

A-Z OF LEAVING CARE




VOYPIC
voice of young people in care

A - Z OF LEAVING CARE

- A** - Accommodation
- B** - Budgeting
- C** - Counselling/Advice
- D** - Drink and Drugs
- E** - Education and Training
- F** - Food
- G** - Grants & Other Financial Entitlements
- H** - Health
- I** - Independence Training & Preparation for Adulthood
- J** - Jobs
- K** - Keeping in Touch
- L** - Loneliness
- M** - Money
- N** - Neighbours
- O** - Own Your Own Information
- P** - Personal Adviser and Pathway Plans
- Q** - Questions
- R** - Rights
- S** - Social Worker Support
- T** - Taking Care of Yourself/Safety
- U** - U Choose (Decision-Making)
- V** - VOYPIC
- W** - Well-Being
- X** - X-Rated
- Y** - Youth Clubs/Centres
- Z** - *Zzzzzzzzz*



MOVING TOWARDS ADULTHOOD

Moving through Care and preparing for adulthood can be both a scary and happy time. When you move should depend on whether you are prepared and ready to leave. These decisions should be made with you along with your Social Worker, Carers, and Personal Advisor. Make sure you talk to your Social Worker about how you are feeling. Some young people's circumstances will not change when they leave Care. Leaving Care does not always mean big changes. You could continue to live with your Foster Carers or you could already be at home living with your family.

This booklet should help in providing you with the information you will need to know when you are moving from being in Care into becoming an adult. While this booklet will give you some information and advice if you need more help you can ask your Carer, Social Worker or Personal Adviser. They are there to help and support you.



ACCOMMODATION

Where will I live?

If you are preparing to leave Care you are probably thinking about where you would like to live! Your Social Worker or Personal Adviser will help you work out what type of accommodation suits you best and what support you will need. This will be recorded in your Pathway Plan (Look at P in this guide). There are a number of options available.

Staying on with Carers/ Return to Family

You might feel that you are not ready to move on from your care placement. You should discuss this with your Social Worker. It may be possible to stay on in your current placement, although remember this cannot be guaranteed. Some young people decide that they want to go back and live with their parents or other family members.

Former Carers Scheme

Some young people may not want to leave their Foster family and may wish to remain there after they turn eighteen. The Former Carers Scheme supports young people who are aged 18-21 to continue to live with their Foster family and are in some form of education, training, employment or volunteering scheme. Financial support will be provided to your foster parents and is determined by the nature of the living arrangements (e.g. do you live there full-time or part-time). To find out if you are eligible for the scheme, talk to your Foster Carer, Social Worker or Personal Adviser.

Supported Lodgings/Housing

Some HSC Trusts have a Supported Lodgings Scheme. This scheme supports young people to live in someone's home where they receive support from Social Services. Each supported lodgings placement has been approved by Social Services. Your placement will be reviewed and you are required to agree to certain sets of rules. Supported Housing projects are also available in some Trusts. These projects can be small, with several people sharing a house, larger hostels or flats. There are staff to help you and other young people who live close by.

Housing Executive/Housing Association Accommodation

This type of housing can be hard to get in certain areas. You will need to fill in an application form and you can choose the area in which you would like to live. Your name will be put on a waiting list. Depending on what area you choose you could be on the waiting list for quite some time.

NIHE/Housing Association accommodation is usually unfurnished, so you will need help to get furniture etc before you move in. Your Social Worker or Personal Adviser will help you get these items through a Setting Up Home Allowance.

Privately Rented Accommodation

Renting from a private landlord is often difficult for 16/17 year olds, so you might have to wait until you turn 18 to get your own flat or house. Private tenancy agreements can be very difficult to understand and you might need some support from your Social Worker/Personal Adviser. Tenancies are often short term and are renewed on a yearly basis. Private flats/houses may have some items of furniture already in place e.g. cooker, fridge, etc.

These belong to the landlord. You will probably be expected to pay a months rent in advance and will also have to pay a security deposit, usually the equivalent to a months rent. If you need help with these advance payments speak to your Social Worker/Personal Adviser.

When living in Housing Executive and privately rented accommodation, floating support is available in all Trust areas. Floating Support Services offer advice and guidance about housing issues and managing a home of your own in the community. Ask your Personal Adviser or Social Worker about Floating Support services in your area.

Shared House or Flat

Sharing a house or flat is usually a cheaper and less frightening alternative. In shared accommodation bills are shared among all the residents. As there are other people living in the house/flat you are less likely to feel lonely. On the down side, sharing can sometimes be difficult, especially if your housemates aren't familiar with cleaning up after themselves!

Lodgings

If you don't want to live by yourself or with other young people you could choose to live in someone's house as a lodger. Some people rent out rooms in their house as a way of bringing extra money. These rooms are often advertised in local newspapers or corner shops.



BUDGETING

Learning to manage your money will help you become more independent. Before you leave Care, it's important to work out a budget to make sure you'll be able to afford all the new things you'll have to pay for. All those things you may well take for granted, such as hot water, food and the TV license, will suddenly be coming out of your pocket. When you draw up a budget, you add up all your outgoings and all your income, then subtract the outgoings from the income and hope that there's something left over!

First of all, consider all your outgoings, that is, the money you spend, or will be spending if you get your own place. Think about the things you will have to spend money on if you have your own place and how much they will cost:

- **Rent (this depends on where you live and what kind of property you're renting)**
- **Electricity and/or gas bills (these will vary depending on the size of your home and the time of year - the more you have your heating on, the higher your bills will be!)**
- **Telephone bill**

