



Welcome to Residential Care

OUR GUIDE TO HELP YOU

For young people in care,
written by young people in care



TúsLA
An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

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WELCOME MESSAGE

"Just because you're in care, it doesn't mean that you can't have role models and build a family."

Angela, 16

"Sometimes when you're in residential you can have a bit more freedom of thought, so explore who you want to be. No matter where you're from you're allowed to have your own views."

Karim, 15

A new set of policies has been implemented for Tusla children's residential centres which requires a young person friendly version to be developed. This booklet was written by young people with residential care experience. It contains information that young people feel is important and helpful to know. This work was independently facilitated to ensure it was young person led with their voice being independent and central to the development process.

We hope this booklet contains useful information, advice and wisdom about residential care and its policies from the experiences of young people.

Right now, you might be feeling scared or worried about what to expect when you go into residential care. This is completely normal and something that everyone feels at first. You might be coming from a family home, a foster home or from another type of care altogether. It can be a bit hard to get used to at the start but no matter how hard you might find it at first, we want you to know that there will always be people there to look out for you and support you.

You might also be worried about the other people living there, whether they'll like you, or whether you'll be able to make friends. Remember that every one of your housemates is in the same position as you, so you don't have to feel out of place. You might think it's not a good thing to have in common but this can make residential care a really supportive and positive place to be.

There will be staff at the centre too and it's their job to make sure that you feel safe, happy, healthy and comfortable. It might feel like a big difference between them and your family but it's their job to give a helping hand.

No matter how worried you might be, residential care can be really positive; we hope this book helps with that. You might even get some opportunities to do things you weren't able to do before, like hobbies and other activities. You also might go to a new school. Be open to these opportunities and talk to the staff about what you want to do.

For every reason to feel scared or worried, there's another reason to be hopeful and look to the future. You may not feel like it now, but this is a chance for a new start and a brighter future!

From **Adelicia, Adrian, Anthea, Chloe, CJ, Holly, Kendra, Kieran, Naomi, Patrick, & Ruth.**

"Residential can be a stepping stone to your new life. It does not define you."

Sarah, 16

"It's given me a lot of opportunities and space I needed to develop into my own personality"

Abebi, 15

YOUR RIGHTS & MAKING SURE THESE ARE LOOKED AFTER

Every single person has human rights. These are laws and policies that ensure you have a healthy and safe life. Every professional has to work to support you in getting your rights met. One of the most important things you can do, when in care, is to know exactly what your rights are and who can help you when you have a problem.

WHAT KIND OF RIGHTS DO I HAVE?

As a young person in care you have two key sets of rights. Rights are basically rules or laws that adults must ensure are followed in relation to how you are treated. The first set of rights are the same rights as every person under 18 in Ireland; the second are specifically for young people in care. Basically, having these rights regulated means you are looked after correctly.

- TO BE SAFE
- TO BE RESPECTED
- TO HAVE YOUR OWN SPACE
- TO BE LISTENED TO

WHERE DO THESE RIGHTS COME FROM?

Your rights come from the 'United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child'. This list of rights (or rules) were made in 1989 and each country has to make sure that young people have these. There are four parts of these rights (called articles) that are really important:

ARTICLES

WHAT IT MEANS

Non-discrimination
(article 2)

Nobody can discriminate against you based on who you are.

Best interest of the child
(article 3)

Any decision made about you has to be the best decision for you.

Right to life and survival
(article 6)

You have the right to life, the best life you possibly can have.

Right to be heard
(article 12)

You have the right to have your voice heard and to be taken seriously.

You can read more about these rights and the convention here:

www.unicef.org/reports/convention-rights-child-children-version

Or see the information here:

www.unicef.ie/childrens-rights

YOUR RIGHTS IN RESIDENTIAL CARE

When you're living in care, instead of your parents or guardians being responsible for you, the government and the staff at the centre are. To make sure that they are doing this properly, there are rules that staff have to follow. For now these rules are called the 'National Standards of Residential Care' but the name might change in the future.

The important thing to remember is these rules are there to make sure you feel you can say:

- ➔ I'm able to do the things that are important to me
- ➔ The centre always has enough staff to look after us
- ➔ I'm not being bullied or discriminated against
- ➔ I'm respected by the workers
- ➔ I have a care plan and know how to see it
- ➔ I am safe and comfortable
- ➔ I'm able to go to school or my training/education programme
- ➔ I can go to the doctor when I need to
- ➔ The building is clean and safe to be in

When you're in care sometimes there will be notes and information taken about you. These notes are about the day-to-day things going on in your life that are important. You will also have a care plan and a placement plan. These plans are sometimes also called records, and are made with your social worker and other important people in your life. They are there to make sure you are looked after now and in the future.

