

Help If You Are Homeless A Guide for 16/17 Year Olds

Your Questions, Answered



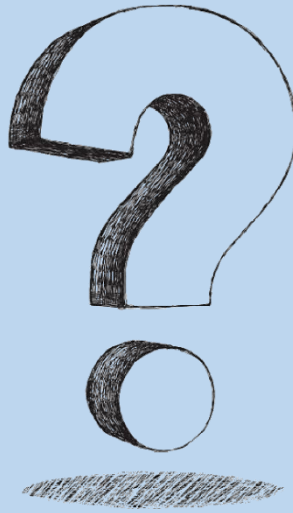
What should I do if I become homeless or am at risk of being homeless?

If you have been asked to leave your home, if you have nowhere to stay tonight, or you are sofa surfing, or at risk of having nowhere to live, then you should contact your local council housing office (Dudley Council Plus) or Dudley Children's Services – contact details for both are on the back of this leaflet.



Will we contact your family?

Yes, a social worker will contact your family. The priority is to support you to return home, where safe to do so. Dudley Children's Services will want to speak with your family to see if they can help sort out any of the problems you are having and support a possible return home.



What will happen if I can't return home?

If you can't return home, Dudley Children's Services will complete a Child and Young Person's Assessment to assess your needs. While your assessment is undertaken, the Local Authority will ensure you have a safe and suitable place to stay. They may explore if it's possible for you to stay with extended family or friends during this time. If not, temporary accommodation will be found for you.

If the assessment finds that you are a 'Child in Need', this means the council has a responsibility to ensure you are kept safe and healthy and provided with services that help with your development, this includes supporting you with accommodation.

If you are found to be homeless, a joint assessment should be undertaken by Housing and Children's Services. This gives you the opportunity to speak with a social worker and housing officer together and have your needs assessed. A decision will then be made on how you will be supported, both now and in the future.

What does being 'accommodated' by Children's Services mean for me?

You will be accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. Dudley Children's Services will identify a placement which best suits your needs. This could be: -

- with a foster carer;
- in a residential home;
- with a supported lodgings carer; or
- in a semi-independent placement

As a 'Looked after Child', you will have an allocated social worker who will oversee your care plan. Your social worker will visit you regularly and support you through to independent living. They will also provide help with areas such as education, health, finances and family relationships. You will be offered an initial and annual health assessment and regular 'Looked after Child' Reviews, overseen by an Independent Reviewing Officer, to assess your progress and ensure all appropriate support is in place.

You may remain in the care of Dudley Children's Services until the age of 18 years old, however in certain circumstances you could continue to receive support until the age of 25 years old via the Care Leavers Team (eligibility for this can be explored with your social worker).

Do I have a choice about being looked after by Dudley Children's Services?

Yes. Dudley Children's Services will only offer to accommodate you as a 'Looked after Child' if there is no other appropriate way of meeting all of your needs.

Your consent is needed to be accommodated - you will not be forced into becoming a 'Looked after child. However, **it is important that you make an informed decision and it is recommended that you consider accessing support via an advocate or independent person before deciding** (your social worker can refer to an advocacy service on your behalf).

What will happen if I choose not to be looked after by Dudley Children's Services?

If you don't want to be accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act, Dudley Children's Services can still provide you with accommodation through Section 17 of the Children Act. In these circumstances you will still have an allocated Social Worker to support you under a Child in Need Plan until you no longer require accommodation or you until you reach the age of 18. As a Child in Need you will be expected to contribute to your care plan and attend multi-agency Child in Need Reviews.

If you decide that you don't want to be accommodated or supported by Dudley Children's Services at all, you may be able to get help from the Council Homelessness Prevention Team - contact details for them can be found on the back of this leaflet.



Jargon Buster for Young People

Accommodation – When a young person is cared for by Children’s Services. Before, or immediately after being accommodated, the social worker should draw up a care plan and get agreement from the young person to the plan. The care plan should set out how the accommodation arrangement can be ended. If a young person is ‘accommodated’ it means they are being ‘looked after’.

Section 17 (of the Children Act 1989) – This is the part of the law that says Children’s Services should provide help to Children in Need to safeguard and promote their welfare. This means you will have an allocated social worker but will not be ‘looked after’.

Section 20 (of the Children Act 1989) – This is the part of the law that says Children’s Services should look after a child when the person caring for them is prevented from doing so, for whatever reason. This means you will have an allocated social worker and a care plan which will be regularly reviewed.

Foster Care – When a young person is looked after by the local authority, they may be placed with foster carers who look after them. Foster carers have to be assessed and approved by Children’s Services before a looked after child is placed with them. They do not have parental responsibility for the young person, they offer the young person a place in their home and have responsibility for their daily care.

Residential Home – A large house where young people live together as a group, with professional staff to look after them. As well as providing food, shelter and a space for leisure in a caring environment, young people are also supported to grow and develop ready for independence.

Semi-Independent Placement – Accommodation which gives young people the opportunity to learn independence skills to get ready for their own tenancy. Onsite Key Workers help you to gain skills such as cooking, cleaning and budgeting.

Supported Lodgings – A short to medium term arrangement where a young person stays with a host family, in their home. The young person receives day to day support from their host, gaining support for independence.

Care Plan – This is the written plan that sets out the arrangements for a young person who is looked after. Before it is drawn up, the social worker must:

- find out the wishes and feelings of the parent, the young person and other significant people in the child's life and
- carry out an assessment of the young person's needs so that services are provided to make sure their needs are met, including their:
 - health
 - education
 - emotional behavioural development
 - identity
 - need for contact with other people in the family

The care plan will also set out

- where the young person will live and why this is good for the child.
- the long term or permanent plan for the young person and
- the name of the Independent Reviewing Officer.

Care plans are reviewed at regular Looked After Child Review Meetings.

Independent Reviewing Officer – Every young person who is looked after by Children's Services must have an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). Their main job is to:

- monitor whether Children's Services are meeting the young person's needs and carrying out the care plan and
- chair Looked After Child Review Meetings

Where to get help...

Shelter

0808 800 4444

www.shelter.org.uk

Citizens Advice Bureau

www.citizensadvicebureau.org.uk

Runaway Helpline

116 000

www.runawayhelpline.org.uk

Just for Kids Law

020 3174 2279

www.justforkidslaw.org



Dudley Children's Services

0300 555 0050 (Mon – Fri; 9am – 5pm)

0300 555 8574 (Out of office hours)

Dudley Council Plus

0300 555 2345

259 Castle Street, Dudley Town Centre, DY1 1LQ

www.dudley.gov.uk/council-community/dudley-council-plus/

Homelessness Prevention Team

0300 555 2345