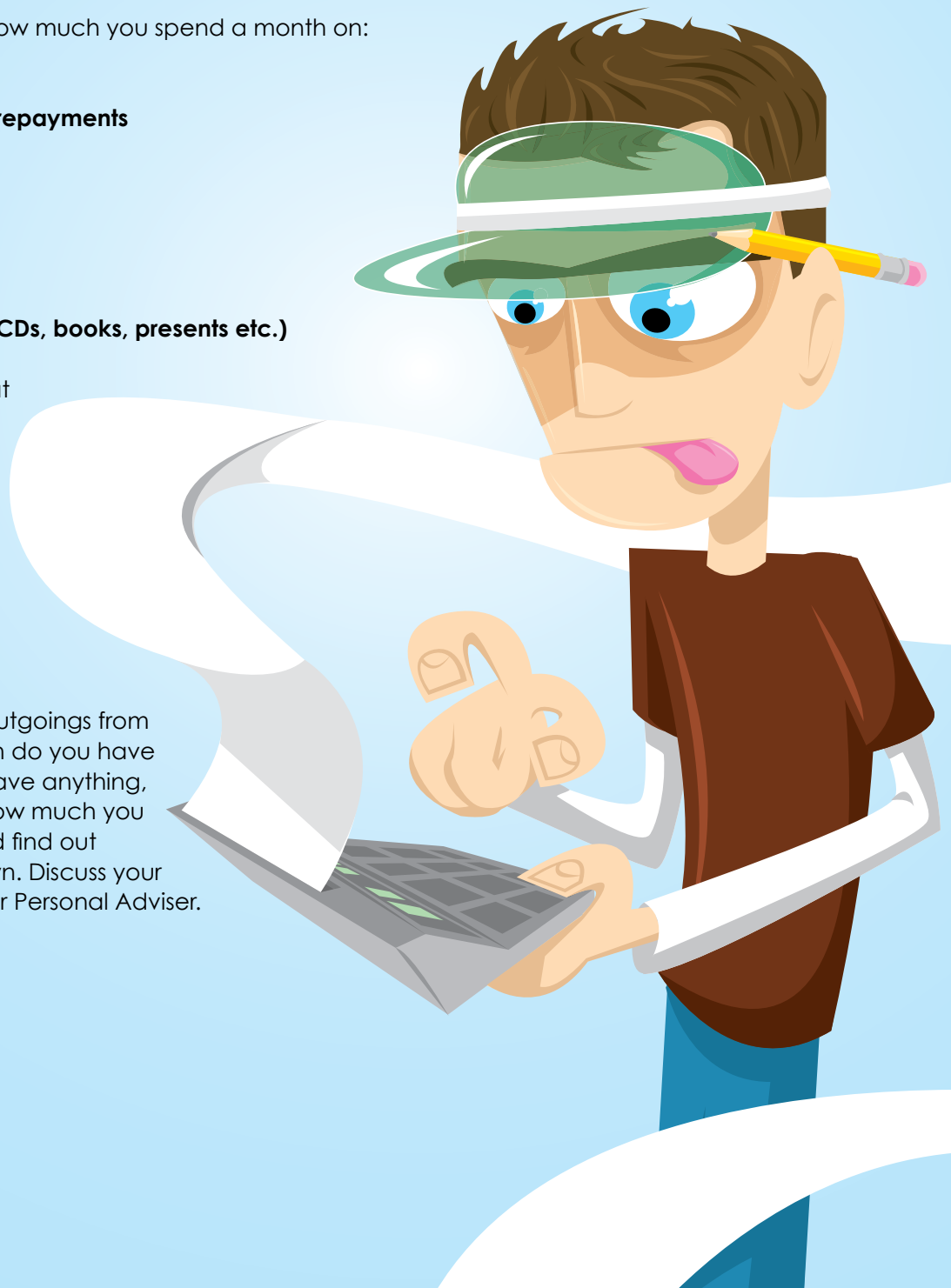
Then try and work out how much you spend a month on:

- **Mobile phone**
- **Credit card or loan repayments**
- **Travel**
- **Food**
- **Toiletries**
- **Clothes**
- **Cigarettes**
- **Going out**
- **Other expenditure (CDs, books, presents etc.)**

Next you need to look at the money you have coming in. This could be from:

- **Wages**
- **Benefits/grants**
- **Student loans**
- **Contributions from your family**

If you take away your outgoings from your income, how much do you have left over? If you don't have anything, you'll need to look at how much you spend in each area and find out where you can cut down. Discuss your budgeting skills with your Personal Adviser.



COUNSELLING/ADVICE

Leaving Care sometimes can be difficult and not easy for you to adjust to. If you feel that you are not coping well, you can talk to someone at a counselling service. They will provide you with an ear to listen to you and some help and advice to help set you back on track.

These are some organisations/services that can help you:

Childline

ChildLine is the free helpline for children and young people in the UK. Children and young people can call us on 0800 1111 to talk about any problem - our counsellors are always here to help you sort it out.

Contact Number: 0800 1111
Website: www.childline.org.uk

Samaritans

Samaritans provides confidential non-judgemental emotional support, 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

Contact Number: 08457 90 90 90
Website: www.samaritans.org.uk

Gingerbread

Gingerbread is an agency that works with and for lone parents and their children, they work with lone parents and other organisations to promote the integrity and life choices of one-parent families.

Advice Line: 0808 808 8090
Website: www.gingerbreadni.org

Contact Youth

Contact Youth help young people ages 8-25 years through face to face counselling or through it's free telephone counselling service.

Contact Number: 02890 320 092
Youthline 24/7: 0808 808 8000
Website: www.contactyouth.org



DRINK AND DRUGS

The law states it is not legal to buy alcohol until you are 18. However, if you choose to drink alcohol then there are some important facts you need to know about how to drink safely and responsibly.

Your gender:

The average adult male is made up of 66% fluid, compared to 55% for women. This means any alcohol intake winds up more diluted in the bloke's body. As a result, women are more likely to get drunk faster than men on the same booze intake.

Your physical shape:

Your size, weight and height influence the effect of alcohol on your body. The bigger you are, the more blood you have in your body. This means that as you drink, the alcohol concentration in your bloodstream will rise at a slower rate than your short-ass boozing buddy.

Your relationship with drink:

Drink on a regular basis and your mind and body can become tolerant to alcohol. This means it gets used to the presence of booze and encourages you to drink more to feel the same effect. So if you're drinking with someone who's never had a pint before, chances are they'll hit the floor before you can say: 'same again, then?'

The type of drink:

The effects of some alcoholic drinks work faster than others. For example, the body absorbs fizzy drinks such as alcopops, champagne or cider, more rapidly than stuff like wine or whiskey. Also consider the percentage alcohol per volume of your chosen tippie. The greater the percentage, the less you need to feel the effects.

The rate you drink:

The faster you drink, the quicker the effects kick in, but it may also take you by surprise. So pace yourself, people.

When you last ate:

Alcohol is absorbed into the bloodstream via the stomach. So if you haven't eaten, the drink could go straight to your head. If you know you're going to be drinking, eat a decent meal first to help slow down the absorption rate.

Your mood:

Alcohol is a depressant drug, so if you're down when you're drinking then chances are you'll wind up feeling worse.

If you require any more information about drink and its effect have a look at the following websites:

www.knowyourlimits.info

www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk

www.drugsalcohol.info



DRUGS

It is important to know the facts about drugs, as they could have a number of bad effects on you.