You also have the right to see these notes and to have your voice heard in making these plans. Sometimes you might not be able to see these notes right away, but there will always be an explanation so you understand why. If you ever want to see these records, talk to your keyworker so you can make a plan to go through your records.

"You have the right to be yourself and don't let anyone judge you for it cause you're amazing the way you are."

Nadia, 14

"If you feel unsafe, or if you feel uncomfortable you can address it and it can get sorted out."

Tommy, 16

WHERE CAN I READ MORE ABOUT THIS?

If you would like to know more about the rules, standards or how your care is planned, you can read more here:

TACTIC: (Teenagers and Children Talking in Care)

www.tusla.ie/publications/tactic

This page has a really great collection of guides written by young people just like you. They will tell you everything you need to know about rules, standards and how you will be looked after and cared for.

If you read something you don't understand, ask your keyworker or any other team member in the centre, and they will be able to talk about this with you.



RULES & ROUTINES

A lot of young people can find it difficult to get used to residential care at the start. There can be a lot of rules that you're not used to having, and your day-to-day routine will probably change a lot. This can be really tough. We want you to know that it will get easier over time and we all thought it was really good for us in the long run. This section will give you a better idea of the kind of rules and routines there are and who can help you with any issues you have.

HELPFUL TIP

Staff have to explain the rules so you know exactly what you can expect in that centre.

"It depends on the residential centre and your specific case. There will be different rules for everyone. It can change depending on your age."

Adam, 17

Things to remember

- ◆ The centre cannot have any rules that are unfair or punish you for no reason.
- ◆ You have the right to your own time and to be treated well, and the staff are there to listen to what you have to say.

"You can go outside and meet friends as long as you're not staying out late and stick to the curfew"

Zoya, 15

RULES

When you're in residential care, **there can be a lot of new rules you will have to get used to.** These are there to make sure you're safe and looked after. Also, if you've been in another residential care centre, the rules in this centre might be a little different to what you're used to. Sometimes, there might be different rules for different people living with you. This is usually because of things like age or how long they've lived there. Even though there is always a reason for this, it can still sometimes feel unfair. Remember, the staff are there to help you. If you're ever confused or upset about the rules, you can talk to your keyworker or a member of staff in your centre.

WHY WE RECKON IT HELPS TO FOLLOW THE RULES

It's useful to spend a bit of time learning what the rules are in your residential centre. The best reason to follow the rules is that they're there to keep you and your housemates safe, and it can help you get along better with staff if you do. Since the rules can be different for some people, showing the staff and your social worker that you can follow the rules can help them trust you more, and make it easier to have a bit more freedom later.

WHO CAN HELP ME IF I THINK STAFF ARE UNFAIR?

You can talk to your keyworker or the staff at the centre about the rules, but **just remember, your opinion matters.** If you feel like the rules are unfair, don't be afraid to say it. You have the right to give your opinion, and the **staff always have to listen to what you have to say.**



If you're not sure if it's fair, or you feel like you aren't being heard, here are some things you can do:

- ➔ Talk to the centre manager, the deputy manager or your keyworker.
- ➔ Talk to the deputy regional manager (ask your keyworker about this), or if you need to talk to the regional manager this can be sorted too.
- ➔ Talk to a family member, or someone else you trust.
- ➔ Talk to your social worker.
- ➔ Talk to EPIC – Empowering People in Care - www.epiconline.ie
- ➔ Make a complaint (we'll tell you how later in this booklet).

ROUTINE

Another thing that can be hard for young people in residential care is the **big change in routine**. You might be used to having a lot of freedom over things like what time you go to bed, what time you get up, or even what time you eat breakfast, lunch and dinner. Sometimes though, the centre will have it's own schedule that you will have to stick to, but your routine will be built around the things you do from day-to-day.

Just remember, you can always ask the staff to help you with getting up and going to bed, and there will always be food in the centre outside of meals if you're hungry.

Most of the time, the routine will be the same for everyone you live with, but sometimes, **some people might have a bit more freedom than others**. Just like with the rules, this is usually because of things like age, how long they've lived there, or what their current routine is in their daily life (like if they have training or rehearsal around dinner time).

WHY WE THINK IT'S IMPORTANT TO FOLLOW THE ROUTINE

It might be annoying to stick to a routine, especially if it feels strict to you or you're used to having more freedom about when you do things. You might also feel like you just don't want to work with the staff, or work around the routine. Even if you feel like this, you will still always have a voice and be able to speak your mind.

WHO CAN HELP ME WITH THIS?

