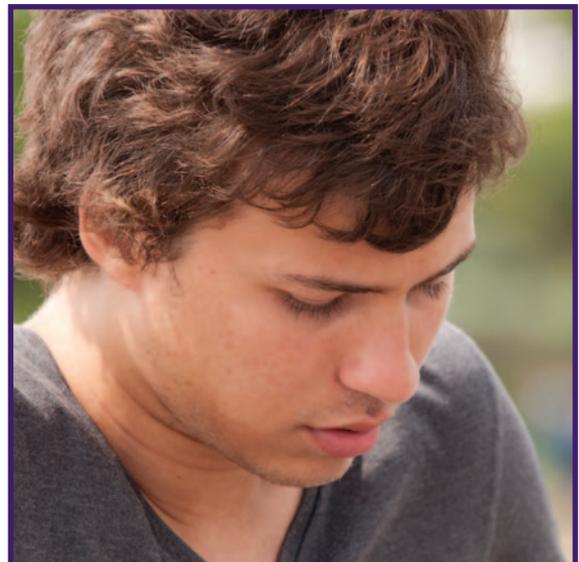
There are only a few options for emergency accommodation such as the YMCA and the Salvation Army. Even if you are homeless, you sometimes have to wait for an interview to get a bed so it's always a good idea to have a contingency plan such as a friend you can stop with.

Emergency Bed and Breakfast Accommodation

If you aged 16-17 and homeless, you may be offered the option of staying in a Bed and Breakfast.

The Government says that Bed and Breakfast is not suitable. If it's the only option in an emergency, you should be there for no longer than six weeks before the Local Authority finds you something better.

Bed and Breakfast will only be used as a last option when all other types of emergency accommodation have been tried.



Money

How will I buy my furniture and kitchen appliances for my home?

Leaving Care Grant

When you have your first unfurnished accommodation, the Next Steps Team will have an allowance for you called the 'Leaving Care Grant.' The leaving care grant is not given to you directly but your personal adviser will help you to choose the things that you want for your new home. Please remember that the leaving care grant can only pay for items you really need and it is important to have some left over in case anything breaks and you need help to replace it. You may not be able to get everything you want from your leaving care grant but you will be able to buy brand new white goods such as a cooker, washer and fridge, this means they will last you a long time if you look after them!

Top tip It's a good idea to save some money if you can before you leave care and then you can buy any extra bits that you may want.

If you go to live at University straight from care you will still be entitled to your Leaving Care Grant once you finish university and move to your own accommodation. However it is important that you keep in contact with your personal adviser because your support will stop once you have finished education. This means that if you have not been in touch with your worker they will immediately close your case at the end of your final term and not know that you want to access your leaving care grant. So make sure you keep your worker up-to-date with your plans and that they are written in your Pathway Plan.

Community Care Grant

If you are claiming benefits once you have left care such as Income Support, Income-based Employment Support Allowance, or Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, you may be able to apply for a Community Care Grant to help with the cost of setting up your home. How much you get depends on what it is that you need and how much Leaving Care Grant you have received. The Government are changing the way that community care grants are being paid so to make a claim check with your personal adviser about what you need to do.

How will I pay my rent and utility bills?

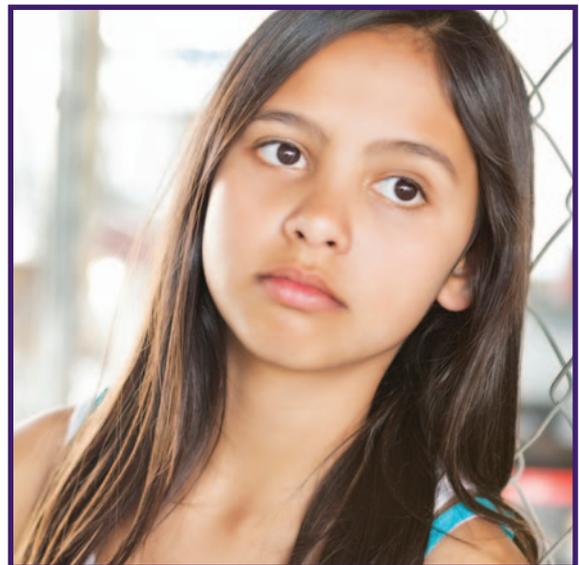
When you are 18 it will become your responsibility to pay for your own accommodation and living costs. How you do this depends on whether you are in education, working or looking for work.

Benefits

Depending on your circumstances when leaving care you may need to claim benefits to support yourself. Benefits can only be claimed when you are 18 years old unless you are a lone parent or sick or disabled. If you are entitled to claim for benefits your personal adviser will help you to apply for your benefits one month before your 18th birthday so you will receive your first payment on your 18th birthday. (Please note that this does not currently apply to income support)

Are you in further education?

If you are a care leaver aged 18 or over, living away from your family and are studying a full-time non-advanced education course, (up to and including A Level and equivalent) then you will be entitled to claim Income Support, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit on the grounds of being estranged from your family. You can enrol on a full-time course at any time up to your 21st birthday and can continue to receive these benefits until the end of your studies or the end of the academic year in which you become 21, whichever is earlier.



Financial Support for studying a further education course

The “16-19 bursary” is a guaranteed £1200 per year for all care leavers attending a further education college or a learning provider. The bursary is paid directly from your college or learning provider; they also decide how they will pay the bursary to you. For more details speak to your college or learning provider. The Department of Work and Pensions disregard the bursary which means that they do not include it as part of your income so it will not affect your benefits.

Older students may also seek financial support from the Discretionary Learner Support Fund. Speak to your college or learning provider for more information.

If you are a lone parent, sick or disabled young person, you can usually continue to claim income-based benefits such as Income support and Employment Support Allowance whilst attending full-time further education.

If you are a young parent under the age of 20 you can apply to “Care to Learn” to help with the cost of your child care whilst you are attending further education. You can find out more information about “Care to Learn” from your worker, Careers adviser or at www.gov.uk/care-to-learn/overview.

The local authority may also be able to provide you with financial assistance to support you with your education or training. Make sure that you discuss your plans for education and training with your social worker or personal adviser and that the agreed support is written down in your pathway plan.

Are you attending higher education?

If you are at university you will not usually be able to claim benefits unless you are a part time student on a low income, a parent or a disabled student.

Young people attending university can access student loans and grants from Student Finance. These are known as Tuition Fee Loans and Maintenance Loans. If you are not living with your family it is important to select the option which says ‘ you are estranged from your family’ when completing your student finance application forms as you might be entitled to further financial support such as a Maintenance Grant which is non-repayable.

You will be responsible for paying your own rent and living costs and will need to pay for these out of your Maintenance Loans and Grants.

When you are at university you are entitled to financial help from the local authority. You will receive a £2000 higher education bursary paid in three separate payments in your first year. You will also receive your vacation accommodation costs such as Christmas and the summer holidays. You can also ask for financial support with any equipment or books you may need.

If you are a care leaver there are also many bursaries to financially support you to go to University. The National Scholarship Scheme helps with fees, accommodation or cash and is managed by individual Universities. Check this out with the University you are planning to attend as some Universities give priority to care leavers and may offer bursaries or extra support.

It will be a good idea to get a part time job whilst you are at University because it will provide you with some extra money and give you valuable experience to add to your CV.