- Street drugs don't come with an instruction manual, one that's been officially sanctioned by the manufacturers. Instead, there's often a question mark over what's in it, what it could do to you, plus a whole load of myths you might have picked up in the past.
- Whatever your viewpoint about drugs, it's always worth taking time to find a source of information that's accurate, balanced and independent.

Know yourself

- In life, it's important to know what makes you tick, and to be relaxed about the kind of person you are. Otherwise, when it comes to drugs, you run the risk of getting involved because you feel it's expected of you, or that somehow you'd be missing out if you passed on the chance.
- Many people use drugs because they feel it helps them have a good time. If you're ever in this situation, however, ask if you could still enjoy yourself without any kind of recreational refreshment. Drugs won't guarantee a good night out and it's good to bear in mind all the things you could forget by getting off your face.

If you require any further information about drugs have a look at the following websites:

www.drugsalcohol.info

www.northernireland.gov.uk/drugs

www.globalgateway.com/features/nidrugs.asp

www.talktofrank.com



EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Everyone in Northern Ireland is required by the law to have a formal education from the age of 5 to 16. The range of subjects taught is known as the National Curriculum. Before you leave school at 16 you will hopefully have taken your GCSE's. So what next?

Further Education:

From the age of 16 the choice as to whether or not you remain at school is yours! You may decide to stay at your current school in 6th Form or you may choose to move to a Further Education (FE) College. At an FE college you can re-sit exams that you failed at school, study for your A Levels or choose an entirely new course of study, from beauty to construction! You can attend an FE college on a full or part time basis and there are no age limits!

Higher Education:

Higher Education means going to University full time and studying for a degree, although you could get a job and study part time. You will need to meet certain requirements to get into Higher Education. For example, you may need GCSE's/A Levels at certain grades or in particular subjects. All universities have admissions staff who can help you with any questions you may have.

Continuing in formal education may not be for you. You may choose another route for example, training schemes. There are a number of options you may want to consider:

- **Essential Skills**
- **Jobskills**
- **Apprenticeships**
- **NewDeal (18+)**

For more information on education and training opportunities check out www.delni.gov.uk

There is now a Careers Adviser in every Trust who is a dedicated link person for Care Leavers. They can offer help and advice to you about a particular career path that you might have in mind, for instance, being a cook, vet or footballer. Ask your Personal Adviser or Social Worker who the specialist Careers Adviser is in your area.



Food

Looking after yourself includes eating regularly and healthily. This can be one of the big challenges you face when you leave Care. Hopefully while in Care you will have had the opportunity to learn how to cook and shop. Even so, when faced with doing these things for yourself when you leave Care can still be a bit daunting. Remember your Personal Advisor is there to continue to help you with shopping, cooking and budgeting.

It is important that when you are cooking for yourself that you try to eat healthily. No matter how much exercise you do, eating fatty junk foods seven days a week can damage your body.

What's healthy?

Healthy eating is all about making sure you get the recommended amounts of vitamins, minerals, protein and carbohydrates, as well as the right types of fats and sugars. There's a huge amount of healthy eating advice and information about, and trying to get your head around all of it is almost impossible.

Here are a few top tips to make sure that you're having the right mix of foods:

- Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day. This includes servings of fruit juice and baked beans
- Base your meals on starchy foods, such as potatoes, brown rice and wholemeal bread
- If you eat meat every day of the week, try substituting it with oily fish like mackerel, salmon or tuna on a couple of days
- Always go for low-fat cheese, milk and yoghurt
- Watch how much salt you're eating. As most salt we eat comes from processed foods, read the label - food containing more than 1.25 grams of salt per 100g is a lot. Don't add it to food when you're cooking or at the table
- Try and cut down the number of high fat or high sugar snacks and drinks you have every week

'CHICKEN AND SPRING VEGETABLE STIR-FRY'

Here is a healthy recipe that is also tasty and easy to make. This Chicken and Spring Vegetable Stir-Fry recipe makes 4 servings and only takes 20 minutes to make!

Ingredients

- 2 Chicken Breast Fillets (approx. 150g each)
- 4 Blocks Medium Egg Noodles, 65g each
- 1 Jar Black Bean Stir-Fry Sauce
- 100g Broccoli
- 100g Olive Oil
- 100g Baby Sweetcorn
- 2 Medium Carrots
- 34g Ginger
- 1 Bunch of Scallions

Method

1. Bring a large saucepan of water to the boil, add the noodles, return to the boil and simmer for 4 minutes (or per pack instructions). Drain and keep warm
2. Slice the chicken breasts into 1 inch chunks,
 - cut the broccoli into florets,
 - peel the ginger and cut into matchsticks,
 - trim and diagonally slice the scallions,
 - peel the carrots and cut into matchsticks
3. Bring a second pan of water to the boil and blanch the broccoli and sweet corn in the water for 2 minutes. Drain well.
4. Heat ½ tbsp oil in the wok until smoking then add the chicken and stir-fry for 7-8 minutes (or until golden). Transfer to a plate and keep warm.
5. Heat the remaining oil in a pan and add the ginger, scallions and carrots and stir-fry for 2mins. Stir in the broccoli and sweet corn and stir fry for a further 2 minutes
6. Return the chicken to a pan; add the noodles and black bean sauce. Stir to coat and heat through
7. Serve immediately!



GRANTS & OTHER FINANCIAL ENTITLEMENTS

While you remain in your Care placement, financial support will continue to be available to you in the normal way e.g pocket money, clothing. Other financial support made available to you will be based on your needs and entitlements.

If you move out of your Care placement before you are 18, your Social Worker and Personal Advisor should explain to you how you will be financially supported and what you are entitled to. If you have no other source of income and are living in, for example, supported accommodation, your Trust is responsible for paying your rent; supports costs and weekly living allowance, up until you reach 18 years.

When you reach 18 years, and depending on what you are doing, you may be in education, training or employment, or a carer/young parent, you may be entitled to financial support through a range of agencies, for example, the Trust, Social Security Agency and Department of Education.

It is really important that your Social Worker and Personal Advisor work closely with you to make sure you have all the information you need to know about your entitlements and how to access them depending on your circumstances.

If you decide to stay on at school or go to college, you may be entitled to an Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). EMA is a fortnightly payment for students aged 16-19 years from lower income households. To be eligible you must be studying at least 15 hours at an FE college or studying full time at school. For more information contact your Personal Advisor, Social Worker or EMA Customer Services on 0845 601 7646.

