



Young People's Guide to Advice and Assistance for Individual Children and Young People



Office of the Children's Rights Director
Ofsted
Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

Freephone : 0800 528 0731 www.rights4me.org



Some Questions You May Have ...

What is this about?

This is a guide for children and young people to explain what the Children's Rights Director and his team do to advise and assist individual children and young people. We hope it helps you to know what sorts of things to call us about and what sort of help we can give.

Who can contact you for advice and assistance?

The children and young people who can contact us are those who are living away from home or living at home with support. Care leavers can contact us up to the age of 21, or 24 if they are in higher education.

Sometimes adults call us on behalf of individual children. These can include foster carers, advocates, local children's rights officers, independent reviewing officers (IRO), children's home staff, independent visitors, siblings, MP's, Ofsted inspectors. We will give them advice but wherever possible we like to speak with you directly to hear what your views are. This is your choice.

How can I contact you if I need to?

You can contact us on the Helpline Number: 0800 528 0731 (this is free if you call from a landline) or email us from our website: www.rights4me.org

How soon will you get back to me?

We aim to get back to you within 2 working days.

What sorts of things do children and young people contact you about?

Here are a few examples:

- My social worker says I have to move placement but no-one's listening to me about what I want. I don't think it's the best thing for me. I want to stay where I am. What can I do?
- I don't feel safe when I have contact with my family.
- I'm worried that my friend is being bullied in his boarding house.
- I'm a care leaver and I've got a place at Uni. My Local Authority says I'm not entitled to any money to help me. What are the rules about this?
- I'm leaving care but I haven't got a pathway plan and don't know what support I'm entitled to. What help should I be getting?
- I live in a children's home and I don't think I'm getting the pocket money I should do.

- I'm in care but I'm not allowed to see my brothers and sisters who are still living at home.
- I've had to move placement. Everyone's arguing about who should pay for my education so I don't go to school. This is my future.
- I've been in care for a long time and done really well at school. I can't apply to go to University because my immigration status hasn't been sorted out yet.
- I want to change my social worker. Is this allowed?

There are lots of other things we get called about too, so please don't think you can only call us if your concern is on this list!

What can you do to help?

- We can tell you what your legal rights are about the problem you tell us about.
- If these rights are not being given then we can help you to get an advocate.
- We can advise you about the right to make a formal complaint to the relevant organisation and how this works.
- We can advise you of the right to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman. This can be used if you are unhappy with the way the complaint has been handled by the Local Authority and you want to take matters further. This is a free, independent service that investigates complaints against councils. You can complain to the ombudsman at any time but they will only usually investigate if you have already been through the Local Authorities own complaints procedure.
- We can make a referral to other organisations to ask them for help with your situation. We'd only do this with your agreement. Some examples of these include:
 - Legal Services for free legal advice and representation
 - The UK Borders Agency
 - Local Children's Rights Officers and Advocates
 - Ofsted – to request an unannounced inspection visit of a particular setting or agency (when it looks like they are not keeping to the rules and it's badly affecting the service you get)
 - In some cases we may decide to refer to, or inform, the Department for Education (DfE) where the concern may affect a lot of other children too.
- If you say something which makes us think there is a real risk to your safety or someone else's safety, we will of course need to pass that on to someone who can sort that out for you.
- In some cases we can send a letter to the Director of Children's Services of your Local Authority, telling them about your concerns,

what your wishes and feeling are, asking them to investigate this and then to report back to us.

How many children have you helped?

We help over 400 children and young people each year. The children that have asked us for help have been mainly from children's homes, foster care and care leavers. We have had a small number of requests for advice and assistance from young people living at home with support and from boarders from Boarding Schools and Residential Special Schools.

What has changed for the children and young people who have contacted you for help?

Here are a few examples:

- Following our advice children have been able to challenge decisions or situations where they have not been given their legal rights.
- Local Authorities have visited and spoken with children to find out how safe and well they are.
- Local Authorities have delayed or stopped proposed placement moves.
- Young people have been given an apology from the Local Authority.
- Children and young people have got an independent advocate to support them, for example to make a complaint.
- Children have been granted legal representation to challenge decisions made about them, such as a proposed move of placement.
- Young people have received an update on their immigration application and status from the UK Borders Agency.
- Inspections have been undertaken to investigate the complaints about children's homes where they may not be meeting the national minimum standards.
- Local Authorities have granted Higher Education funding
- Pathway plans have been provided and reviewed and support been given to care leavers
- Local Authorities have changed the child's social worker
- Local Authorities have found suitable education for children and young people
- Privacy has improved for under 18 year old students in an FE College. The Manager said they would ensure staff will now knock on doors and wait for an answer before entering.

We hope this has been helpful but if there's anything you want to ask about it then please send us an email or give us a call.

If there are questions you'd like us to answer, to put on the Q&A page of this website then let us know. This could help other children and young people as well as you!

Some other Useful Contacts:

Care Leavers' Association - 0161 275 9500 website: www.careleavers.com

ChildLine - To get help and advice about a wide range of issues or talk to a counsellor online: 0800 1111 website: www.childline.org.uk

Coram Children's Legal Centre - Free legal advice: 0808 020 008
www.childrenslegalcentre.com

National Care Advisory Service (NCAS) This is part of the 'Catch 22' organisation. Advice support for care leavers 16-25 year olds: 020 7336 4824
Email: ncas@catch-22.org.uk website: www.leavingcare.org

National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) Legal Services: 01376
310640

The Who Cares Trust: 020 7251 3123 mailbox@thewhocarestrust.org.uk

VOICE – A children's advocacy organisation for looked after children and care leavers. Free phone: 0808 800 5792 website: www.voiceyp.org

REMEMBER:

You can also ask your local children's rights or advocacy team for advice and assistance.