The Buttle UK Quality Mark for Care Leavers - www.buttleuk.org/

The Frank Buttle Quality Mark is a set standards created by a charity called Buttle UK. Colleges and Universities can sign up to achieve the Quality Mark to demonstrate their commitment to supporting young people in care and leaving care in further and higher education.

Each College and University who has the Quality Mark should provide;

- A named contact. This person will tell you what support the individual College or University can offer.
- Money. The College or University should advise you about available bursaries or any extra funding that you may be entitled to.
- Accommodation. If you need help with where you are living while attending education, there should be someone you can speak to.
- Support. Each College and University offers lots of support to young people who have been in care, this may include during the application stage as well as when you are studying. There should also be someone that you can talk to if you are worried or upset about anything. All you need to do is ask the named contact.

Students and Trainees Programme

Buttle UK also runs a grant programme which young people studying at further education and higher education can apply for to help with the costs of studying. You can find out more information about this on the Frank Buttle website www.buttleuk.org/.

Are you an Apprentice?

If you are undertaking an apprenticeship course, you will be classed as being employed. Most apprenticeship wages start at about £100 per week for the first year and then gradually increase. Being employed means you will not be able to claim an income based benefit such as income support, however you may qualify for benefit support with your rent and council tax if you are over the age of 18. If you are thinking about starting an apprenticeship, speak to your social worker or personal adviser to find out what support is available.

Are you in full-time or part-time employment?

If you have a full time job you will be financially responsible for paying your own rent, council tax and living costs. If you are on a low income you may be entitled to some support with your rent and council tax. You can seek advice from your personal adviser and local authority.

If you are working part-time or on a low income you may be entitled to an income based benefit, housing benefit and council tax benefit. Your personal adviser can help you with your budgeting skills to help you to get used to paying bills and managing your money.

Are you looking for work?

If you are unemployed and looking for work you may be entitled to claim Job Seekers Allowance (JSA).

When you are 16 and 17 years old the local authority is responsible for paying for your accommodation and living costs, therefore you are not entitled to claim benefits. If you are unemployed when you are 18 or over you are then entitled to apply for JSA.

In order to receive JSA you must be available for work and actively seeking work. If you are not available to attend job interviews, job centre courses or appointments at short notice, you could receive a sanction which means your JSA will be stopped. If you claim housing benefit too this will also be affected. If this applies to you, please contact your local job centre for more information.

You will be still eligible to claim JSA if you are working or studying for less than 16 hours per week but this will affect the amount you receive.

You can apply for JSA online at www.direct.gov.uk/jsaonline, by phoning 0800 055 6688 or ask at your local Job Centre for a paper form. Your personal adviser or support worker can help you to complete your application.



Housing Benefit

Housing benefit can help to pay for all or part of your rent depending on your circumstances. As a care leaver you can only claim Housing Benefit once you are 18 and over.

You may be eligible to claim housing benefit if you are studying a full-time or part-time education further education course, on a low wage like an apprenticeship or not working.

There are certain rules and regulations about claiming housing benefit and these are as follows;

- Care leavers aged 18-21 can claim housing benefit for one bedroom accommodation until the age of 22. If you think that you will still need to continue to claim Housing Benefit after your 22nd birthday then you will only be entitled to claim the amount for shared accommodation. This means that you will need to contribute to your rent should you be living in a 1 bedroom accommodation at 22 or consider moving to shared accommodation.
- If you live in private rented accommodation from a private landlord then housing benefit is called 'Local Housing Allowance (LHA).' Each local authority sets out how much LHA a person is entitled to claim. You need to check this out before renting your accommodation from a private landlord as private rent is more expensive than council housing.

You could be expected to contribute to your rent if you have more bedrooms than you need. You can check out how much LHA you can receive for the area you are considering living in by contacting the local authority that you live in, speaking to a benefit adviser or by visiting www.gov.co.uk. LHA is also paid directly to you and so you would be responsible for paying your landlord. If you think that this would be difficult for you, you can request that your LHA is paid directly to your landlord by explaining why you are unable to pay directly. Remember that if you don't pay your rent you could be evicted. You can always speak to your personal adviser who will help you decide which is the best option for you.

Bedroom Tax (under-occupancy reduction in Housing Benefit)

From April 2013 your Housing Benefit will be reduced if you are of working age (over 18 and under state pension age) and have more bedrooms than you are assessed as needing.

One bedroom will be allowed for:

- Each adult or couple living in the household
- Two children under the age of 16, of the same sex
- Two children under the age of 10, regardless of sex
- A carer who provides overnight care to a person with disabilities

How will this affect you?

If you have one more bedroom than the government thinks you need, you will lose 14% of your Housing Benefit.

If you have two or more bedrooms than the government thinks you need, you will lose 25% of your Housing Benefit.

Remember...

You will be responsible for paying the difference between your rent and the amount of housing benefit you receive.

How do I apply for Housing Benefit?

If you are making a claim for a benefit for job seekers allowance or employment and support allowance through the Jobcentre Plus they will help you to make a claim for housing benefit at the same time.

If you are not claiming any other benefit you will need to contact your local council to make an application for housing benefit.

If there is anything you are unsure about speak to your personal adviser and/or local authority.

Council Tax

Before April 2013 you were eligible to pay council tax when you were in employment or had savings over £16,000.

This meant that if you were unemployed, or sick you may have been eligible to receive full Council Tax benefit.

However from April 2013, there have been a number of changes to Council Tax benefit. The changes mean that if you are of working age and claim council tax benefit, you may not receive the full amount of benefit to cover your yearly Council Tax bill and will be expected to pay the difference.

You can seek further advice about this from your local housing benefit office and ask for support from your personal adviser.

If you are in full time education and living independently you are not eligible to pay council tax. You will need to provide evidence to your local authority by getting a certificate from your college or learning provider.

How do I apply for Council Tax Benefit?

If you are making a claim for a benefit like job seekers allowance or employment and support allowance through the job centre they will help you to make a claim for council tax benefit at the same time.

If you are not claiming any other benefit you will need to contact your local council to make an application for council tax benefit.

If there is anything you are unsure about speak to your personal adviser and/or local authority.

Top Tip From January 2010 you will not be charged for calls to 0800 benefit claim numbers from a mobile if your mobile contract is with 02, Orange, Tesco Mobile, Virgin Mobile or Vodafone.

Are you a parent?

If you are a parent there is support available to help you. You may be entitled to claim the following things;

Income Support

If you are 16 or 17, have a child and do not work, you may be eligible to claim income support. Income support can be claimed from 11 weeks before you are due to give birth. However if you are still at school or college you have to wait until your child is born before you can claim Income Support.

Sure Start Maternity Grant

A Sure Start Maternity Grant is a one-off payment of £500 to help to buy the things that you will need for your baby. You do not have to pay this back.

If you are employed full time or part time when you have your baby you could be entitled to 'statutory maternity pay' from your employer or 'maternity allowance' from the job centre. How much you receive will depend on the length of time you have been employed and how much money you have been earning. If you are unsure ask your personal adviser for advice.

Child Benefit

Child Benefit is a tax free payment that you can claim for your child as long as the child is living in the same household as you. You can claim this benefit no matter what age you are.

Child Tax Credits

You can claim child tax credits if you have a child. The lower your income is, the more tax credit you get. If you are employed you might also be entitled to Working Tax Credit too, which can help towards your childcare costs.