If you find that you get sick, or have to pay dental or optician bills, you may be entitled to get help with some, if not all the costs. Contact your local Social Security Agency and ask for leaflet HC 11 6 form to find out more.

HEALTH

We are all spending much more time sitting these days. We work and play in seats more than ever before. Many jobs are now desk jobs and TV, video games and DVDs have become a big part of people's spare time. So exercise is not a part of daily life like it used to be. We now have to make an effort and factor exercise into our lives. But it doesn't have to be a chore or cost money, exercise should be fun and it can be included in your normal day.



Remember.... any movement is an improvement!

- Climb stairs instead of using lifts or escalators.
- Ride bikes or walk whenever you can. You only need to plan your day a little better and you will save money and the environment.
- Walking the dog is also a good way of improving your fitness, and your dog will love it too.
- At lunchtime, go for a walk with a friend instead of sitting down talking - you can talk while you walk. Get out into nature!
- Have a game of soccer, footy, cricket or basketball (or any other game) during your lunch break.
- Make use of whatever is around you to fit your physical activity into everyday life.

Add more to your own list - let your imagination go wild.

Benefits of being physically active

- You feel fit, energetic, strong and healthy. If you've ever suffered from a lack of energy, say after an illness such as glandular fever, you'll know how good it is to have a healthy body. Feeling fit, energetic, strong and healthy makes you feel positive about life.
- Physical activity releases endorphins - these are the body's natural 'feel good' chemicals - no wonder getting physical makes you feel good!
- Physical activity reduces stress and tension, making you one relaxed person.
- Exhilaration - enjoy the thrill of some activities, like climbing a rock wall or BMX racing.
- Social enjoyment, like making new friends, enjoying the fun of a social team game together, or the chatting while you walk, play tennis or bike ride together.
- Increased skills - practice means getting better at what you do.
- More physical activity means you can eat more without gaining pounds.
- Your muscles become stronger with more physical activity.
- You have a better night's sleep when you are regularly active.
- You have more energy and feel less tired.
- Being healthy means looking your glowing best - this can increase self-esteem and positive self-image.
- You can use strenuous physical activity as an effective way of reducing your anger.
- Any physical activity that involves an impact, e.g. walking, running, aerobics etc, helps to keep calcium in your bones, keeping them stronger for longer. This will make you stand tall and strong and help prevent osteoporosis when you're older.
- Physical activity means a strong heart and lungs - they'll last longer - and so will you! Your blood pressure and the bad cholesterol are lower, so you'll stay healthy in later years.

If you find that you do get sick, or have to pay for dental or optician bills you may be entitled to help to cover some, if not all of the costs. If you go to your local DHSS office and ask them for a HC 11 form this will outline whether you are eligible.

But remember, there is more to being healthy than getting exercise and eating well. It is also important to look after your emotional health and wellbeing. See 'W' for Wellbeing.



INDPENDENCE TRAINING & **P**REPARATION FOR LEAVING CARE AND ADULT LIFE

Getting ready and prepared for the time you are no longer Looked After, should start well in advance of the date and time that you plan to leave your Care placement. Preparation involves learning skills as well as feeling emotionally ready to take on a lot of new responsibilities. Whilst in Care there should be formal and informal opportunities for you to learn new skills that will help you when you leave Care. Carers and workers will work to support you to gain these new skills - sometimes working with you in a group. The kind of things that they will help you with includes managing a budget, cooking, shopping, managing a household, personal health and development.

Independence training helps you learn all the skills you will need when you leave Care. Your Personal Adviser / Social Worker / Key Worker will help you draw up a list of the types of areas you will need to look at. Training could include cooking, DIY, personal health, budgeting etc. Independence training will help you be more emotionally and physically prepared for adulthood. So if there are things you would like to know before you leave Care, make sure you learn about it before you leave.



JOBS

When you are applying for most jobs you need to have a CV. Your CV will provide prospective employers with a summary of your relevant life experiences and skills to date. A CV or 'Curriculum Vitae' is essentially a record of your personal, educational and work details, which emphasises the experience, knowledge and skills relevant to the type of job / course of study for which you are applying.

CV's are where you can elaborate on your work history, education, training and skills. You don't need to have had paid employment to have a CV. You could focus instead on the skills and experience you have gained through school, study, work experience and hobbies.

Here are some tips to help you write your CV:

- Your CV should be no more than two pages long
- Make it easy to read by putting a space between each section
- Be brief, you can leave things out that are less important
- Start with your personal details, name, address and contact details
- You should outline your skills and qualifications - Start with your most recent study and go back to the qualifications you got at school. Use bullet points or a table to include, university, college name, the dates the qualifications were awarded, any other relevant courses
- Include a brief outline of your education and the experience you have
- Some jobs require experience, while for others your qualifications are more important
- If you've been working for a while, put your employment history first: if you don't have much work experience, focus on your education, training and volunteering
- Start with your present or most recent job and work backwards, using bullet points.

Include:

- Each employer
- The dates you worked for them (if you can't remember, these dates should be on your P45 or the month would do)
- The job title
- The main duties you carried out
- Finally, you should state that references are available if required. You don't need to include referees contact details on the CV. At least one referee should be work related; if you haven't worked some other responsible person who is not related to you could provide you with a reference.

It's a good idea to get some help with your CV. Look at the websites listed below and get someone with experience to read your CV and give you feedback!

Useful Websites:

www.totaljobs.com

www.cvspecial.co.uk

www.workthing.com

KEEPING IN CONTACT

To help you feel supported and less isolated when you leave Care it is important that you keep in contact with people who are important to you. Obviously your Personal Adviser and Social Worker will be there to offer support and advice but it is important that you keep in contact with family, friends and teachers to get extra help and support from them. In some cases the Trust may be able to offer financial assistance to help keep in contact with your family and/or friends. If you need help keeping in contact with your family and friends talk to your Personal Adviser or Social Worker to see if this can be put into your Pathway Plan.

LONELINESS

Loneliness is a feeling which can strike a person at any time. It is not dependant on being physically alone - in fact, it's common to experience loneliness when surrounded by people with whom we don't feel a common link. For this reason, loneliness can occur when first leaving care and moving into new accommodation, whether it's a shared house, supported housing etc.

Leaving Care can be both exhilarating and frightening. Many people feel excited by the new challenges which lie ahead and look forward to meeting new people and enjoying new experiences. However, you might feel anxious that you may not immediately meet new people you feel comfortable with and that you will end up by feeling lonely and isolated and with no-one to talk too. This is quite common for anyone starting afresh somewhere new.

