



Department
for Education

An illustrated guide to the

Children's Social Care National Framework



For children and young people

March 2026

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About this guide

‘Children’s social care’ refers to the different kinds of support that children, young people and their families receive from their local authorities when they need extra help. Your local authority is the organisation who provides for the people in your local area, and they can support you.

Every day there are 400,000 children and young people, like you, who receive children’s social care support, that’s around 1 child in every classroom in England. Proper support can change all these people’s lives, and yours, but only if everyone knows what good quality children’s social care looks like.

To bring everyone together, the Department for Education created the ‘**Children’s Social Care National Framework**’.

It tells everyone involved in providing support what children’s social care is supposed to achieve and how it should work. The purpose of the National Framework is to clearly explain what you should expect from the help and care you receive.

This guide will tell you what the National Framework will mean for you and how it puts your wishes at the heart of the children’s social care system. You should use it to compare your current support to how it is described here. That way, you can be sure the support you get is good enough, and you can speak out if you don’t think it is.



The purpose of children's social care

It is important to take a moment to tell you what the purpose of children's social care is. This is so you can understand the shared goal of everyone who works in this area. In the National Framework, it says the purpose is to:

“...support children, young people and families by addressing problems early, intervening decisively when there is likelihood of harm and to provide care for those who need it so that they grow up to achieve and thrive with safety, stability and love.”

What this means, in simpler terms, is to be there for you, so that you can be safe, and so you can grow up to be healthy and happy.



The principles of children's social care

People working in children's social care should follow 6 principles when they work with you. You can think of these principles as things that everyone who works in children's social care believes. They are that:

- children's welfare is the most important thing of all
- children are asked about their wishes, and they are listened to and responded to
- children's social care works with whole families
- children are raised by their families, with their family networks or in family environments wherever possible
- local councils work with other people to understand what children, young people and their families need
- local councils are committed to acting fairly for everyone



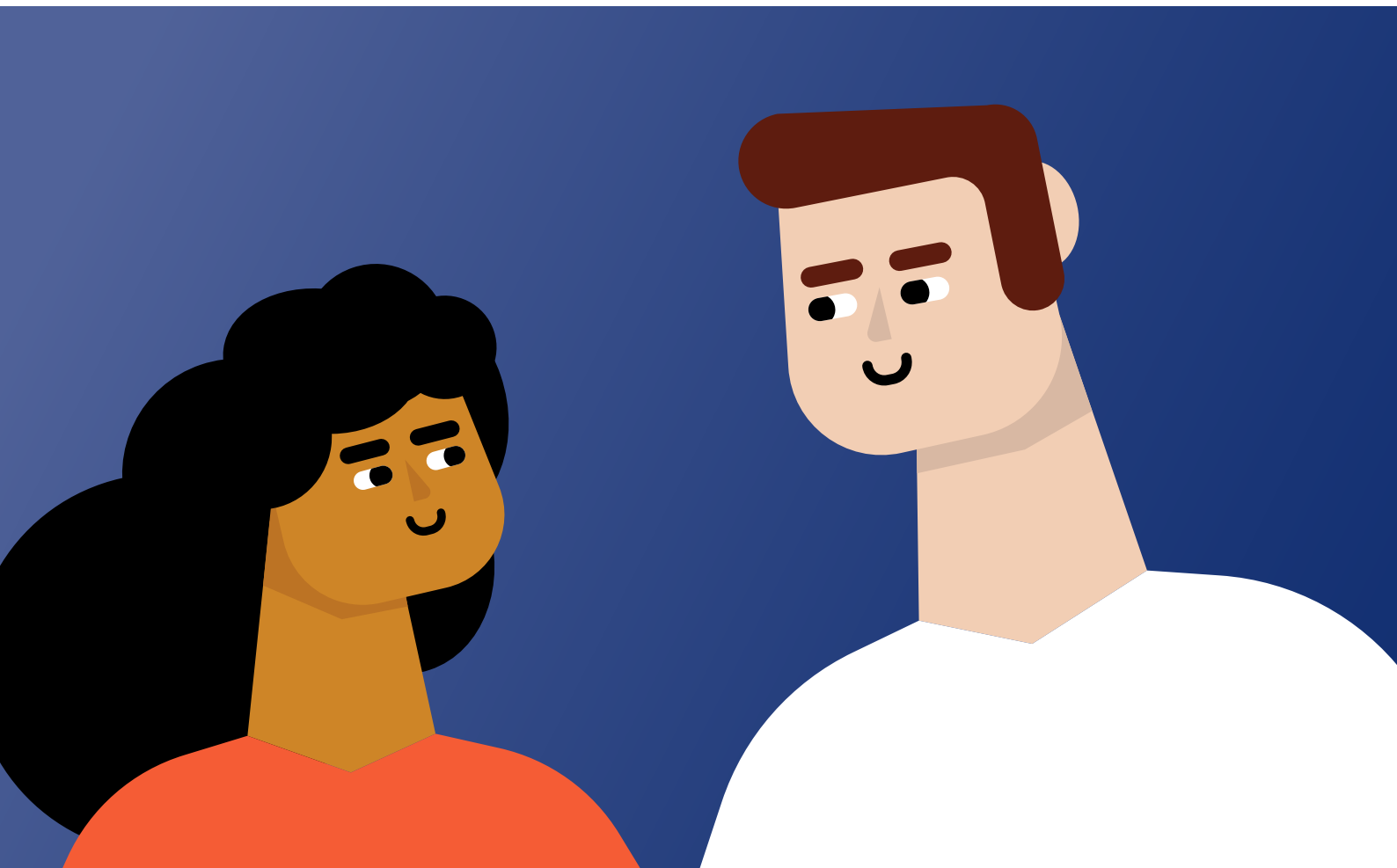
These principles inform everything that children's social care hopes to achieve. But they particularly contribute to 4 things the National Framework focuses on, called 'outcomes':