Healthy Start Vouchers

Healthy start vouchers are free and provided weekly. They can be used to buy liquid milk, infant formula or fresh fruit and vegetables.

Are you sick or disabled?

If you are a care leaver, aged 16-17 and are sick or disabled, you may be entitled to claim benefits.

Employment and Support Allowance

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) is a benefit for people who are sick or disabled and unable to go to work. You can claim ESA when you are 16 and 17 but you cannot claim housing benefit as your local authority is responsible for this until you are 18 years old. Once you are 18 you will then be able to claim for housing benefit if you need it.

How do I make a claim for ESA?

To claim ESA you will need to have a medical certificate, sometimes called a 'fit note' from your GP showing why you are not fit for work. You will also have to attend an assessment to see if you can work, unless your medical certificate states that you have a condition that exempts you from the assessment.

If you think this applies to you, find out more information from the Benefit Enquiry Line and speak to your carer or personal adviser who will support you in making a claim.

Disability Living Allowance (DLA)

If you need help with one or more of the following things you may be entitled to claim for Disability Living Allowance (DLA).

- help with personal care
- someone with you to make sure you are safe
- aged 16 or over and cannot cook a main meal without help due to sickness or a disability
- have difficulty walking
- have severe behavioural problems
- need support and someone with you when walking outdoors in unfamiliar places

You may be able to receive DLA even whilst you are working full-time or part-time but you must state that you are working in your application form or notify the authority if you are starting work.

You can claim DLA when you are under 16 and your DLA will be paid directly to an adult, but when you are 16 it can be paid to you. The amount you will receive will depend on what your needs are.

If you think this applies to you, find out more information from the Benefit Enquiry Line and speak to your carer or Personal Adviser who will support you in making a claim.

Please note from June 2013, all new claims for DLA will be replaced by a new benefit called Personal Independence Payment.

All existing claims for DSA will eventually change to PIP, however there is no automatic transfer. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) are contacting every individual who is receiving DSA with more information about the changes will affect claimants.

Currently, the government have no plans to change DLA for children under the age of 16.

“ Hardships often prepare ordinary people for an extraordinary destiny ”
C.S. Lewis

Personal Independence Payment (PIP)

Personal Independence Payment (PIP) started to replace Disability Living Allowance from April 2013 for people aged 16 – 24 with a health condition or disability.

To qualify for PIP, you must have a long-term health condition or disability and have difficulties with activities related to:

- daily living
- mobility

You must have had these difficulties for 3 months and expect them to last for at least 9 months.

Daily living difficulties

You may get the daily living component of PIP if you need help with things like:

- preparing or eating food
- washing and bathing
- dressing and undressing
- reading
- using the toilet
- communicating
- managing medicine and treatments
- making decisions about money

Mobility difficulties

You may get the mobility component of PIP if you need help with going out or moving around.

Making a claim

If you think this applies to you, find out more information from the Benefit Enquiry Line and speak to your carer or personal adviser who will support you in making a claim.

Health assessments

You may get a letter telling you to go for an assessment to work out the level of help you need. The letter explains why and where you must go.

DWP makes the decision about your claim based on the results of the assessment, your application and any supporting evidence you include.

Are you seeking Asylum?

Many young people who come into the UK on their own seeking asylum and that are looked after by their local authority get 'discretionary leave to remain' until they are 17 and a half years old. When 'discretionary leave to remain' expires it affects their rights to benefits.

To be able to claim benefits you will need to have been granted 'refugee status', 'humanitarian protection', 'discretionary leave' or 'indefinite leave'. If you have been granted one of these statuses, you will no longer be classed as an asylum seeker.

You must apply for an extension of discretionary leave to remain before it expires to be able to claim benefits. Talk to your personal adviser or benefit specialist for advice.

Remember only those qualified can give immigration advice!

Top Tip Don't forget if your circumstances change, for example if you start work or have a partner come to live you, you need to contact the Job Centre Plus and your local authority straightaway. If you don't, you could end up owing money or even worse get into trouble for benefit fraud.

The Benefit Welfare Reform - What is going to change?

Between October 2013 and April 2017 benefits such as income support, JSA, ESA, housing benefit, and tax credits are going to be replaced by one new benefit called 'Universal Credit'. This makes claiming benefits simpler because all of your money will come from one place. However, you will only get paid every 4 weeks and it will be your responsibility to make sure you pay all of your bills including rent and council tax. You will need to be able to budget your money to make it last until next time you get paid.

Health

You have the right to good health care to help you stay fit and healthy. A big part of staying healthy is eating a healthy diet and getting plenty of exercise. Occasionally you may become poorly or need some advice about a health issue so we have included some information below about how you can access health advice whilst you're in care and for when you have left care.

The Named Nurse for Looked After Children and Young People

The Named Nurse LAC/YP is a qualified registered nurse with a specialised degree in health visiting/public health, midwifery or school nursing.

The Named Nurse has further specialised experience with Children and Young People Looked After.

There are Named nurses for LAC/YP throughout England, Scotland and Wales. You can always access one in your area through your social worker.

The Named Nurse can offer you:

- Advice on health promotion services where you live.
- Help with Stopping Smoking, Drug and Alcohol misuse, Genito Urinary Medicine (GUM) Clinic, Contraception and Counselling.
- A health appointment at a venue suitable to you. E.g. Your home or a health clinic. Or a telephone consultation.

If you do have any concerns about your health, you can ask to speak to the Named Nurse for Looked After Children at any time by using the contact number at the back of this guide.

What is a health assessment and why do I need one?

While you are in care you will be invited to attend a health assessment once a year. This will either be with your School Nurse, GP or the Named Nurse for Looked After Children. The health assessment usually takes about one hour depending on your health needs.

A health assessment covers both your physical and emotional health. The doctor or nurse will talk to you about your health, how you are feeling and whether you have any problems or things that you are worried about. They can give you information on health services in the area you are living and assist you with accessing any health service if you are having a problem; all you need to do is call them on the number provided at the back of this guide. Your health assessment is there to help you stay fit and healthy, so there is no need to worry about it.

Top Tip You can get free prescriptions, glasses and dental treatment until the age of 18 so make sure you have regular appointments with the opticians and dentist as this may save you money in the future.

What are health questionnaires and why are they used?

When you are 16 and 17 you have the right to decline the offer of a health assessment, but this is not recommended because of your care status and the law, your Independent Reviewing Officer needs to know how your health is for your statutory review. It is your Independent Reviewing Officers job to make sure that you are receiving right support and care which includes your health. If you do decide that you do not want a health assessment then you will be offered either a telephone health consultation with the Named Nurse or asked to complete a health questionnaire instead. The questionnaire has questions about your physical and emotional health, your dental, and optician and GP registration appointments.

Telephone Health Consultation

- The Named Nurse will telephone you after gaining your permission from your social worker
- This will take approximately ten minutes
- All the information you give will be written into a health plan and you will get a copy along with your social worker, carer and GP.

Health Questionnaire

- The Named Nurse will get your permission to send you a questionnaire from your social worker.
- The Health Questionnaire will be posted to you at your current address.
- If you are living with a foster carer the Named Nurse will let them know that you have chosen to complete a questionnaire. You may want to ask your carer, social worker or personal adviser for help in completing the questionnaire, as they may have details about your doctor, dentist and optician.
- You will be asked to return the questionnaire to the Named Nurse in a stamped addressed envelope provided, ideally no longer than 5 weeks to return please!
- The Named Nurse will write your individual health plan that will inform your statutory review. Copies will be sent to your carer, social worker and GP.