Just like with the rules, the staff should let you know why the routine is the way it is. If you feel like your routine doesn't work for you, you can ask the staff and your keyworker to help you change it. After this, if you still feel like it's unfair, you can:

- ➔ Talk to the centre manager, deputy manager, or your keyworker
- ➔ Talk to your social worker
- ➔ Talk to a family member, or someone else you trust that can speak on your behalf
- ➔ Talk to EPIC – Empowering People in Care - www.epiconline.ie
- ➔ Make a complaint (we'll tell you how later in this booklet)

HELPFUL TIP

The staff need to work with you around your routine. As long as it's safe, and the staff are able to, they will help build your routine around the things you like to do.

"I worked with staff to create a routine that suited me, it took a long time to find the right mix of things that didn't bore me or burn me out, I had help with finding hobbies too"

Colm, 16

Things to remember

- ◆ The routine you have now might not be the routine you have later
- ◆ No matter what happens, or how you feel about the staff or your routine, the people looking after you always need to listen to you

"I think it's great that staff help me with my morning routine, it makes my mornings way easier"

Musa, 15

THE STAFF

When you move into residential care, there will be a lot of staff to meet. Their job is to make everything run well, and make sure that you feel cared for and looked after. If you're coming from a family or foster home, it can feel like a big difference not having someone to act like a parent figure. Also, staff work shifts, so it won't always be the same people that are in the house every day, so it can take a while to meet and get to know everyone. The important thing to remember is that they are there to help you.

"If you are having a difficult time talk to people like the staff. They can help you."

Sarah, 16

HELPFUL TIP

The following things can help ensure you can go to things outside the centre:

- ◆ Try to let staff know in advance so they can plan around your needs
- ◆ Talk to the centre manager, or your keyworker about how you're feeling if your needs are not met
- ◆ Let your social worker know if this happens repeatedly
- ◆ If you feel like you've missed things too many times, you can make a complaint

STAFF GOING WITH YOU TO PLACES YOU NEED TO GO

You often need to have the staff come with you while you do things outside of the centre. What this means is that a member of staff should be there to take you places you need to go if you can't go yourself, or you need a lift. Depending on the situation and your age, this could be things like:

- ➔ Going out for hobbies (like training or practice)
- ➔ Going to do your shopping
- ➔ Going to the doctor or another appointment
- ➔ Meeting with people or organisations outside of the centre

Staff will try their best to support you to go to the things you want to and need to. Sometimes though, **there might be times where you're not able to do the things you want to.** This can be for a few reasons, like if you've broken rules or missed your routine, or if the staff are worried about you. When you're living in residential care, it's important that everyone gets the same treatment, and gets to do the things they like. This means it can be challenging to balance everyone's needs. If you feel like you don't get to do the things you like enough, or if you feel like it's unfair, the staff have to listen to you and hear you out.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A STAFF MEMBER I LIKE LEAVES?

Sometimes staff change and a person that you really like might leave. This can happen because they move to a new job or are moved to another centre. Even when there is a good reason, it's normal to feel sad about this, or worried about the future. Sometimes, this means that the centre will also have to bring in agency staff.

This can be hard if you like a particular agency staff member. Agency staff are people just like the full-time workers at your centre. The only difference is that they won't be working there all the time. Sometimes it might just be one or two days a week, other times they might be there for a month, and then leave to help out at another centre. Even though they're only there for a short time, **agency staff are still there to help you, and they still have to follow the rules we told you about in the section on your rights.**

YOUR KEYWORKER

If you have not heard the word 'keyworker' before you may already have had something similar. There are a lot of names for the type of job a keyworker can do like - support worker, liaison support, link worker or care worker.

Basically, a keyworker is a person who works closely with you while you are in residential care to make sure that you're getting the support you need. **When you first move in, your keyworker will be assigned to you right away.** They will then meet with you on a regular basis to check in with how you're doing, they'll be your worker for your whole time in that centre.

WHAT CAN MY KEYWORKER DO?

One of the most important things your keyworker can do for you is make sure that you have a say in how you are taken care of. **If you have any concerns or issues around your care plan, your routine, your family or friends, your spare time, or anything else, it's your keyworker's responsibility to help.** While they might not be able to change some things, they are there to make sure your voice is heard in decisions that are made about you.

WHAT IF I DON'T LIKE MY KEYWORKER?

It's really great if you get along with your keyworker, but you don't have to like them for them to do a good job for you. BUT - If you feel like they're not helping you, or you have a personality clash, you can talk to the centre manager and ask for their help in sorting it out. In more serious cases, where you're not happy with the way you were treated, you can also make a complaint.

HOW DO I KNOW THE STAFF AND MY KEYWORKER WILL TREAT ME WELL?