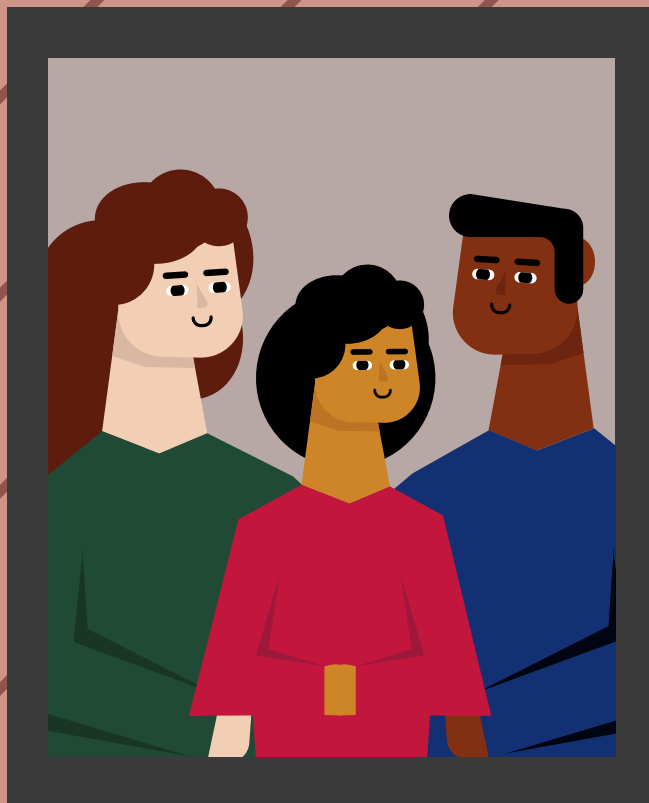
- your family staying together, and you being able to stay with them when it is safe
- being safe
- being supported by your family and family network
- being able to live in a loving home

These are the areas of your life that children's social care is there to help you with the most. The system is designed so that the focus is on family because families can often provide the best support for their children.

However, it is not always the case that children can stay with their own family. When this happens, children's social care is there to find them a loving home somewhere else. In all cases, the safety of children is the most important thing.

The rest of this guide will explain what the National Framework means for you in terms of these 4 outcomes.





outcome 1

Children's social care will help your family stay together

Your council will help your family stay together, and give them support so they can look after you wherever it is safe to do so.

Children's social care works with parents and family members to help them cope with any difficulties they face. Children's social care is committed to keeping children and young people within their family

wherever it is safe and appropriate to do so. This is so that the important people in your life are in the best position to provide you with safety, stability, and love.