What is a health plan?

After you have had a health assessment or have completed a health questionnaire, a health plan will be written with you to ensure that all of your health needs are identified, how they will be met and by whom. The health plan will be discussed at your review with your independent reviewing officer (IRO) and shared with your social worker, carer, GP and maybe your birth parents. This will be discussed with you first.

What support will I get with my health when I leave care?

When you leave care your personal adviser will help you to register with a GP and dentist. You will then be responsible for your own health. This means that you must book your own health appointments, make sure you eat healthily, get plenty of exercise and enough sleep. Being in bad health will have a serious impact on your happiness and the quality of your life, now and the future, so it is very important that you look after yourself. It is also important that you know when and how to seek help or advice from professionals if you are feeling unwell or worried about your health. There are lists of numbers at the back of this pack that will help you find what health service you need if you are feeling unwell.

After the age of 18 you may still be able to receive free prescriptions, glasses and dentistry if you are still in full time education or claiming benefits. To find out if you are eligible, you will need to speak to the health provider.

If you have a long term illness or disability which you need support with, your social worker and personal adviser will discuss it with you before you leave care and the planned support will be clearly written in your pathway plan.

What is a Health Booklet?

A health booklet is a record of your health. It will include;

- A quick reference page of what it means to be in care and who gives permission for sharing health information and treatment.
- A history of your health and health appointments
- Information on family illnesses
- A record of treatments and medication
- Your immunisation history
- Advice on common illnesses and tips for a healthy lifestyle
- Useful health service contact numbers and websites.

The health booklet will be kept by your carers whilst you are in care and will be given to you when you leave care. This means that you will have access to your medical history and can refer to it at any time and have all the useful health contacts you may need.

Healthy Relationships

Relationships can be full of fun, romance, excitement and intense feelings, but they can be painful and frustrating too. It's pretty rare for people to marry and live happily ever after with the first person they meet. Relationships can be difficult when you're young because you're still growing and changing every day. You might seem perfect for each other at the beginning but this may change. If this happens it may be a good idea to end the relationship as friends rather than stay in a relationship that's not right for you. Don't forget it's good to be choosy about who you let into your life and get close to!

Top Tips For a Healthy Relationship

- Respect
- Trust
- Honesty
- Support
- Separate identities
- Fairness/equality
- Good communication

Unhealthy Relationships

Not all relationships are healthy. Qualities like kindness and respect are must haves for a healthy relationship. It is really important that you look after yourself and your own happiness. If someone you're in a relationship or friendship with is making you feel bad, you need to change things. A relationship is unhealthy when it involves someone being mean to you or trying to control you, disrespecting you or abusing you.

Signs of an Unhealthy Relationship

Your partner or friend;

- Gets angry when you don't drop everything for them
- Criticises the way you dress or look, and say you will never be able to find anyone else who would date you or be your friend
- Stops you from seeing other friends or talking to anyone else
- Wants you to quit an activity, even though you love it
- Raises their hand when they are angry, like he or she is about to hit you or does hit you
- Tries to force you to go further sexually than you want to or do things that you don't want to
- Is offering you money, alcohol, drugs or gifts in return for sex
- Is asking to you to have sex with other people

It can be tempting to make excuses or misinterpret violence, possessiveness, or anger as an expression of love. But even if you know that the person hurting you loves you, it is not healthy. No one deserves to be hit, shoved, or forced into anything he or she doesn't want to do.

So if your partner or friend starts using verbal insults, nasty putdowns, hitting or slapping, or forces you into sexual activity, you must talk to your carer, social worker or personal adviser. Don't suffer in silence.

Helplines

- Get Connected – free confidential help for young people under the age of 25 experiencing abuse and violence. Freephone 0808 808 4994 or text for free to 80849 or visit <http://www.getconnected.org.uk/>
- Arch North Staffs Domestic Violence Helpline – Call 01782 205500 or visit www.archnorthstaffs.org.uk/

“If you are giving your all to someone and it's not enough, you are giving it to the wrong person”

Sexual health

Your sexual health is important because it can have an effect on many other parts of your life.

Sex should be an expression of love, not something a person feels that he or she must do. If a boyfriend or girlfriend truly loves you, he or she won't push or pressure you to do something you don't believe in or aren't ready for yet. Don't let anyone put you under pressure to have sex and always say no if you don't feel ready.

If you decide to put off having sex, it's okay, no matter what anyone says. Being a virgin is one of the things that proves you are in charge, and it shows that you are powerful enough to make your own decisions about your mind and body.

The thing about sex and relationships is that everyone is different and the important thing is that you're happy with the choices you are making. Nobody has the right to force you to do anything and you need to develop the skills and confidence to make sure that you are only having sex that doesn't harm you or your partner, physically or emotionally.

Sex and the Law

As a young person, you have rights and responsibilities when it comes to sex.

The age at which it is legal to have sex is called the age of consent. In the UK the age of consent is 16 years old for everyone, whether they have sex with someone of the same or opposite sex.

Remember that if you have sex with someone under the age of 16, even with their consent, you could get into trouble with the law. The age of consent is designed to protect young people from harm rather than prosecute them however when it comes to sex you need to act responsibly and make mature decisions.

Using Contraception

Using contraception, like condoms can help protect against unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (also known as STI's and STD's)

Using a condom during sex can help stop you getting an infection and it also reduces the chances of pregnancy. The contraceptive pill is also a popular method of contraception for women, but it gives no protection against infections so always use a condom.

If you want to talk to someone about having sex for the first time or contraception call Ask Brook on 0808 802 1234 or visit www.askbrook.org.uk/ - your call or enquiry will be kept confidential.

Need Contraception?

All contraception is free on the NHS in the UK. If you are not sure which type of contraception you want to use, it's a good idea to talk it through with someone you trust. You can pick up free contraception and get confidential advice on which method might be right for you from;

- Contraception and Sexual Health Services (CASH Clinic)
- A family planning clinic
- Your GP
- Your carer
- Named Nurse for Looked After Children
- School Nurse

Don't forget if you need help or support you can always speak to your carer, social worker or personal adviser.

Alcohol

The legal age to drink alcohol is 18 years old. If you are under 18 years old then it is illegal to buy alcoholic drinks from anywhere. It is also illegal to ask someone over 18 to buy alcohol for you.

Alcohol is a depressant, which means it slows the function of the central nervous system. Alcohol actually blocks some of the messages trying to get to the brain. This alters a person's perceptions, emotions, movement, vision, and hearing.

In very small amounts, alcohol can help a person feel more relaxed or less anxious. More alcohol causes greater changes in the brain, resulting in intoxication. People who have overused alcohol may stagger, lose their coordination, and slur their speech. They will probably be confused and disoriented. Depending on the person, intoxication can make someone very friendly and talkative or very aggressive and angry. Reaction times are slowed dramatically which is why people are told not to drink and drive. People who are intoxicated may think they're moving properly when they're not. They may act totally out of character.

When large amounts of alcohol are consumed in a short period of time, alcohol poisoning can result. Alcohol poisoning is exactly what it sounds like; the body has become poisoned by large amounts of alcohol. Violent vomiting is usually the first symptom of alcohol poisoning. Extreme sleepiness, unconsciousness, difficulty breathing, dangerously low blood sugar, seizures, and even death may result.

