

Looked-after children and young people

<http://publications.nice.org.uk/lgb19>

Published: 25 June 2014

Introduction

This briefing summarises NICE's recommendations for local authorities and partner organisations on [promoting the quality of life of looked-after children \(including babies\) and young people](#)^[1]. It is particularly relevant to directors and executive members of children's services and to the work of health and wellbeing boards. It may also be of interest to local safeguarding boards.

Key messages

The [Children Act 1989](#), the [Care Standards Act 2000](#) and accompanying [regulations and statutory guidance](#) (covering an extensive range of topics) provide the legal framework within which local authorities, providers of fostering services and children's homes must work. Since the NICE guidance on [promoting the quality of life of looked-after children and young people](#) was published in 2010, there have been a number of changes to government policy. In particular, [The Children and Families Act 2014](#) introduced reforms for tackling delay in the adoption process and for improving the life chances of looked-after children and young people.

As a corporate parent, the local authority has a statutory duty to care for all looked-after children and young people. By working with its partners, through its public health leadership role and through the local health and wellbeing board, it can also improve the future health, wellbeing and life chances of looked-after children and young people.

Early experiences have long-term consequences for the emotional and physical health, and social development of looked-after children and young people. Many children and young people have positive experiences in the care system, have good emotional and physical health, do well in their education and have good jobs and careers ([Increasing the number of care leavers in 'settled, safe accommodation'](#) C4EO 2009). However, the underlying reasons for entering care are strongly associated with poverty and deprivation (for example, low income, parental unemployment, relationship breakdown).

Implementing the recommendations in this briefing will help local authority services and educational, health and social care organisations, and professionals (including foster carers) work together. The recommendations aim to deliver integrated services and high-quality, stable placements within local authorities, and across local authority boundaries. Integrated services and high quality placements will promote nurturing relationships and educational achievement for looked-after children and young people.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is an independent organisation providing guidance and advice to improve health and social care.

For further information on how to use this briefing and how it was developed, see [About this briefing](#).

^[1] The term 'looked-after children and young people' refers to those looked after by the state where the Children Act 1989 applies, including those who are subject to a care order or temporarily classed as being looked after on a planned basis for short breaks or respite care.

In this briefing, the term 'looked-after children and young people' also includes babies.

What can local authorities achieve by promoting the quality of life of looked-after children and young people?

Meet several indicators in the Public Health Outcomes Framework 2013 to 2016

Several indicators in domains 1 and 2 of the Department of Health's [Public Health Outcomes Framework 2013 to 2016](#) directly relate to looked-after children and young people. NICE has produced a briefing on [NICE guidance and public health outcomes](#).

Meet indicators in the NHS Outcomes Framework 2013 to 2014

In the [NHS Outcomes Framework 2013 to 2014](#), domain 4: Ensuring that people have a positive experience of care, indicator 4.8 ('improving children and young people's experience of healthcare'), is relevant to looked-after children and young people.

Meet obligations set out in the Ofsted inspection framework

The [Ofsted inspection framework](#) sets out guidance for inspecting services and reviewing local safeguarding children boards for children and young people who need help and protection. This includes looked-after children, young people and care leavers.

What NICE says

NICE quality standards

NICE's quality standard on the [health and wellbeing of looked-after children and young people](#) defines best practice. Its 8 specific, concise and measurable statements relate to high-priority areas where improvements are needed. It applies to all settings and services working with and caring for looked-after children and young people, and care leavers, including where they live.

[Statement 1](#) Looked-after children and young people experience warm, nurturing care.

Statement 2 Looked-after children and young people receive care from services and professionals that work collaboratively.

Statement 3 Looked-after children and young people live in stable placements that take account of their needs and preferences.

Statement 4 Looked-after children and young people have ongoing opportunities to explore and make sense of their identity and relationships.

Statement 5 Looked-after children and young people receive specialist and dedicated services within agreed timescales.

Statement 6 Looked-after children and young people who move across local authority or health boundaries continue to receive the services they need.

Statement 7 Looked-after children and young people are supported to fulfil their potential.

Statement 8 Care leavers move to independence at their own pace.

NICE guidance

This section highlights the recommendations that NICE's guidance on [promoting the quality of life of looked-after children and young people](#) covers. Those with responsibility for directly commissioning, managing or providing services are advised to read the recommendations in full by following the hyperlinks.

Following NICE's recommendations on looked-after children and young people will help you make the best and most efficient use of resources to improve their health and wellbeing.