Every single person who works in the centre has to always follow a set of rules, which are in the 'National Standards for Children's Residential Centres'. These standards are there to ensure you are treated with respect and dignity. The manager needs to know if these standards are not met, so the situation can be improved and to ensure it doesn't happen anymore.

Although centres sometimes have different rules for staff and young people, they always have to follow this policy. The important thing is, they're all there to make sure you and other young people are looked after as best as possible.

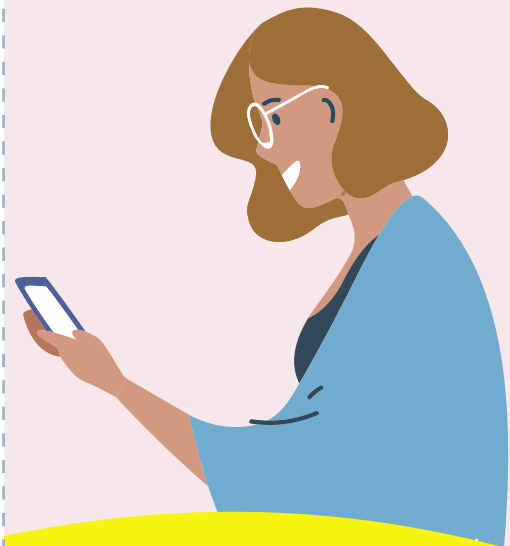
"My keyworker helped me apply for stuff like a bank account and helped me work on my life skills"

Tommy, 16

HELPFUL TIP

Your keyworker will do a lot of things for you, but mainly they are there to help you with:

- ◆ Organising to see your family if you want to.
- ◆ Any problems or worries you might have.
- ◆ Planning for your future and life after care.
- ◆ Your care plan and reviews.



"Try and make an effort at the start to find things to bond over with your keyworker. It's a good way to build up rapport".

Karim 15

LIVING IN RESIDENTIAL CARE

"I know it's hard but try your best to be positive in residential. It's not the end, it's only the beginning."

Abebi, 15

"If you're arguing, try to resolve the situation, whether it's with staff or the other people you live with."

Justina, 17

Things to remember

You all have something very important in common. You might be from different backgrounds and different opinions or outlooks, but you are all in the same position, and can really support each other.

"Don't feel bad about spending money that's put aside for clothes! It's your money and it's there for you to use."

Nadia, 14

It can be scary living in a new place, but there are some really great things about living in residential care, and some things might be better than before. There will be a common area, where you can hang out and spend time with your housemates, and you will have your own private bedroom for when you need some space and privacy. This section will give you some information on how to make the move as easy as possible.

GETTING ON WITH OTHERS

When you move into residential care, in most cases, there'll be other young people living there with you. This can be hard at the beginning, since you might not be used to living with a lot of people. But remember that it's a good place to make friendships that will stay with you for your whole life. But like all friendships these may take time to grow. **In the first few days, it can be good just to focus on talking to a few other people.**

RESPECT AND BOUNDARIES

At the beginning it can be a bit scary to share a space with other people you don't know very well. It helps if people respect each other's boundaries. Here are some examples of what this can mean:

- ➔ **You get to have a private space that's just for you**, so everyone should treat each other's space with respect and not come in without knocking and asking if they can.
- ➔ **The staff can't search your room without letting you know, unless they are worried about you** and need to always explain the reason why they are in your room.
- ➔ Sometimes your housemates might ask why you're in care, remember that **no-one has to talk about things they don't want to**.
- ➔ If you're overwhelmed, you can take the time and space you need, and **no-one should bother anyone who wants to be left alone**, unless they're really worried about them.

HANDLING YOUR MONEY

Your keyworker and staff have access to money to spend on things you need, like clothes, food, personal hygiene products (like tampons or deodorant) or other stuff. **This money is only ever spent on you**, and part of your key workers job is making sure you have everything you need.

You also have pocket money, and it's up to you how you would like to spend it. In every centre, there are some things that you are not allowed to spend money on, like alcohol or cigarettes, but your key worker will let you know the rules and help you with saving if you want to get something big.

PHONES AND LAPTOPS

There may be different rules for phones and laptops depending on your age and how long you've been in the centre. This can be challenging, especially if you are used to using your phone whenever you like. Before you are able to use a phone or laptop, the staff will need to make sure it's safe for you by talking to you about what you use it for, and how to use the internet safely.

There will also be rules on how you can use your phone, like what kind of websites you visit, and who you can talk to. If the staff are worried about you, they might need to take your phone until they feel like it's safe for you to have it back.