(<http://kidshealth.org/teen/>)

If you need any help or advice about alcohol then you can always talk to your carer, social worker, or personal adviser.

Smoking

Smokers may have started smoking because their friends did or because it seemed cool. But they keep on smoking because they became addicted to nicotine, one of the chemicals in cigarettes and smokeless tobacco.

If you're not a smoker but have thought about it, you shouldn't start. Many people start smoking because their friends and family smoke. Smoking can be hard to quit and you might think it looks cool or good but it doesn't. It stains your teeth with a yellowish-brown colour. It gives you bad breath and could cause all sorts of health problems.

When tobacco is smoked or chewed, nicotine goes straight into the bloodstream. It goes from the bloodstream straight to the brain within seconds. The nicotine is what our bodies become addicted to. Nicotine is a stimulant so it speeds up the nervous system and can make you feel like you have more energy. It also makes the heart beat faster and raises blood pressure. However when the effects wear off it can make you feel low until you have another cigarette. So the addiction starts! According to the experts, the younger you are when you start smoking, the more likely you are to become strongly addicted."

<http://kidshealth.org/teen/>

Smoking is also extremely expensive, you could be spending your money on better things such as driving lessons, day outs or clothes.

You can get more advice from your carer, social worker or personal adviser. You can also seek advice from;

- Visit the South Staffordshire website www.southstaffordshirepct.nhs.uk/services/quit/goSmokeFree
- Call 0800 0434304 or text 'Quit' to 60777
- Visit the North Staffordshire website www.northstaffordshire.nhs.uk/smoking

“ Take care of your body. It's the only place you have to live ”
Jim Rohn

Drugs

Drugs are illegal and can be incredibly unpredictable. The effects that drugs can really vary from one person to another.

Some drugs come in pill or tablet form, which are usually swallowed; some come in a powder form which can be snorted, smoked or injected, and some are in an herb or resin form which is usually smoked.

Depending on the drug, the effects vary greatly but most give the user a 'high' and it is this high that can become addictive. However, after every high there is a come-down and they can be very unpleasant. Drugs can also lead to life threatening diseases and death.

There are many reasons that you may begin taking drugs. The most common reason is peer pressure. You might find that if your friends take drugs they will put you under pressure to do the same. If this is the case then they are not good friends to have because they are trying to make you do something that is bad for you and that you do not want to do.

Some people use drugs because they are depressed or think drugs will help them to escape their problems. The truth is, drugs don't solve problems; they simply hide feelings and problems. When the drug wears off, the feelings and problems are still there and can possibly become worse!

Need some help?

Worried about drugs or want some information? You can call FRANK confidentially and for free from a landline, 24 hours a day on 0800 77 6600, or visit www.talktofrank.com. If you are deaf or hard of hearing, you can also use FRANK's text phone number which is 0800 917 8765.

FRANK offers a confidential, non-judgemental drugs advice, information and support about legal and illegal substances. The helpline is open to people of all ages.

You can now text FRANK anytime with a drugs-related question. It's completely confidential and you will receive a reply from a trained expert. Text your question to 82111.

Don't forget you can also talk to your carer, social worker or personal adviser.

Emotional Health

Life is full of ups and downs and just like physical health; needing help with your emotional health is something everyone is going to need at some time in their lives. Emotional health problems can cover lots of different feelings and problems from feeling depressed to other problems where you might need more help and support.

Remember, there are always people you can talk to if you need help. You could speak to your social worker, carer, personal adviser, nurse, as well as specialist charities, doctors and friends.

Asking for help and support is often the hardest step but remember there is nothing to be ashamed or embarrassed about. People offering support will not judge you for feeling depressed, they are there to support you. If however, you do feel you are not being listened to, don't give up – seek alternative support from your doctor (GP), named nurse, counsellor, helplines, friend, teacher or college tutor or a family member. It's your right to be listened to and supported.

Feeling Depressed?

Everyone gets sad or depressed at some time. You shouldn't feel ashamed or embarrassed about it as people sometimes feel depressed about something a long time after it has happened. Things that have happened a long time ago can still be upsetting years later, so there is no reason to feel like you should have 'gotten over it.'

You may feel depressed for reasons not linked to an event for example if you are under a lot of stress, or depression can run in families sometimes. There are different types of depression, however if you are feeling depressed for long periods of time you may want to talk to someone like your Carer, Social worker, Personal adviser, Named Nurse or Doctor.

Self-Harm and Self-Injury

Self-harm covers a wide range of things that people do to themselves in a deliberate and usually hidden way that cause harm.

This includes things like; cutting, hitting, drinking, smoking, addiction and taking excessive risks and self-injury.

Self-harm is often a way of coping with painful and difficult feelings and distress. Someone may harm themselves because they feel overwhelmed and don't know how else to deal with things. It is usually a very private issue and reasons vary from person to person.

Sometimes it can help to find things that distract you or to cope with how you are feeling. This could include drawing, writing, listening to music, or may be just creating a box with things inside that make you feel better.

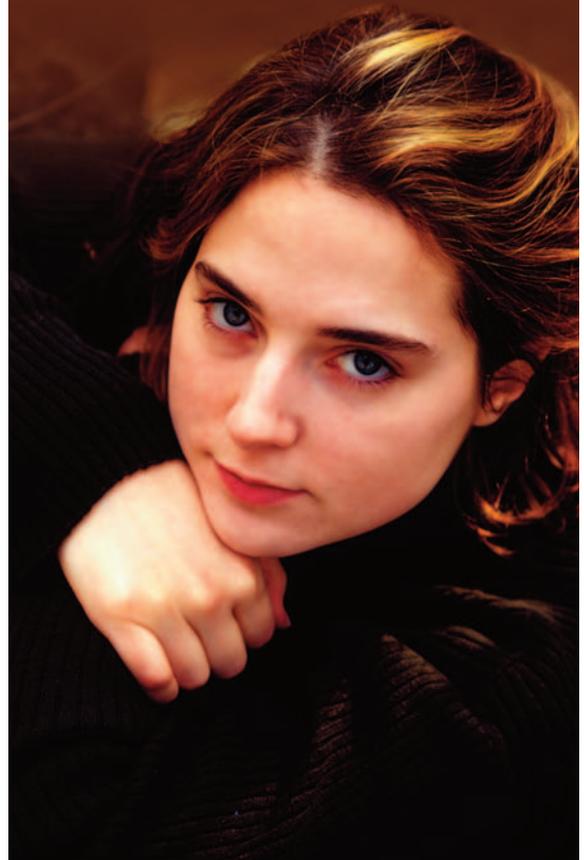
Self-injury is a deliberate, intentional injury to your own body that can cause death, damage or scars. This is done to cope with an overwhelming or distressing situation (and in some cases can lead to death).

Telling someone about self-harm can take courage, honesty, maturity, and trust. It's a healthy step that can lead to talking more about the things that stress you, receiving understanding and support. If you are worried about yourself or someone else, please speak to someone you can trust as soon as possible. There is a list of contacts and websites at the end of this guide.