Recommendations

To see NICE recommendations for local authorities and other bodies involved with commissioning or delivering services for looked-after children and young people, follow the links below to the NICE pathway on [Looked-after babies, children and young people](#).

Local strategy, policy and commissioning for looked-after babies, children and young people (including preparing them for leaving care)

The NICE pathway contains recommendations on the importance of strong leadership and an aspirational vision of effective corporate parenting in [strategic leadership and planning](#). It sets out advice on providing local [reports and resource guides](#) and [commissioning services](#), and includes recommendations on [providing specialist services for babies and young children](#).

This section also includes advice about preparing young people for adulthood and [supporting the transition to independent living](#), including leaving care services and safe and settled accommodation.

It also offers advice on developing effective partnership and multi-agency working and [supporting professional collaboration](#).

Planning, commissioning and monitoring placements and case reviews for looked-after babies, children and young people

The pathway includes [background on care planning, placements and case reviews](#) and recommendations on effective [planning and commissioning of placements](#) led by social workers, which can promote permanence and reduce the need for emergency placements and placement changes.

The pathway also contains recommendations about commissioning and managing a range of high quality placements for all babies, children and young people, including those in secure and custodial care, [assuring the quality of foster and residential care](#) and [promoting care provided by family and friends](#).

Providing care for looked-after babies, children and young people

The NICE pathway includes recommendations about managing a diverse range of placements, [assessments and placements for babies and young children](#) and [providing support in secure and custodial settings](#). It includes the type and range of assessments needed when [supporting siblings](#), [supporting foster carers](#) and [making informed decisions for all babies, children and young people](#).

Promoting the mental health and emotional wellbeing of looked-after babies, children and young people

The NICE pathway contains recommendations about providing flexible and accessible mental health services and support for looked-after children and young children (including those from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups and unaccompanied children and young people who may be seeking asylum). Recommendations offer advice about intervening early and providing treatment and care for particular mental health disorders or providing dedicated mental health services from skilled professionals. The pathway also includes recommendations on supporting the transition to adult mental health services and ensuring personal quality of life.

Health assessments of, and keeping records and information on, looked-after babies, children and young people

Recommendations offer advice about accurately assessing health needs and updating the personal health record whether for health purposes (such as vaccination records) or other information (such as family medical history) for children and young people during their time in care. Sharing health information (including records of consent) is important if they move to another location and when preparing young people for independent living when they become adults and are responsible for their own or their family's health.

Educating children and young people

NICE's pathway contains recommendations to encourage working in partnership with educators to help children and young people achieve their individual potential and get the most out of their time in education. There are recommendations about corporate parents being ambitious for the education of the children and young people in their care in both schools and further and higher education.

Training practitioners and carers involved with looked-after babies, children and young people

Providing foster and residential care is complex and calls for rehabilitative and therapeutic approaches and skills. Because of this the NICE pathway contains recommendations for all professionals working with looked-after babies, children and young people, carers and frontline practitioners working with babies and children, supervisors of foster and residential carers and foster and residential carers.

It also has recommendations on providing [enhanced training for professionals](#) and [national core training for professionals](#).

Promoting and supporting diversity in relation to looked-after babies, children and young people

The NICE pathway contains recommendations that will help local authorities meet the needs of looked-after children and young people who are black, Asian or from a particular minority ethnic background. It also includes recommendations about the needs of those who identify as gay or lesbian or those who are seeking asylum but who entered the country alone, with no adults.

These recommendations are about [embedding diversity in local plans](#), [appointing a diversity champion](#) and ensuring that all the needs of babies, children and young people being cared for by local authorities are met by [carrying out core assessments](#) and [ensuring a diverse range of placements](#).

It also includes recommendations on [sharing learning](#), [providing expertise for specific groups](#) and training on diversity for [all professionals working with looked-after babies, children and young people](#).

Developing an action plan

NICE has developed an [action planning tool](#) for the related quality standard on the [health and wellbeing of looked-after children and young people](#) (NICE quality standard 31). The aim of the tool is to help commissioners and providers to:

- identify whether the individual quality statements are relevant
- record evidence for the measures associated with the quality statements
- plan and monitor actions to improve quality.

Costs and savings

Improving the quality of life of looked-after babies, children and young people can lead to the following costs and savings.