YOUR RIGHT TO BE HEALTHY

When it comes to your health and wellbeing, the most important thing to know is that you have the right to be healthy and be able to get any kind of medical treatment that you need. This is the law, which is outlined in:

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

www.unicef.org/reports/convention-rights-child-children-version

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Health and wellbeing are more than just seeing a doctor and dentist. It is also being able to get information, support and care for your physical, mental, and social health. This could mean:

- ➔ **Physical Health** - Having access to healthy foods or getting things like toothbrushes and toothpaste. Basically, you have the right to be healthy, and to get what you need to stay healthy.
- ➔ **Sexual Health** - Your sexual health will cover everything from how your body develops during puberty, to relationships you have with other people your age. You have the right to get clear information about sex, sexual development, contraception and safe sex. If you're over 16, you also have the right to access contraception without consent from your legal guardian.
- ➔ **Mental Health** - Your emotions are also an important part of your health and wellbeing. Sometimes, if you're feeling down, talking to someone you trust might be enough, but other times this won't be. You have the right to get extra emotional and mental support when you need it, like seeing a counsellor or a therapist.

HELPFUL TIP

If you need a laptop for school, you can ask your keyworker or a staff member to help you get one.

"If I need money for something and have difficulty saving up, staff can help me budget or keep money aside for me."

Angela, 16

HELPFUL TIP

If you break the rules or don't follow your routine, your pocket money can be docked as a consequence, but no matter what, **your pocket money can't be docked more than 50%.**

"If you've had some health issues for a while you can tell the staff right away. It can be easier in residential to get some good medical help, because they have funding and resources."

Adam, 17

Things to remember

Every young person in residential care will get a medical card, so doctors and medicine are free.

If you're over 16, you can go to the doctor and agree to treatment without a staff member or keyworker with you. You can also give consent for your own medical treatment.

"If you are having a bad mental health day, tell staff, let them know how they can help, even if it is just giving you space."

Sarah, 16

SEEING FAMILY & FRIENDS

"Sometimes, your family just can't look after you, even though they really care about you. It's not you, they just can't look after you right now."

Riya, 15

FAMILY CONTACT

Family can be a really good source of support for you. So, as long as it's safe, it's really important that you're able to see your family if and when you want to. If you're coming from a foster home, you might also want to keep in contact with them as well. **It is your keyworkers job to help you plan and organise this with your social worker. Sometimes though, it might not be safe for you to be around your family, which will mean you cannot see them for a while.**

For some young people, a court might decide whether or not it's safe for them to see their family. If this happens, your social worker will work with you and help you through the process. Even in serious cases like this, it's important to remember that your voice matters, and you will be able to say what you would like to happen.

If you don't want to be in contact with your family, you don't have to.

Everyone's situation is different, it's important that staff respect your choices if you decide not to see or talk to your family. In any of these cases, you have the right to have your voice heard when people make decisions about and for you.

SEEING FRIENDS

Just like with seeing your family, **the staff will try to make sure you're able to see your friends.** This could be having them visit the centre, going to visit them outside, at their house, or sleeping over. **Before you can see your friends though, your keyworker will check first to make sure that you will be safe where you are going** (this is called a risk assessment).

This decision isn't made by one person, it might involve your keyworker, your social worker, your parents/foster carers, your centre manager, or other people that are there to keep you safe. In all of these decisions, your voice will also count. You can ask to be part of these decisions when they happen, and to have your opinion heard.

HOW CAN I BE SURE THAT I CAN SEE MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY?

As long as it's safe, the staff and your social worker have a responsibility to help you see your friends and family in any way that they can. This could mean going out to visit them where they live or in a public place, or it could also mean having them over to the centre you live in. Sometimes, someone else in the house might be having an issue which means your friends can't come to visit, but the staff should do their best to help you whatever happens. This is because of the set of rules (National Standards for Children's Residential Centres) we told you about earlier.

HAVING BOYFRIENDS/ GIRLFRIENDS/PARTNERS

It might sometimes feel like a challenge to have a relationship with someone when you are living in residential care.

There are two important things to remember:

- 1 The main priority is your safety and wellbeing
- 2 You're not allowed to have a relationship with someone you live with

If the people looking after you are happy that you're safe, then it might be ok for you to have a relationship with someone, but you should always talk to your keyworker about this. Just like with friendships, you can ask the staff to help support you to see someone you are going out with and to spend time with them.

The staff and your keyworker will also have a lot of information, like sexual health, age of consent laws, what consent is, and how to access sexual health supports. Depending on your age, your social worker might need to work with you and your legal guardian to talk about contraception and accessing sexual health services. If you're over 16 though, you have the right to decide what medical care you want.