Health Key Facts

- NHS Direct is a totally confidential telephone helpline that can help anyone out with virtually any health question 24 hours a day on 0845 4647 or visit www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk.
- You can go to a NHS Walk-in Centre, even if you have your own GP. Many universities run their own health service too, which makes it easier if you are away from home.
- Some GP's even run special clinics for young people. Everything you talk to your GP about is kept confidential.
- Depending on your circumstances, you might be able to get free or reduced fee treatment from opticians and dentists.
- In an emergency always call 999.
- All non-emergencies call 101.

“ We can do anything we want to do if we stick to it long enough ”
Helen Keller



Education, Training and Employment

Education is a top priority for young people in today's world and that is why we want to support you to stay in education for as long as you need and want to. There are many different options for learning once you leave school and it is important that you think about what you want to do in the future and what support you will need to get there.

Money is always a consideration when thinking about whether you want to go to college, start an apprenticeship, find a job or go to University. You can find out more about the different types of financial support you can get in the money section of this guide.

You can also check out the Virtual School Website which has been specially developed to provide you with the latest information about education, training and employment opportunities, and available support.

Education G.C.S.E's

G.C.S.E's are very important if you want to go on to start a further education course, study A-Levels or start an apprenticeship. We understand that doing well at school can be difficult when you have had had lots going on in your life and so we promise to ensure that you get a second chance to get the grades and education you deserve. You can study your G.C.S.E's again at a further education college or a Sixth Form College. You can always speak to the careers adviser from the Next Steps Team who will help you to consider your options.

If you decide to stay in education, support from your personal adviser and the local authority can continue until your 25th birthday.

Get a second chance at education

Recent changes in the law also mean that if you are a care leaver you can start a further education course anytime up until your 21st birthday and receive benefits to support you. Find out more in the finance section under further education.

PA to 25 (former relevant pursuing education or training)

If you are over the age of 21 you can contact the Next Steps Team to tell them that you have or would like to return to education or training. Your local authority will then complete an assessment to decide whether they can offer you support. The assessment will look at your current situation and what want kind of education or training you want to do. If you are unsure of exactly what you want to do, then the assessment can help you to decide.

There are a few things that you should think about before you contact the Next Steps Team as this will help them to decide what kind of support they can offer you. These include;

- Why you would like to return to education or training
- What are the requirements of the course or training you would like to do, if you know
- How you will help to financially support yourself
- What are your ambitions and what do you hope to achieve
- What are your long-term career goals

If your assessment is successful the Next Steps Team can support you to return to education in the following ways;

- allocate a Personal adviser (this may not be same PA that you had previously as they may be unavailable for numerous reasons)
- help you to write an education pathway plan which will record the support offered and by who
- may offer financial support but this only if the welfare of your education or training requires it.

Remember if you are offered support to return to education or training it is important to keep in touch with your PA as they are there to support you. You need to make sure that you tell them about any changes and let them know if you are struggling.

You can find the law relating to PA to 25 support under The Children Act 1989, Guidance and Regulations, Volume 3: Planning Transitions to Adulthood for Care Leavers.

Education Pathway Plan (EPP)

An Education Pathway Plan is like a Personal Education Plan (PEP) but for young people aged 16-21 years old. The plan has been created to provide you with quality support and advice to help you to achieve your goals in education, training and employment post 16. Your worker will arrange to meet with you to complete your EPP, usually at the same time as your Pathway Plan review. However if there is any change in your circumstances, for example, you change to a different course or college, or get a job, your EPP will be need to be reviewed as soon as possible to make sure you have receive the right support. If you are planning to change courses, colleges or are starting a new job, then it's a good idea to contact your worker right away. This will mean that your plan can be reviewed before you leave or start another course/job and you can get professional advice before you make any big decisions.

Training Providers

If you feel that attending further education in a college setting isn't for you then you may prefer to attend a training course with a training provider instead.

Training providers offer lots of different qualifications, from English and Maths, to more practical things like woodwork and mechanics.

If you think that a training course might be what you are looking for then contact the Next Steps Career Adviser who will be able to support you in finding the right course for you.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships offer you the opportunity to work and earn as well as gaining skills and qualifications. There are many apprenticeships available for young people aged 16-25 years old. The wage usually begins at £100 per week and gradually increases each year you continue if the option is available. You can check out the finances of an apprenticeship under the finance section of this guide.

The City of Stoke-on-Trent Council offers its own apprenticeship scheme offering opportunities in many different departments across the Council. You can find Council apprenticeship vacancies on the Stoke Council websites under the jobs section. You can also find other apprenticeship opportunities available in your area by visiting www.apprenticeships.org.uk.

Employment

Finding the right kind of employment that gives you enough money to live on and a career that you enjoy, is one of the most important things you can do to help yourself to have a happy and secure future.

Having the right qualifications will help you to achieve this, so it may be that you need to go back to college or attend a training provider. Information on the support available to do this is written in this guide.

As well as having the qualifications you also need to know where to look for jobs, have a CV, know how to complete applications forms and have good interview techniques that will guarantee that the job is yours. You can find advertisements for job vacancies in local and national newspapers, they are available to read in libraries as well as at your local Job Centre. Job vacancies are also advertised on many organisations websites including the Virtual School. You can improve your employability skills by attending an employability course with a training provider, by seeking support from your college or university or by speaking to the Next Steps Career Adviser.

“ Believe you can and you're halfway there ”
Theodore Roosevelt

Employment for asylum seekers and refugees

If you have refugee status, exceptional leave to remain in the UK, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave you can work in the UK as soon as the Home Office give you a positive decision. You will then need to apply for a National Insurance Number. If you are granted one of the above statuses then this includes the right to be able to study vocational training scheme. If you are unsure seek advice from your PA and the Home Office.

Volunteering

Sometimes it may be difficult to find employment even when you have the right qualifications, simply because you haven't got experience. One way of making sure you have the right experience and stand out from the rest of the crowd when applying for jobs is doing some volunteer work. You can dedicate a couple of hours a week whilst you are studying or whilst you are looking for a job. Working for free might seem like a pain at the time but it will soon pay off when you get the job you have always wanted. It will also help you to feel good about yourself and make a difference.

Check out the website www.volunteering.org.uk or if you have somewhere in mind, check their website and go and ask if they need any volunteers.

National Insurance Number

When you are 18 you will need a National Insurance Number to begin work or to claim benefits. You pay National Insurance Contributions to build your entitlement to benefits and the state pension. If you have not received your National Insurance Number by your 16th birthday, speak to your social worker or contact the National Insurance Registrations Helpline on 0845 915 7006 for advice.

National CitizenCard

Young people will often need photograph identity to open bank accounts and for education, training and employment purposes. If you do not have a valid passport when you are 18 years old, you can ask your worker to help you apply for a National CitizenCard.

The National Minimum Wage

Whether you are employed part-time, full-time or undertaking an apprenticeship you need to make sure that you are receiving at least the national minimum wage for your age. You can find out this information at www.direct.gov.co.uk or call the Minimum Wage Helpline on 0845 6000 678.

Tax Codes

When you are employed part time or full time you will be required to pay tax on your wages. This is usually taken from your wages by your employer before you receive them. You can check your pay slip to see how much you pay. When you start a new job it is important to make sure you are not paying too much or too little. You can find out more about this by speaking to your employer and by contacting the HM Revenues and Customs.

“ Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life ”

Participation

Have your say

All our services are focused on achieving the best outcomes for young people leaving care so it's really important that we listen to what you say about the services you receive from us.