So if this does happen to you, here are some important points to remember.

- Firstly, try very hard not to panic. This is more easily said than done, but panicking will only cause you to make rash judgments and decisions. Also, when you do meet people you are more likely to make friendships if you are calm and relaxed rather than anxious.
- Just because you are on your own does not mean that there is anything wrong with you. Self-esteem and confidence can take a knock when you find yourself feeling lonely and this feeling is normal. Remind yourself of friends you have made in the past and successful group situations which you have been a part of.
- Give it time. It would be nice if everybody found immediate friendships, but it doesn't always happen that way. Just try and accept that for you, along with many others, it is going to take a little longer than you might have hoped.
- Do things to help yourself. Sometimes it is necessary to be pro-active in making things happen. It is no use hiding away. Be cheerful and friendly with those you do meet, smile so that others feel you are approachable. Join any club or society which interests you, because shared interests are a tried and trusted way of meeting new friends. Try to be the sort of person that you would like to make friends with.
- A new job, volunteering or going back into education or training is a great way of meeting new people.
- Some Leaving and After Care services run user groups - where you can meet and chat with other young people who have left care too and are experiencing the same feelings as you.
- Finally, try and talk your feelings over with someone you can confide in - a friend, your Social Worker or Personal Adviser. It really does help to talk through your feelings and to be reassured that what you are feeling and experiencing is not unusual.

Loneliness may not always strike when you first leave Care. Sometimes an unexpected change in situation may lead to you feeling more isolated than you did before. For instance, a change in accommodation where you find yourself living with different and unfamiliar people. Or there can sometimes be a shift within friendship groups, if someone who was once your closest friend becomes more friendly with someone else. It's important to remember that changes in friendships is normal and that if you can try and remain calm and cheerful, the situation will eventually right itself. It is important that you seek support from your Social Worker or Personal Adviser if you are feeling particularly lonely and are concerned that things are not getting any better for you.



MONEY

It is a requirement to have a National Insurance Number to claim benefits. Your National Insurance Number should be given to you when you become 16. Your Social Worker should apply for your National Insurance Number before your 16th birthday to ensure that you can claim benefits and/or get a job. Ask your Social Worker whether they have applied for your National Insurance Number. The three main benefits claimed by young people are called Income Support, Job Seekers Allowance and Housing Benefit.

Income Support

Income Support may be paid to you if you cannot work or do not work more than 16 hours a week. It may be that you are still in school or college, are unwell, or looking after a child. If you are working more than 16 hours a week, you cannot claim Income Support.

Job Seeker's Allowance

Job Seeker's Allowance is a benefit that many Care Leavers can claim. It is similar to Income Support, but the difference is that it can be paid to you if you are able to work, but you have not got a job, or you are working less than 16 hours a week. When you contact the Social Security Agency or Jobs & Benefits office you will be issued with a claim pack which includes the claim form for Job Seeker's Allowance and the Jobsearch Plan.

An appointment for a new Job Seeker's interview will be arranged for you with a Client Advisor / Personal Adviser. You will need to bring a fully completed claim form and supporting documents with you when attending the interview. At the interview the conditions of Job Seeker's Allowance will be explained and a Job Seeker's Agreement will be drawn up based on your Jobsearch Plan. A claim for Job Seeker's Allowance may only be accepted when a claim form has been fully completed. Your Personal Adviser or Social Worker should help you complete the relevant forms.

Housing Benefit

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive pays Housing Benefit to people who need help to pay their rent. **How is it paid?** In cases where you are liable to pay rent to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive or rates to the Rates Collection Agency, benefit is paid directly to your rent account. If rent is paid to a private landlord, then benefits will be paid by cheque to you or credited to your landlord's bank account.

Community Care Grants

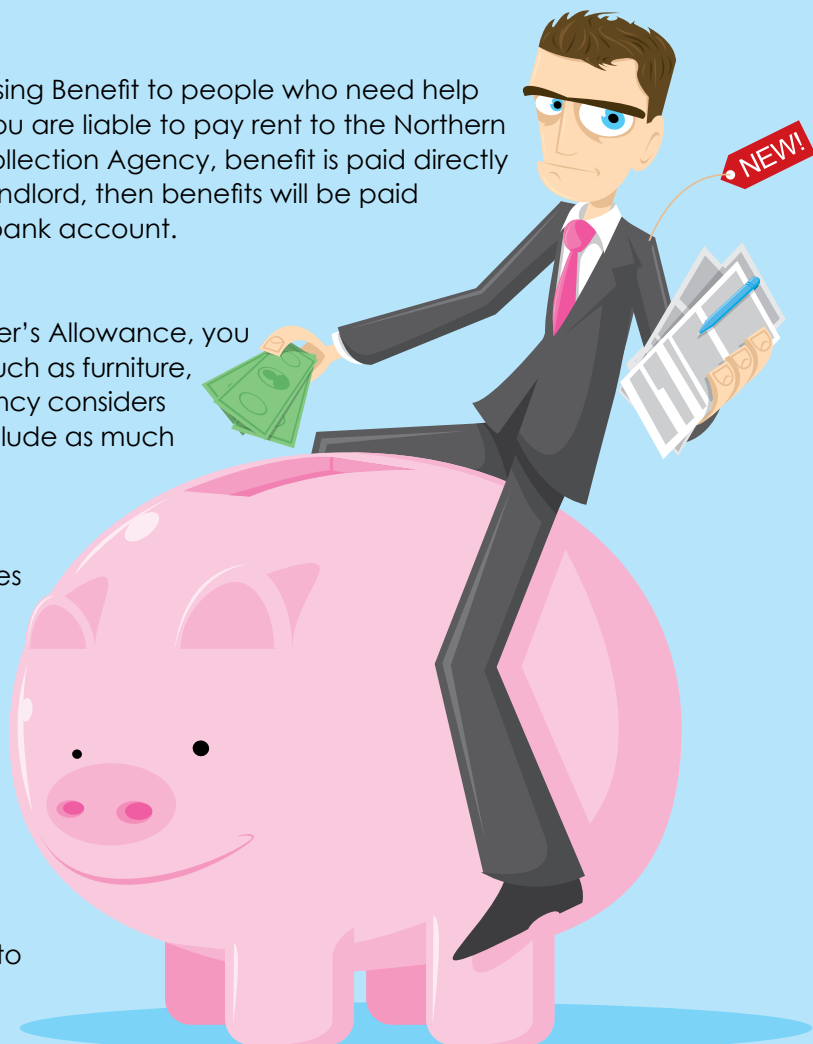
If you are entitled to Income Support or Job Seeker's Allowance, you may be able to claim a grant to help with things such as furniture, bedding, or kitchen items. The Social Security Agency considers each application individually, so you need to include as much information as possible on your application form.