- Costs avoided for providing interim placements in agency residential units, and any additional support services needed for the child. Earlier intervention by professionals to improve and sustain relationships would help to prevent the breakdown of carer–child relationships, which can lead to short-notice, unplanned and sometimes costly moves. For example, in 2005, the Department for Education and Skills reported that the total cost of looking after a child (without any additional support needs) who remains in the same authority foster placement for 20 months was around £35,000 (Department for Education and Skills, *Looked after children: At what cost?* 2005). The total cost for a child with emotional and behavioural difficulties was more than 6 times higher, at over £215,000.
- Administrative costs avoided from placement breakdown. It takes, on average, 18–24 working hours to find a new placement for a child who is considered difficult to place. This is more than double the typical time needed to find a placement (Department for Education and Skills 2005). Administrative costs include staff time for:
 - placement planning
 - developing care plans
 - attending matching meetings with the foster carers and the child
 - helping the child settle in
 - producing assessments
 - arranging independent review of placement
 - providing more frequent monitoring at the start of the placement.

Facts and figures

Below are other facts and figures on promoting the quality of life of looked-after children and young people:

- At the end of March 2013, there were more than 68,000 looked-after children and young people in England. This is 2% more than on 31 March 2012 and an increase of 12% compared with 31 March 2009. The number of looked-after children and young people has increased steadily each year and is now higher than at any point since 1985. Almost 75% of these were in foster placement and approximately 9% in children's homes, secure units and

hostels ([Children looked after in England, including adoption](#) Department for Education 2013).

- The main reason for children and young people entering care is abuse or neglect (62%), with family dysfunction being the second most frequently cited cause. Around 60% of looked-after children and young people have emotional and mental health problems and a high proportion experience poor educational, health and social outcomes after leaving care. One-third of children and young people in contact with the criminal justice system have been looked after ('Children looked after in England, including adoption').
- The number of boys who were looked after decreased between 2009 and 2013, while the number of girls increased ('Children looked after in England, including adoption').
- The number of white children and young people who became looked after increased between 2009 and 2013, while the number of children from other black, Asian and minority ethnic groups remained approximately the same ('Children looked after in England, including adoption').
- There has been an increase in the number of babies and young children becoming looked after. In 2009, about 38% of looked-after children were younger than 10 but by March 2013 this had increased to 43% ('Children looked after in England, including adoption').

Support for planning, review and scrutiny

Local authority scrutiny activities can add value to strategies and actions to improve the public's health. Effective scrutiny can help identify local health needs and check whether local authorities are working in partnership with other organisations to tackle the wider determinants of health. NICE guidelines and briefings provide a useful starting point, by suggesting useful 'questions to ask' during the scrutiny process.

A range of other support tools are available on the [Centre for Public Scrutiny](#) website and via [Intro practice](#) on our website.

Other useful resources and advice

The following resources may also be useful:

- NICE's [Looked-after children and young people: guide to resources](#)

-
- NICE's quality standard on the [health and wellbeing of looked-after children and young people](#) and its supporting resources, including a [short film](#) aimed at children and young people in care to help them understand and use the quality standard
 - [Social Care Institute for Excellence](#) has a range of films and other resources for practitioners and for looked-after children and young people themselves
 - [Info 4 Care Kids](#) has films and information aimed at children and young people

About this briefing

This briefing is based on NICE guidance on promoting the quality of life of looked-after children and young people published in October 2010 and NICE's quality standard on the health and wellbeing of looked-after children and young people published in April 2013 (see the [NICE website](#) for details of published briefings and briefings in development). It was written with advice from NICE's Local Government Reference Group and using feedback from local authority officers, councillors and directors of public health.

It is for local authority officers and elected members and their partner organisations in the health and voluntary sectors, in particular, those involved with health and wellbeing boards. This includes directors of public health and commissioners and directors of adult social care and children's services. It will also be relevant to local authority scrutiny activities.

This briefing may be used alongside the local joint strategic needs assessment to review or update the joint health and wellbeing strategy.

This briefing is intended to be used online and it includes hyperlinks to sources of data and further information.

About NICE guidance

NICE guidance offers:

- recommendations based on the best available evidence to help you plan, deliver and evaluate successful programmes

- an objective and authoritative summary of the research and evidence, reviewed by independent experts from a range of backgrounds and disciplines
- an assessment of the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of public health interventions.

Copyright

© National Institute for Health and Care Excellence 2014. All rights reserved. NICE copyright material can be downloaded for private research and study, and may be reproduced for educational and not-for-profit purposes. No reproduction by, or for, commercial organisations, or for commercial purposes, is allowed without the written permission of NICE.

ISBN: 978-1-4731-0612-3