HOBBIES AND ACTIVITIES

It's really important that you're able to do the things you like to do and be able to try out new things. Being able to have new experiences is one of the good things about being in care. Tell your keyworker about the things you'd like to do or try. There are finances available and people who can help make this happen

GOING TO SCHOOL

Every young person in Ireland has the right to education, and to be able to do the best they possibly can in learning. These rights are in the law. Sometimes, especially if you're feeling sad or stressed, you might not feel like it's very important, but getting an education, or getting training is one of the best things you can do for your future.

If you're already in school, your social worker will try to make sure that you are placed in a care centre that's close enough to your school. Sometimes though, you may have to move a bit further away from where you used to live. This might mean you have to change school. If this happens, you can always ask for help from the staff, your keyworker, or your new teachers to help you settle in and get used to it.

"I didn't have all my art supplies, but I was given funding to help with that and now I can do my art".

Abebi, 15

HELPFUL TIP

Ask your keyworker about what school you will be able to go to and ask to have a tour or be shown around.

"If you have a hobby, pursue it. If you want to do horse-riding or learn Korean or whatever, you're not bad for having a hobby."

Justina, 17

"When I went to my new school, I was given a tour, so I knew what it looked like".

Colm, 16



COMPLAINTS

Sometimes when you're living in care, things might happen that upset you.

This could be an argument with another housemate, how **you feel** a staff member treated you, or about things you feel are not fair. Sometimes this can be worked out by talking to the person, but other times it might be more serious.

"If a staff member isn't listening to you, you can talk to the manager one on one."

Karim, 15

"If there's someone else outside of the house that you feel comfortable with, you can talk to them first and they can help you with the complaint"

Riya, 15

If you're not happy with something, there are a few different things you can do to make things better.

- ➔ **Talk to any staff member, your centre manager, keyworker, or social worker.** If you're not happy with something, but don't want to make a complaint, sometimes it can be good to work out a solution yourselves. The staff and your keyworker should be able to help you with this. This is a good first option, and lots of problems can be solved like this.
- ➔ **Make a complaint** to Tusla, and tell them about your problem. There are a lot of people who can help you with this, and we'll tell you all about it below.

WHEN CAN I MAKE A COMPLAINT?

You have the right to make a complaint about anything you want, whenever you want. Complaints can be for big or small problems. You are always able to let people know how you feel, and you should never feel like you can't.

If something isn't right, telling staff, your social worker, or anyone else in Tusla, helps them to do their job better.

WHO CAN HELP ME WITH THIS?

In every residential centre all staff are happy to hear about complaints you may have. If you do not wish to speak to them you can talk to someone else you trust for example the centre manager, your social worker or a family member who can raise a complaint on your behalf. Centre managers are also 'complaints officers' and their role is to help sort out complaints you may have. If your complaint is about the centre manager or your social worker your complaint will be dealt with by a more senior member of staff.

DON'T FORGET
That EPIC can also help you

EPIC – Empowering People in Care
www.epiconline.ie

EPIC is a group that work with young people in the care system. Their job is to help make life better for people in care. They can give advice on your rights, give you help if you have any problems getting your rights met and help you make complaints if you need to.

ANOTHER WAY OF MAKING A COMPLAINT

Sometimes it's easier not to speak to someone you know and make a complaint online. If you wish to do this, you can use the Tusla website.

Go to the feedback and complaints section of Tusla's website

www.tusla.ie/about/feedback-and-complaints/tell-us-publications

This page has a list of guides on how to make complaints. It has a lot of really great information, but there's one in particular that can help, see below.

"How to Give Feedback and Make Complaints to Tusla - A Guide for Children and Young People"

This is a guide designed to help young people make complaints. It gives you lots of information on the process and includes a form at the end for you to fill out. You might have a copy of this guide in your residential centre already, so don't be afraid to ask someone if there is one.

www.tusla.ie/about/feedback-and-complaints



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I MAKE A COMPLAINT?

If you made a complaint by talking to someone, the first thing that will happen is your keyworker or centre manager will follow up on your complaint for you. They'll do their best to help and try to resolve the issue. If you made a complaint in writing by yourself, someone from the 'Tell Us' department in Tusla will contact you and keep you updated on what's happening with your complaint. In any case, this is how most complaints are dealt with:

'Local Resolution' This is when staff will try to help you resolve your issue in the centre. This could mean talking to the people that upset you or even just helping you make sure that you feel happy, safe and comfortable. It's always a good idea to try this way first. This shouldn't take more than five days to resolve, but if a solution can't be found, your complaint will be given to the centre manager who will try to help.