Setting Up Home Allowance

You may be entitled to a grant from Social Services to help you set yourself up in your new home and help you to buy essential items such as bedding and furniture. The idea of this grant is that it pays for what you need to get started, after you have claimed all of the above benefits. Your Social Worker or Personal Adviser will discuss with you the particular things you need and this will be included in your Pathway Plan.

Bank Account

If you don't have a bank account, you will need to open one. Proof of identity is required to open a bank account. To find out what is acceptable, contact the bank and remember keep your bank details and other important documents in a safe place.



NEIGHBOURS

So now that you are living in your own place there are a few things you need to think about. Having a good relationship with your neighbours is important especially if you intend living in the same area for any length of time. Whilst you might not want to be over friendly, it's best to have a polite relationship.... You never know when you might need their help!!

Getting to know your neighbours

- Perhaps the single most important move you can make
- Just knock on the door and introduce yourself or say hello when you spot each other on the street or in the garden

Parties

- Give your neighbours notice of your intentions well in advance
- Fix a reasonable finishing timing and stick to it
- Limit the number of parties at each address - spread them out with your mates
- Keep doors and windows closed. In the summer if you start outside, move in doors before it gets very late
- At the end encourage your guests to leave quickly and quietly
- Don't forget to clean up and dispose of your rubbish properly

General Noise

- Not everyone will share your taste in music – keep the volume down to a reasonable level
- Position speakers away from adjoining walls
- Avoid shouting in the street and remember to be careful and quiet when you return home after a night out

Offensive Behaviour

- You might think a poster or a note in your window is funny. A neighbour might think it is tasteless/offensive. Think about what others can see
- Take your rubbish home or use proper bins - don't just dump it in the alley
- Respect the property of others, particularly fences, walls, street furniture and parked cars
- Keep your garden and any surrounding areas free of rubbish.

Parking

- Think about how you park your car as well as where - think about mums with prams or wheelchair users - can they get past?



OWN YOUR OWN INFORMATION

When you leave Care and live in your own home it is important that you only share information about your life with people you trust. You do not need to tell neighbours and others who live close by your life story as this information is private to you. **Remember Own Your Own Information!!!**

P PERSONAL ADVISER AND PATHWAY PLAN

You are entitled to additional support as you begin the process of preparing to leave Care. Well in advance of your 16th birthday, preparations should be underway to appoint you a Personal Adviser. A Personal Adviser is someone who is there specifically for you, to offer you advice and guidance when completing your needs assessment and developing your Pathway Plan. Your Social Worker and the manager of the Personal Adviser Service will talk to you well in advance of your 16th birthday about who your Personal Adviser might be. Your Personal Adviser is someone who is there to provide support, help to improve your circumstances and opportunities in life and to advocate on your behalf.

He or she will:

- Work alongside you and other professionals in relation to your assessment and Pathway Plan
- Provide you with advice and support
- Help you make decisions about your future in relation to education/health/living arrangements/job
- Work with other services that you need in order to help and support you
- Keep in contact with you regularly to see how you are progressing and ensure your Pathway Plan is meeting your needs
- Assist you with managing your money and budgeting

You, with your Social Worker and Personal Adviser, will prepare a "Pathway Plan" which will take over when your Care Plan ends. If you are 16 now your Social Worker and your Personal Adviser must start preparing your Pathway Plan if they haven't already prepared it. It must be completed within 3 months of your 16th birthday at the latest. Your Pathway Plan looks at the support you will need when you leave Care, up to 21 and beyond in some cases, and who is the best person to help you. Completing your Pathway Plan can help you think about what you already know and about what you need to learn. It is your plan for the future.

Your Pathway Plan will include

- Your accommodation - your rights and housing options
- Education, training or employment needs and any financial or practical help you're entitled to
- Relationships with family and friends
- Any practical skills you need and how to get them
- Any personal support you need for your health needs

Your Trust and Personal Adviser will help along the way and ensure you get the best help and support. Your plan will be reviewed by you, your Personal Adviser and Social Worker every 6 months and changes will be made if needed.



QUESTIONS

When you are leaving Care you will have lots of questions you would like to ask, remember no question is ever a stupid question!

Here is a list of some organisations that can help answer those all important questions. These are just a few that can help you but there are many more, ask your Social Worker or Carer to help you find the services that you need!

VOYPIC – Voice Of Young People In Care

If you have a problem or issue you can get help or advice from the VOYPIC's Advocacy Service. An Advocate is a person who helps you speak up for yourself or they can speak up for you in the same way as you would like to speak up for yourself.

Contact Number: 02890 244 888
Advocacy Line: 08450 742 942
Website: www.voypic.org

The Northern Ireland Youth Forum

The NIYF is a youth led organisation that lobbies, advocates, promotes and fights for the rights of young people in NI.

Contact Number: 02890 331 990
Website: www.niyf.org

NICCY - Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

The Commissioners job is to promote and safeguard the rights and best interests of children and young people, to help them challenge and change the world in which they live.

Contact Number: 02890 311 616
Website: www.niccy.org

Know Your Rights

Do you know that you've got lots of rights to protect you? Learn all about your rights through artwork, videos, animations and games.

Contact Number: 02871 366 339
Website: www.knowurrights.org

The Children's Law Centre

Works in partnership with children and other agencies to help young people know their rights.

Chalky freephone: 0808 808 5678
Website: www.childrenslawcentre.org

Citizens Advice

Help people resolve their debt, benefits, housing, legal, discrimination, employment, immigration, consumer and other problems.

Contact Number: 02890 503 000
Website: www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Housing Right Service

Aims to help people find the best possible solution to their housing problems by providing free, confidential advice and representations.

Contact Number: 02890 245 640
Website: www.housingrights.org

Law Centre NI

Promotes Social Justice through legal advice, representation, policy, training and publications.