There are many ways that you can get involved, including Tune In care leavers' group, the virtual school website and interview panels. You can also complete a complaint, compliment, comment form available online at www.stoke.gov/childrenscomplaints.

Tune In Care Leavers' Group

If you feel that things could be done better, have some ideas about how we could help care leavers or just want to find out more about what you're entitled to then Tune In care leavers' group can help.

Tune In, Care Leavers' Group is a group of young people aged 16-25 who are preparing to leave care or already have. Tune In meets once a month to discuss issues that are important to care leavers.

The group is held in a confidential place and everything that is said is kept confidential unless there is concern that a young person is at risk of serious harm, in which case we would talk to the young person about it first.

Tune In has a number of aims which include;

- Improving services for young people leaving care.
- Creating information booklets for leaving care and accessing further and higher education.
- Raising awareness of the needs of care leavers making the transition to adulthood.
- Providing feedback on issues that affect them such as education, employment and training, accommodation and external support services.
- Providing a support network for care leavers to share experiences and advice.

Tune In was established in 2011 and has had a big impact on the quality of leaving care services. So far Tune In's achievements include;

- Raising the leaving care grant
- Education Pathway Plans for young people leaving care
- This leaving care guide
- Writing and launching the Pledge

These are just a few of the differences that Tune In has made to the lives of young people leaving care. Being a member of Tune In can also help to improve your own skills, in writing, presenting, confidence, assertiveness and self-esteem. Tune In provides young people with valuable work experience too, so we can provide you with references to help you to get your dream college/university place or job.

If you would like to join Tune In, or would like more information you can contact the Service user involvement worker on 07717714056 or TuneIn@stoke.gov.uk.

Interview Panels

Another way that you can become involved in participation is becoming a member of our "Young People's Interview Panels."

Every person who comes for an interview with "Stoke-on-Trent Children and Young People's Services" must have an interview with a panel of young people. This is a very important role because you get to have a say and be part of the decision in who is employed to work with you.

Being a member of our interview panels' means that you will develop skills in interviewing, find out what employers are looking for and what makes a good interview. So if you are looking for a job and feel that you need to learn some interview technique skills, get in touch with the service user involvement worker on 07717714056.

Virtual School Website

The Virtual School Website has all of the up-to-date information on changes in services, entitlements, opportunities and consultations.

Every month we will ask your opinion on a different topic so you can let us know what you think, with just the click of one button. You can also join discussion boards to talk to other care leavers about any issues you might be experiencing and find useful links to other available support from different organisations. Check the website out at <http://tinyurl.com/d832sf2>

What happens when I am 21?

When you are 21 years old the support you receive from Children and Young People's Service will stop unless you are still in education or training. Hopefully by this time you will have learnt everything you need to know about living independently and will no longer need any support. However don't forget, if you decide you would like to return to education or training between the ages of 21-25 years old, you can ask Children and Young People's Services for an assessment for support whilst you are in education.

Farewell Meetings

Just before your 21st birthday you will be invited to a farewell meeting with your personal adviser and/or practice manager of the Next Steps Team. This is just an informal get together to give you the opportunity to give feedback about your time in care, to make sure you are aware about the support for young people aged 21 -25 returning to education or training and to say goodbye. If you don't want to attend your farewell meeting, you can complete an online questionnaire on the Virtual School Website or request that one is sent in the post.

We wish you all the best for the future.

Access to Care Records

If you have been in the care of the Local Authority then the Data Protection Act gives you the right to view your records. You do not have to give a reason why you want to view your files and can't be denied access if you don't want to disclose your reason. You are likely to be offered guidance by a social worker about accessing your records but you do not have to be seen by a social worker if you do not want to before or during access. It can be helpful though to have such assistance as it can provide emotional support and help to explain things that may be difficult to understand in the records.

To apply for access your records you need to contact the department who manage access to records in the Local Authority area(s) you were in the care of. It is likely that the Local Authority you were last in care with will have those records stored. You will need to put this request in writing and usually Local Authorities have documents designed for this purpose. This written request starts the process off and in all the timescale is 40 days for the Local Authority to respond to your written request once received. Some authorities may charge a fee of £10 for this service depending upon the age you are when you apply to view your records.

While for many young people accessing their records can be a very positive and uplifting exercise it can also be a daunting and emotional experience. Undertaking the task can begin to offer explanations about your life in care and help you to put your past and present circumstances into perspective.

“ Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending ”

Carl Bard

Who can help me?

NYAS Advocacy Service

NYAS is a UK charity providing socio-legal services. They offer information, advice, advocacy and legal representation to children, young people and vulnerable adults through a network of dedicated paid workers and volunteers throughout England and Wales.

NYAS provides specialist legal advice and assistance.

Through these services NYAS provides a safety net for children, young people and vulnerable adults, who have nowhere else to turn. NYAS work within communities across the UK, with children, with young people, with adults, and with carers, local authorities and professionals such as social workers and lawyers.

NYAS are independent and confidential as long as you are safe.

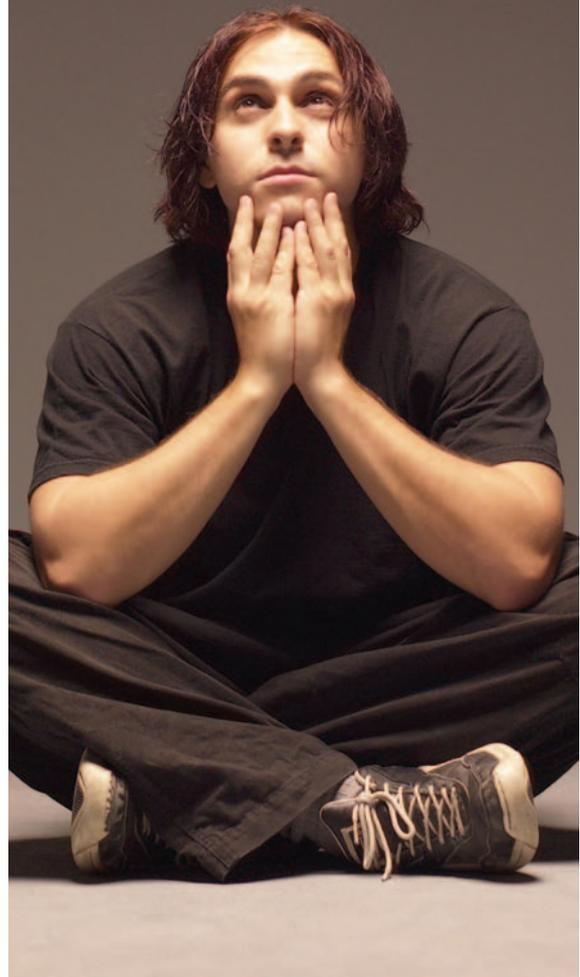
NYAS can help if you are:

- Not being listened to
- In need of some advice
- In need of help to talk to Social Services
- Aren't being treated fairly
- Being told you have to move
- Having difficulties about school
- Not having the contact with your family that you want
- Homeless
- A vulnerable adult who is disabled
- A carer
- Experiencing the separation or divorce of your parents
- Not feeling safe

If you are a child or young person, or you're acting on behalf of a child, young person or vulnerable adult and need help, information or advice, please contact the NYAS helpline on FREEPHONE 0300 330 3131 or send an email to help@nyas.net