'Referral to Complaints Officer' This is when your complaint is sent to a person outside of your residential centre. Their job is to help find a solution and they will try to solve your issue in or within 20 working days. There might be times where you're not happy with the solution Tusla decide on. If this happens, you can ask Tusla to have your complaint reviewed by someone else. If you're still not happy, you can ask the Ombudsman for Children's Office to help.

Ombudsman for Children's Office - www.oco.ie The Ombudsman for Children's Office is a human rights institution that makes sure that young people under the age of 18 in Ireland are safe and well looked after. If you're ever unhappy about how a complaint is handled, you can ask the Ombudsman for Children's Office to help you.

YOUR INDIVIDUALITY

Everyone who comes to live in residential care is different. You and the people you live with may be from different cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds. There are a lot of things that make you unique and you have a right to not be discriminated against for who you are. This is one of your fundamental human rights and comes from the 'United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child'.

Because of this, staff need to make sure that:

"When you live in residential care you come into contact with a lot of different people. Try your best to be open and understand them, and learn from them"

Zoya, 15

Things to remember

The staff should always support you in your individuality. If you want to learn more about this, you can read more here:

www.hiqa.ie/reports-and-publications/standard/national-standards-childrens-residential-centres

"When I first came out, some staff were more supportive than others, but it gets better, even if it takes a while",

Colm, 16

You're able to take part in things that are important to your culture.

Your culture is part of your history and who you are as a person. This means that you should always be able to celebrate that and express yourself openly. This could be things like taking part in important events like Ramadan, wearing clothes that are important to your culture or being connected to local groups for people that share your culture or beliefs.

You're able to practice your religion. Religion and spirituality can be a really important part of how you live your life. You have the right to practice your religion, take part in the things that are important to you, celebrate important events, and go to your place of worship.

Your sexuality and gender are respected. If you're part of the LGBTQ+ community, or are wondering if you are, you have the right to be safe from discrimination, no matter what your sexuality or gender identity is. You also have the right to express yourself how you like. This could be things like going to Pride and local events, being part of LGBTQ+ youth groups, being free to dress how you like and express yourself without fear. You can also be called the name and pronouns you like.

You're able to get the food you like. There are a lot of different reasons why you might want or need different food to the other people you live with. This could be for religious or cultural reasons, because of allergies, or your own preferences. In any of these cases, you have the right to have the foods that you need. Let the staff know what's important for you.

WHAT CAN I DO IF I DON'T FEEL RESPECTED OR SUPPORTED?

If you feel like your individuality isn't being supported or accepted by the staff, or if you're having problem with other housemates, you should:

- ➔ Talk to the centre manager or your keyworker
- ➔ Talk to your social worker
- ➔ Talk to a family member or person you trust
- ➔ Talk to EPIC – Empowering People in Care - www.epiconline.ie
- ➔ Make a complaint

AFTERCARE

Aftercare is a service that supports you after you turn 18 and you're going to leave residential care. The aftercare service will become involved in your life between the age of 16 and 17, to work with you and important people in your life to help you plan for your future.

When you start planning for aftercare, you'll also have an aftercare worker to help you.



"Staff help you prepare for aftercare, with budgeting. I was helped by being given a certain amount for food shopping, and was helped to make meals"

Adam, 17

PLANNING FOR AFTERCARE

When you're planning for life as an adult or after residential care, **you, your keyworker, your social worker and your aftercare worker will work through and build a plan together.** This plan will cover things like:

- ➔ If you would like to go to college or learn a trade
- ➔ If you would like to find a job
- ➔ Where you are going to live
- ➔ If you're going to move back to your family
- ➔ How you're going to support yourself and manage money
- ➔ Helping you build a good support system of friends and/or family
- ➔ What support you can get from other services

The plan will be based around the things that you want and need. The purpose of this plan is to make your transition from living in care to an independent adult as easy as possible.

WHAT IF I CHANGE MY MIND ABOUT PLANS?

Sometimes, you might change your mind about what you want to do. For example, you might not want to go to college but then come across a course you might like to go on to. The important thing to remember is that **you can review or change your plans at any time by telling your keyworker.** They can help you change your plans to meet your needs.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT AFTERCARE?

If you would like to learn more about aftercare, the first thing you can do is talk to your keyworker. You could also ask some older people in your residential centre what aftercare planning is like for them. You can also read more here:

Tusla National Aftercare Policy for Alternative Care
www.tusla.ie/services/alternative-care/after-care

This page has a collection of different documents that outline the responsibilities of each person in your aftercare planning, and how the staff have to help you. The provision of this service is covered by the 'Child Care Care Amendment Act 2015'.