What this means for you

- Your views **will be heard**, whatever your age or how you best communicate with others, and those supporting you will do their best to understand your perspective.
- You and your family **will be listened to** by everyone who works with you, so practitioners can understand how to design services that work properly. Practitioners are the people who work with you to give you support and keep you safe.
- You will be **supported to understand** how children's social care works, and your family will be helped to access the right support at the right time.
- If you have a disability, you and your family will be **supported to make decisions** about the help you receive.
- Your parents' views will form part of the plan **to keep you safe**.
- You will be encouraged to **share your wishes and feelings** separately from other people in your life.
- Your culture will **be respected**, and discrimination will always be challenged.
- Your family will be **given practical advice** on getting support with money and housing from people in your community.
- Practitioners will try to understand what has happened in your life and will **help you to cope with things that you find difficult**.
- Practitioners understand how important education is in **keeping you safe and helping you to reach your full potential**.





outcome 2

Children's social care helps to keep you safe

The absolute most important thing is your safety, at all times and wherever you are.

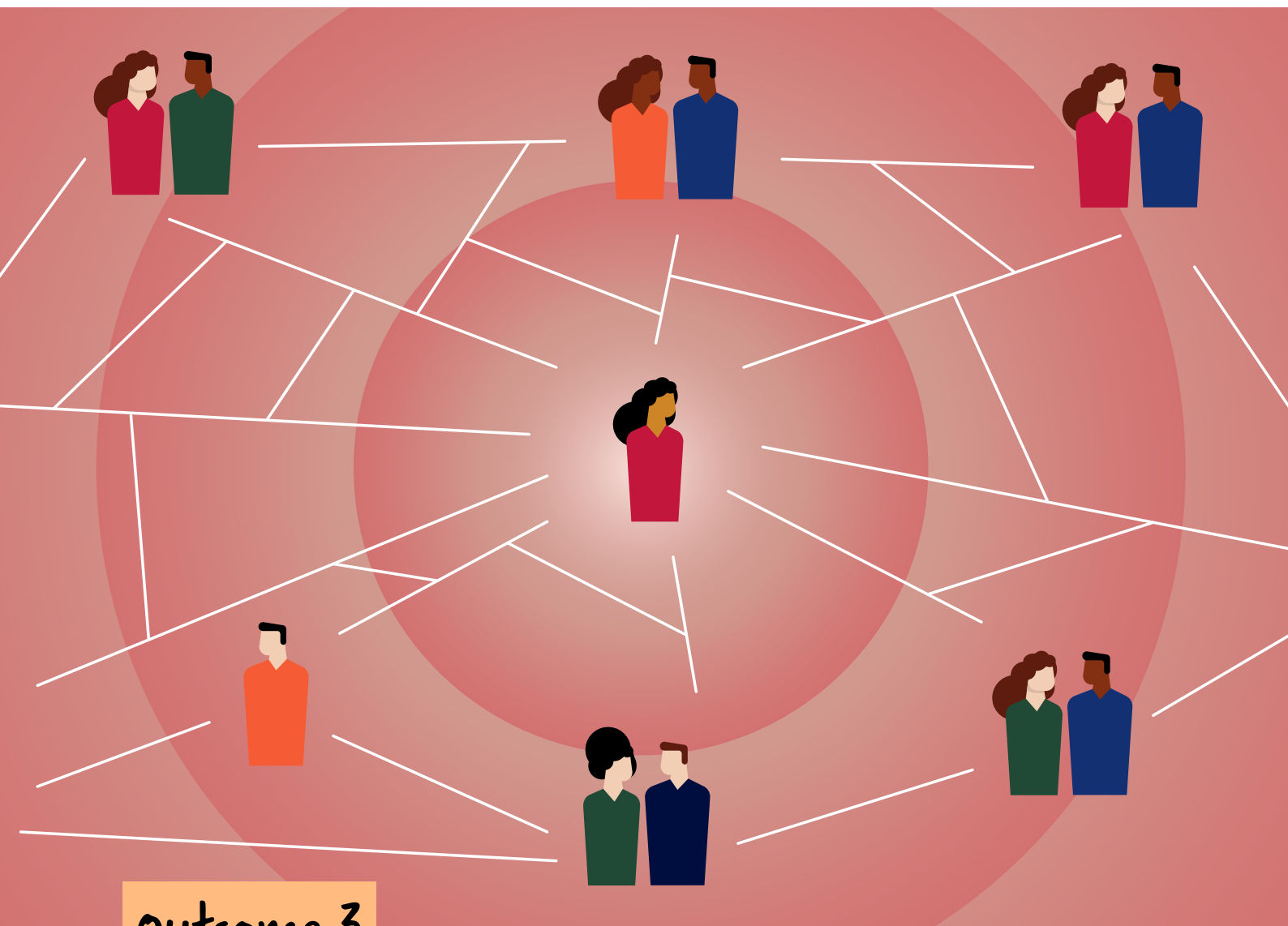
The National Framework makes it clear that children's social care wants to protect you from harm and if you might be being harmed, work out exactly what is going on.