**“ I am
always
doing that
which I
cannot do,
in order
that I may
learn how
to do it ”**

Pablo Picasso



Useful numbers and websites

The Next Steps Team

Duty Number: 01782 233575

Careers adviser: 07881332759 (text messaging only)

Service user involvement worker: 01782 235458 / 07717714056

Health

- Named Nurse for Looked After Children: 01889 571368
- NHS Direct is a totally confidential telephone helpline that can help anyone out with virtually any health question 24 hours a day on 0845 4647 or visit www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk.
- Teens Health <http://teenshealth.org/teen/>
- FLSH - Feel Like Self Harm
Support for young people who feel the need to self-harm. By texting FLSH to the service the sender receives back a text message with a suggestion for something else to do that might help beat the feeling to cut. Messages have been provided by young people who do harm themselves as being helpful. No charge to receive a text, the sender pays usual charge to send text from their phone.
Text FLSH to 077 66 36 33 90.
Email: q2a@whatnow.lancscc.gov.uk
Website www.q2a.co.uk
- National Self Harm Network
Survivor led organisation that campaigns for the rights and understanding of people who self-harm. The service provides support and understanding to people who self-harm and an online support forum.
Email: info@nshn.co.uk
Website www.nshn.co.uk
Address: PO Box 7624, Nottingham, NG1 6WJ

Sexual Health

- Help and advice about sexual health matters, such as contraception, pregnancy or sexual assault www.nhs.uk/sexualhealth/
- Ask Brook on 0808 802 1234 or visit www.askbrook.org.uk/

Mental Health

- North Staffs Changes YP
Changes can help with any type of mental distress and any issues that impact upon your mental well-being, whether it be exam stress, bullying, family issues, drug use etc.
For further information call 01782 413355, e-mail yp@changes.org.uk or visit www.changes.org.uk/
- Dove Service
The Dove Service offers counselling and support to all those affected by bereavement, life-changing illness and significant loss.
Call 01782 683155 or visit www.thedoveservice.org.uk/
- Savana
Savana is an organisation that offers support services and information to anyone who has encountered or experienced any form of sexual assault or violence at some point in their lives.
Call 01782 221000 (24 hour message line), e-mail info@savana.org.uk or visit <http://www.savana.org.uk>
- Childline
Childline is a free confidential service for young people who need to talk. Call free on 0800 1111 or visit <http://www.childline.org.uk/>

Smoking

- Visit the South Staffordshire website www.southstaffordshirepct.nhs.uk/services/quit/goSmokeFree
- Call 0800 0434304 or text 'Quit' to 60777
- Visit the North Staffordshire website www.northstaffordshire.nhs.uk/smoking

Alcohol and Drugs

- Talk to Frank. You can call FRANK confidentially and for free from a landline, 24 hours a day on 0800 77 6600, or visit www.talktofrank.com. If you are deaf or hard of hearing, you can also use FRANK's text phone number which is 0800 917 8765. You can now text FRANK anytime with a drugs-related question. It's completely confidential and you will receive a reply from a trained expert. Text your question to 82111.

Alcohol and Drugs (cont)

- **Wise Up! Arch North Staffs**
Wise Up! is a programme that provides support and assistance to young people who are drinking excessively. The service will be flexibly delivered through 1:1 support, discovering and exploring alternatives to alcohol, diversionary activities, building positive relationships, support networks, and, through a series of workshops, customers will be given the knowledge and skills to 'get wise and stay wise'.
Telephone - 01782 683758
Fax - 01782 208622
Email - keith.whalley@archnorthstaffs.org.uk

Domestic Violence

- **Get Connected** – free confidential help for young people under the age of 25 experiencing abuse and violence. Freephone 0808 808 4994 or text for free to 80849 or visit www.getconnected.org.uk/
- **National Domestic Violence Helpline.** The Freephone 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline is a national service for women experiencing domestic violence, their family, friends, colleagues and others calling on their behalf. Call 0808 2000 247 or visit www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk
- **Arch North Staffs Domestic Violence Helpline**
Call 01782 205500 or visit www.archnorthstaffs.org.uk/

Being in care and leaving care

- **Stepping up.** *Stepping Up is a new service to help prepare and support young people leaving care. The service is run Arch North Staffs but works in partnership with the Next Steps Team. Stepping Up can provide you with one to one support and help you with all sorts of things. Speak to your worker or contact Stepping Up directly at steppingup@archnorthstaffs.org.uk or 01782 683735 / 01782 683753.*
- **NCAS - National Care Advisory Service.** *Information and advice about being in care and leaving care. Free advice and enquiry line. Visit www.leavingcare.org or register your enquiry by phone in 020 7336 4846 or by e-mailing ncas@catch-22.org.uk*
- **Who Cares Trust** *is a voice for children and young people in care. Everything they do is designed to improve the day to day experience of children and young people in care and their future lives. Visit www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/*

- **Who Cares Town.** Visit the Who Cares Town for information on being in care and leaving care. www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/who-cares-town/
- **Rights 4 me** is the official website for the Office for the Children's Rights Director for England (OCD). They spend lots of time listening to what children and young people who live away from home have to say about how they are looked after. If you live away from home then this is the place to find out about your RIGHTS and a way for you to BE HEARD! Visit www.rights4me.org/.
- **Get Ready for Adult Life** is an online resource which can help you to learn the skills you need for independent living. Check it out at www.getreadyforadulthood.org/

Are you disabled and looking for work?

- **Shaw Trust**
Shaw Trust supports thousands of disabled and disadvantaged people across the UK to achieve their personal development and employment aims.
Free helpline; 0800 085 1001
Email: stir@shawtrust.org.uk or visit www.shaw-trust.org.uk

Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities

- If you are disabled you can receive specialist help with finding employment. Contact 'Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities' which is a national charity helping all people with disabilities and medical conditions find and retain work.
53 New Broad Street, London, EC2M 1SL.
Telephone: 020 7448 5420 (voice),
020 7374 6684 (text)
Email: info@eopps.org or visit www.opportunities.org.uk

Employment for asylum seekers and refugees

If you have refugee status, exceptional leave to remain in the UK, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave you can work in the UK as soon as the Home Office give you a positive decision. You will then need to apply for a National Insurance Number. If you are granted one of the above statuses then this includes the right to be able to study vocational training scheme. If you are unsure seek advice from your PA and the Home Office.

7 rules in life

- 1 Make peace with your past so it doesn't spoil your present. The past does not define you and your future - your actions and beliefs do.
- 2 What others think of you is none of your business. It's how much you value yourself and how important you think you are.
- 3 Time heals almost everything, give time, time. Pain will be less hurting, Scars make us who we are, they explain our life and why we are the way we are. They challenge us and force us to be stronger.
- 4 No-one else can make you happy except for yourself. Waste no time and effort searching for peace and contentment and joy in the world outside.
- 5 Don't compare your life with others, you have no idea what their journey is all about. If we threw our problems in a pile and saw everyone else's, we would grab ours back as fast as we could.
- 6 Stop thinking too much, it's alright not to know all of the answers. Sometimes there is no answer, not going to be an answer, never has been an answer. That's the answer! Just accept it, move on, NEXT.
- 7 Smile, you don't own all the problems in the world. A smile can brighten the darkest day and make life more beautiful. It is a potential curve to turn a life around and set everything straight.