Contact Number: 02890 244 401
Website: www.lawcentreni.org

RIGHTS

A new law about leaving Care came into force in Northern Ireland on 1st September 2005. The legislation aims to improve the life chances of Care Leavers as it should ensure:

- Young people will not be discharged from Care until they are prepared and ready to leave
- Better assessment, preparation and planning for leaving Care
- Better personal support for young people leaving Care
- Improved financial arrangements for care leavers

The Act makes some changes to Leaving & Aftercare Services: A designated 'YOUNG PERSON'S ADVISER' who is their point of contact, along with a named Social Worker. A MULTI-AGENCY ASSESSMENT, which must take into account the views and wishes of the young person.

The assessment should look at:

- Health and development
- Education, training or employment
- Family support or other relationships
- Financial needs
- Practical skills for independent living
- Young person's need for care, support and accommodation

Sixteen and seventeen year olds, who no longer live in their Care Placement, will not qualify for benefits through Social Security Agency.

Instead the Trust will offer financial support.

This will cover:

- Weekly living allowance
- Rent/accommodation costs
- Education, training or employment expenses



SOCIAL WORKER SUPPORT

When you are preparing to move into adulthood you will be appointed a named Social Worker from Leaving Care Services who will take over from your Field Social Worker. How and when this happens will be discussed with you and agreed at your review. Your Social Worker along with your Personal Adviser will provide advice; assistance and befriending services to you if you're either leaving Care or you are already living independently. All young people should have a Social Worker and a Personal Adviser.

Aftercare is a partnership between your Social Worker, Personal Adviser and you as you prepare for adult life. Your Social Worker works directly with you and undertakes a variety of specific tasks. The role of your Social Worker and Personal Adviser will be made clear in your Pathway plan so that you know who is doing what and by when. The level of support given varies according to each young person's needs. Your Social Worker and Personal Adviser will:

- Listen to what you have to say
- Help you decide what you want
- Help you get ready independently and move when you are ready
- Help you to get ready for adult life
- Help you when you are living independently

Young people can get advice about accommodation, education and training, money matters, employment and specialist agencies offering support in the community. Social Workers also deal with referrals, interviews and general enquiries and are responsible for making sure that you have a Pathway Plan in place and that your reviews happen on a six monthly basis. Your Social Worker along with your Personal Adviser attends reviews and planning meetings to advise on the Aftercare Service procedures, services and resources.



TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

So you have decided that your own place is the way to go. Living on your own can be a bit scary at first. But here are some tips for living on your own:

- Close your blinds/curtains - especially at night or whenever you are not home.
- Do not leave your name on your answering machine. And, if you are going away for holidays or the weekend, do not leave this info on your machine.
- Always lock your door - even when you are home, or just going next door. It only takes a minute for someone to get into your home.
- Don't hide a spare key. If you can think of a hiding place - then a criminal can too!
- Get to know your neighbours! Ask them to keep an eye on your place... and do the same for them.
- List only a first initial and last name in the phone directory.
- Notify your landlord if you are going to be out of town for any length of time.
- Do not carry an identification tag with your address on your key chain.
- If your apartment has a sliding glass door, does it have a drop bar installed? If not place a wooden rod/broom handle/dowel cut to length in the track so it cannot be opened from the outside.
- Be careful when opening the door to strangers, if you are worried and they are wearing a uniform ask them for ID.
- Some insurance companies will protect your valuables. Check to see if you are protected or if you need to get a Renter's policy.
- If a stranger asks to use your phone, do not let them inside. Ask for the number, lock your door, and call for them.

U CHOOSE

Always remember that you are the most important person in the Leaving Care process, so it is essential that you make decisions that are right for you. Talk to your Personal Adviser and Social Worker about what your needs and wants are, and make sure that if decisions are made you are happy with them. When living on your own, you will have to decide on how you spend your money, who you let into your house and how often you go out, so try and be mature and wise with your decision-making.



Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC)

VOYPIC is an independent regional charity that seeks to empower and enable children and young people with an experience of care to participate fully in decisions affecting their lives. VOYPIC works directly with and on behalf of care experienced children and young people up to 25 years of age. By care experienced we mean children and young people who are currently or have lived in a Children's Home, Foster Care, Secure Care, home on trial, in a hospital setting or participants in an Aftercare project.

VOYPIC has five main projects which helps young people have more of a say in the decisions that affect their lives. These are: Advocacy, Mentoring, Policy, Participation and Research.

Participation

The Participation project provides an introduction to Voice of Young People in Care. The project offers care experienced children and young people across Northern Ireland, the opportunity to take part in various programmes and activities, enabling them to make connections with their peers, VOYPIC and other agencies.

Activities include: Website Design, Newsletter Publications, Young Reps Programme, Dance workshops, Creative Arts Programme, Personal Development Programme, Drama Workshops, Training, Groupwork and Residentials.

Advocacy

The Advocacy service is about helping you to find out about your rights. It can help you to make the choices about the services you are entitled to receive and to be involved in decisions that affect you.

The Advocacy service can:

- Provide you with information on your rights
- Provide you with advice on your rights
- Provide you with an Advocacy Worker to attend a meeting with you
- Help you to ask for a service (s)
- Help you to negotiate with others
- Help you to speak out about decisions that affect you
- Help you to make a complaint



Mentoring

The Mentoring Project provides a Mentoring Service to 'Looked After' children and young people between the ages of 12- 18 years old. It aims to engage young people who could benefit from a mentoring relationship and / or who are excluded or suspended from school or at risk of being excluded / suspended from school.

The Mentoring relationship allows a structured and positive approach to engage young people to look at the current issues within their life. It provides the opportunity to create an open relationship where issues can be discussed in a non judgemental manner, where young people have the opportunity to reflect on their life, make decisions about their future and have an understanding of who they are as a person.

Mentors are volunteers from all walks of life, who have been through an assessment process in order to become a Mentor. This has involved completing and passing a training programme. All Mentors are police checked and are asked to provide two referees.

Policy

The Policy Project provides opportunities for care experienced young people throughout Northern Ireland to inform and shape legislation, policy and practice which impacts on their lives.

The Project ensures that your views and opinions are fed back to the Government and other agencies which are responsible for the design and evaluation of services for care experienced young people.

The Policy Project has Sessional project workers, who are aged 18-25 years and are care experienced. These young people are trained in how to run groups, work with computers, carry out research and train other people. Sessional project workers are paid for their work and given an opportunity to have their say on the work of Social Services and others.

Research

Through Participatory Action Research VOYPIC will ensure that Care experienced children and young people are fully involved in research. They advise and guide all aspects of the work e.g. Designing tools and carrying out research. VOYPIC's research can provide valuable, valid and well documented information based on the child's perspective.