This applies whether harm is occurring at home, where you live, in your community, or online.

What this means for you

- You will be **asked about your safety and wellbeing** at all stages of your care experience, and you will be asked what needs to change so that you can be safer.
- Practitioners will **act quickly to protect you** if you are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing harm.
- You will **get regular information** on the decisions being made about your life.
- Your **views will be heard** if your council is worried about you and thinks that they need to go to court to ask a judge to decide how to keep you safe.
- Your **voice will be heard** independently from the views of parents, carers, or other adults.
- Practitioners will **work hard to build strong relationships** with you and they will try to understand everything that is happening in your life.
- Your **views will be heard**, whatever your age or how you best communicate with others, and those supporting you will do their best to understand your point of view.
- You may have experienced upsetting things that you find very hard to talk about. People supporting you **will understand** that harmful events might have happened, or be happening to you, and they will hope that you can tell them about these things, so they can help you and keep you safe.
- You should be **treated fairly**, and if you are being discriminated against, the people supporting you should address this.
- Even when children and young people harm others, practitioners will recognise that they are still people in need of help and support.





outcome 3

Children’s social care will support your family network

Children’s social care will support family members beyond parents, like your grandparents, aunts and uncles, as these people can often provide essential safety, stability and love.

Often there are wider family relationships and networks that can help families that are experiencing problems.

Support from these family members can improve children’s lives, but sometimes these family members need help from children’s social care to make this happen more effectively.

What this means for you

- You **will be asked** who you consider to be your family. This might include relatives like aunts, uncles, grandparents or people like family friends.
- You **will be asked** about how your family network can look after you, and the support, love and trust you feel with them.
- Your **views will be considered** when arranging support from wider members of your family.
- Your family **will be asked** how much support from children's social care services they receive, and if it is enough.
- Your family will be **brought together to share** their experiences, and they will have time to answer any questions about your support.
- You may **receive support** from people beyond your family, including from friends, youth workers, teachers and people in your community or religious network.
- Your family could **get help to strengthen relationships** or repair difficult ones where necessary.
- You **will be supported** when your family or family network can't look after you, especially when it is unsafe.
- If you have a disability, your family network could be **supported to help you**.





outcome 4

Children's social care will help to give you a loving home

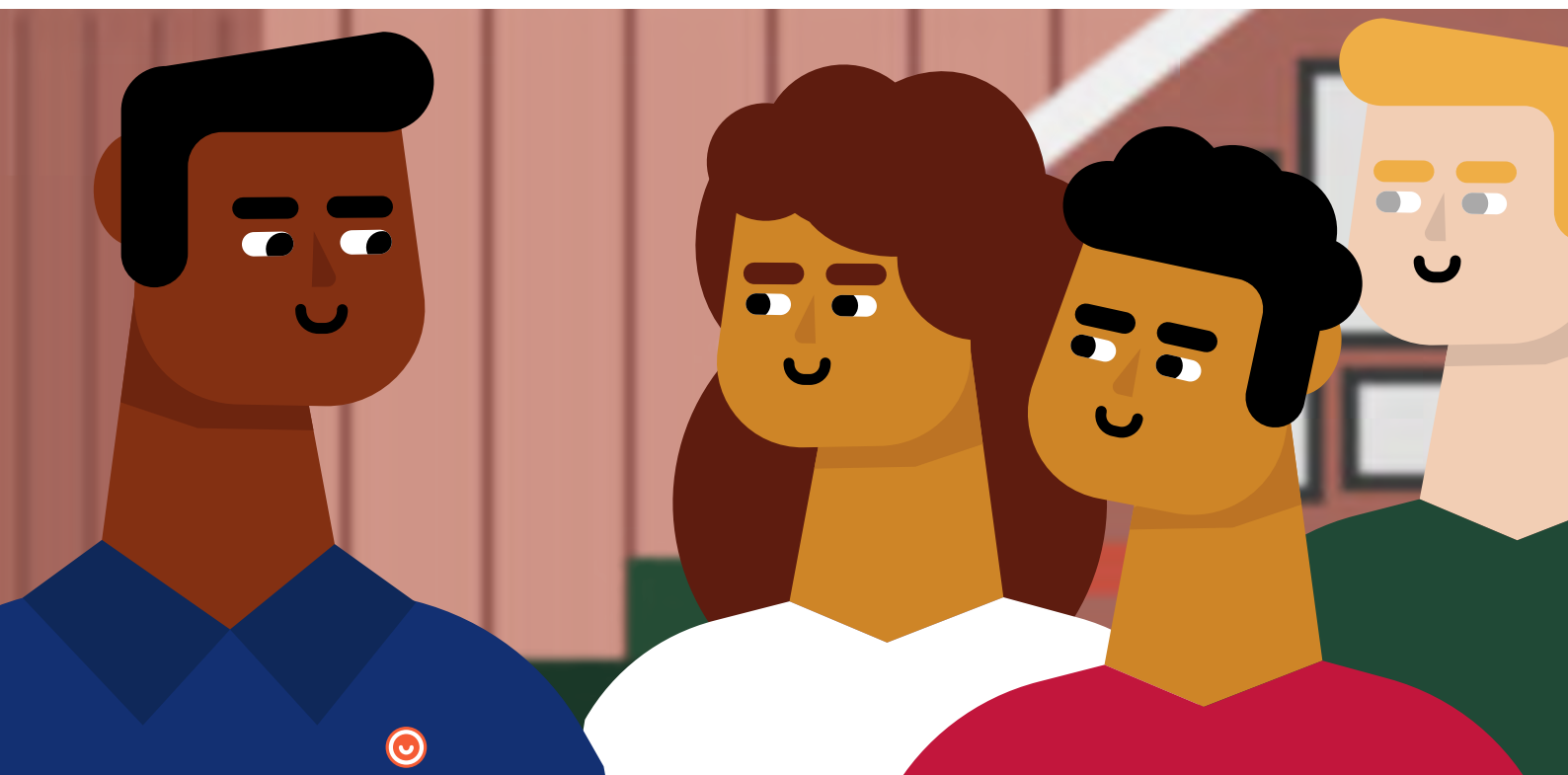
You deserve the same love, care and protection as anyone else.