Things to remember

When you're under 18, your family, your foster family or any other adult can ask that your aftercare plan be reviewed **but so can you.**

If you're not happy with your plan, **you can request a review at any time** by talking to your keyworker or the aftercare worker to work through this together.

"I was helped by my keyworkers to find the right accommodation for me"

Justina, 17

USEFUL TIPS & INFORMATION

WORDS YOU'LL HEAR

There are many different words and terms you will hear when you first come into care. At first you may not understand what all these words mean. To help, we've put together some definitions on the most important ones:

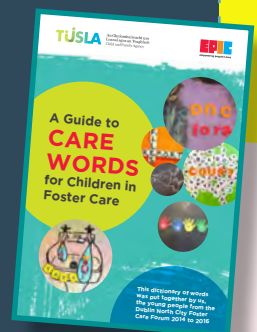
- ➔ **Access** – This is just another word for time that you spend with your family. Sometimes it can be called contact, or family time.
- ➔ **Admission** – Admission is the time that your care was given to the residential care centre.
- ➔ **Aftercare** – This is a word that describes the help you get leading up to, and after you leave residential care when you get older.
- ➔ **Care Plan** – Every young person in care has a care plan. This is a document that keeps track of how you're doing, and what kind of things you would like help with and the support you need.
- ➔ **Care Review** – These are meetings between the people that look after you, to see how you're doing and to update your care plan. You can go to these meetings if you like, or you can tell your social worker about what you would like them to talk about.
- ➔ **Daily Report** – there are lots of different types of reports and notes that will be made in residential care. Some are for school, some are for your health, this one is for how you're doing and feeling day-to-day.
- ➔ **Inventory** – Inventory means a written record of things that belong to you. Sometimes this can be personal items, other times it can be things like medication. This is to make sure that you, and the things you own, are safe.
- ➔ **Keyworker** – This is the staff member who is responsible for your care while you're living in the centre. They will have more time with you than other staff and aim to be the person who can answer your questions and help you with what you need.
- ➔ **Legal Guardian** – A legal guardian is a person who is legally responsible for the care and wellbeing of a young person. This can be a parent, a family member or a person decided by a court.
- ➔ **Placement Plan** – This is a report full of information on how staff should work with you and look after you while you're in residential care and what kind of things you need.
- ➔ **Risk Assessment** – This is a process done with your social worker that makes sure it's safe for you to see the people you want to see and do the things you want to do.
- ➔ **Social Worker** – This is a person who works with young people and their families to make sure that they're safe and looked after. Your social worker will visit you to see how you're doing and you can ask them for help with things like your care plan and family access.

During your time in residential care, there will probably be a lot more words you will hear that are confusing. Tusla have a really great dictionary of words that give in-depth explanations of lots of words and terms. It's called:

"A guide to Care Words for Children in Foster Care"

www.epiconline.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/TUSLA-EPIC-DICTIONARY-OF-CARE-WORDS-WEB-VERSION.pdf

This guide was written by young people in care, for young people in care. It covers all of the words they thought might be tricky, explained in a way that's easy to understand.



USEFUL RESOURCES

RESIDENTIAL STANDARDS

Health Information and Quality Authority

National Standards for Children's Residential Care Centres

This is a set of rules, guidelines, and standards for all residential care centres in Ireland. This has a list of 29 statements of what a good centre should look like to make sure young people are well looked after.

Child Care (Placement of Children in Residential Care) Regulations, 1995'

This is a set of regulations, or rules, that a residential care centre has to follow by law. These rules cover a lot of things, like the safety of the building, the number of rooms and young people, how well the centre staff look after you.

TUSLA'S TACTIC GUIDES AND RESOURCES

www.tusla.ie/publications/tactic

'A guide to going into Residential Care'

This is a really great guide that has a lot of useful information about living in care. There are also some questions and activities that you can do with your keyworker to help you feel more comfortable and at home.



'Me and My Care Plan Review Form'

This is a document that you can use with your keyworker to help figure out what your care plan is going to look like. It will help you to let your keyworker know what things are important to you, and what you would like help with.



TUSLA DOCUMENTS AND GUIDES

'How to Give Feedback and Make Complaints to Tusla – A Guide for Children and Young People'

We told you a little bit about how you can make a complaint as a young person in care. This guide though goes into a lot more detail than we have. It gives a lot of information but in an easy-to-understand way.

"A Guide to Care Words for Children in Foster Care"

This guide was written by young people just like you and includes all the words that they felt were confusing. If you're ever confused about the meaning of something, you can always check this guide before asking your keyworker or staff.

"The Changing Futures Website"

This is also a really useful website for information about Tusla. It was designed by young people with experience of Tusla services.

www.changingfutures.ie



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