If you can't remain living with your family, within a family network or with others, your local council will provide the support you need. Children's social care should provide homes that offer love, care, protection, and stability.

The support that you receive will help you understand your feelings and address any issues you may have while making sure you are safe. It will give you the basis for a healthy, happy life.

What this means for you

- You will be **asked where you want to live and what's important to you** if you can't remain with your family.
- You will **get regular updates** about the decisions being made, so you can be clear about what is happening and why.
- You will have regular opportunities to **share your hopes and dreams**, and this will be reflected in how you are provided with support.
- You will be **encouraged to put forward your views**, including through independent advocacy. This is where someone will represent your views, wishes and needs without judging you, and help you make a complaint if you need to.
- You will be **given a safe and loving home** if you can't live with your family or family network.
- You will be **supported to stay in touch with your family, friends and community**, and especially with your siblings, if you move to a new home.
- Your **mental wellbeing should be taken seriously**, and practitioners will help you get support.
- Adopted children will be supported by practitioners **to bond with their adoptive parents** from the first time they meet.
- Children who have travelled to England without their parents will be **supported, and their needs and experiences considered**.



For older children leaving children's social care and approaching adulthood

- You will be **supported to develop and nurture loving relationships** with your family networks and friends as you get older and become an adult.
- You will be **supported to live in safe, suitable accommodation**, and children's social care will try to offer you a range of options to choose from. You may have priority for social housing and help with accessing rented accommodation. Every effort is made to avoid care leavers becoming homeless.
- You will be **supported to access education, employment, and training** as you become an adult. Practitioners may work with job centres and potential employers to help find opportunities for you to apply for, including opportunities made especially for care leavers.
- You will be **supported to plan for the future** because proper education, work and housing is necessary for living a healthy and happy life.





What to do next

This guide is here to show you what the Children's Social Care National Framework means for you. But it only shows you the most important things. There may be other parts of the National Framework that are relevant to you, so you should think about having a look at the full [Children's Social Care National Framework](#).

If you have any questions or concerns, you can speak to your social worker, personal advisor, family support worker or another member of staff.

You can also get more information, advice and support from these charities:

- **Childline** is a safe, confidential place for children with no one else to turn to. Whatever your worry, whenever you need help or just want to talk, you can contact

Childline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year on 0800 1111 or through the one-to-one chat on their website. Childline has a huge online community where you can get support from other children on message boards, as well as resources to help you through any issue you are concerned about. childline.org.uk

- The **Children's Commissioner's Help at Hand** team can offer free support, advice, and information about your rights if you are in care, leaving care, living away from home or working with children's services. This is to help you with any challenges you are experiencing. You can call the team for free on 0800 528 0731 or visit childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/help-at-hand



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