WELL-BEING

The years of adolescence and young adulthood are ones of upheaval, change, and growth. How you meet the challenges of these years will to some extent determine your future life. Learning the skills needed to handle emotional problems will give you a foundation of good mental and emotional health.

Emotional health has many aspects. Put simply, it is based on self-esteem - how you feel about yourself - and behaviour that is appropriate and healthy. Someone who is emotionally healthy:

- Understands and adapts to change
- Copes with stress
- Has a positive image
- Has the ability to love and care for others
- Can act independently to meet his or her own needs

Everyone, including people who are emotionally healthy, has problems. Emotionally healthy people are able to adjust to and solve problems, and in doing so they help others as well as themselves to get satisfaction out of life.

Lots of things can affect your well-being, these include:

- Not exercising enough
- Not Sleeping well
- Having poor sexual health
- Not being able to express your feeling or emotions
- Being stressed or angry
- Drink or Drugs

So is important that you try and exercise as much as you can, this can even be walking to work or school everyday. Talking to friends and family about how you feel can be helpful and ensure that you do not bottle things up. If you feel upset or annoyed at anything and you feel that this is affecting your well-being talk to your Personal Adviser or Social Worker.



X-RATED

Sex can be one of life's most fulfilling experiences. But whether or not you're sexually active, there is information you should have to help you set your own boundaries and make your own choices about sexual activity.

These days, what you don't know about sex can hurt you, so you'll want to get the facts - and fast. Whether or not you're currently having sex with someone, you probably have lots of questions about how to protect yourself and your partner. Fortunately, we have some answers.

It's your body and it's up to you what you do with it. It may surprise you to know that most teens today aren't sexually active. If you choose to have sex, you need to make informed choices to protect yourself from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV - the virus that causes AIDS, as well as accidental pregnancy. **You also need to be prepared for the emotions that having sex can stir up.**

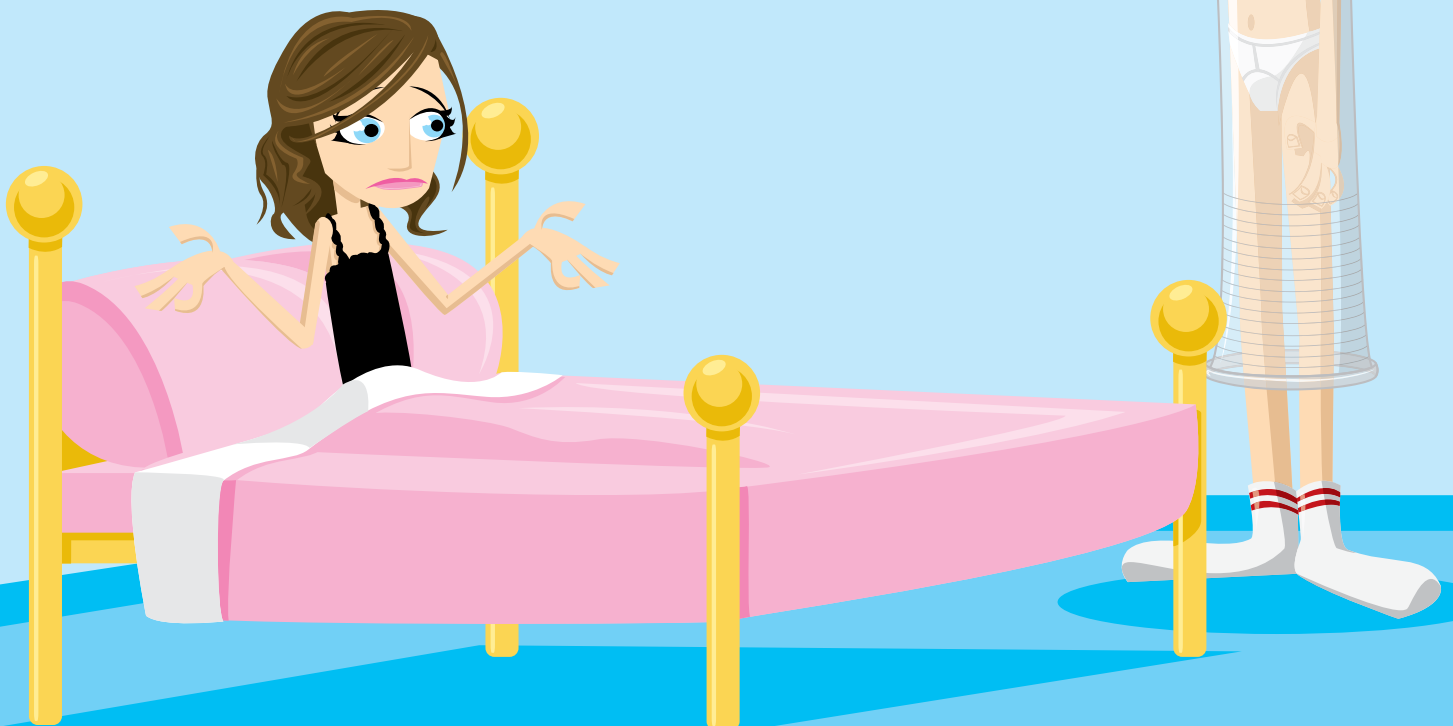
Making smart decisions is easier than you might think - all it takes is a little foresight and planning before you are in the heat of the moment. Make the effort to safeguard your physical and emotional health, both now and for the long-term. Remember that having sex is a choice (not just the first time, but every time) and your decision is your own.

There are lots of methods of contraception to choose from. Individual advice on contraception is available from:

- your GP
- another GP (registering for family planning only)
- a family planning clinic
- Brook Advisory Clinic

Contraception is free and advice will be confidential. Types of contraception are:

- male/female condom
- contraceptive injection
- implant
- intrauterine system (IUS)
- natural family planning
- combined/ progestogen only pill
- contraceptive patch
- intrauterine device (IUD)
- cap/ diaphragm with spermicide



Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are a major cause of ill health. Since 1995 there has been a large increase in the number of people diagnosed with STIs, particularly women in their late teens and men in their early twenties. This may be because people are more aware of STIs and are visiting clinics to be tested.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms vary between STIs and some have no symptoms at all. Where there are symptoms, these may include unusual discharge from the vagina or penis, heavy periods or bleeding between periods, pain or burning sensation when passing urine, rashes, itching or tingling around the genitals or anus.

Tests and treatment

Most STIs can be easily diagnosed and treated at Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM) clinics which are usually based in local hospitals. If you think you may have an STI, you can refer yourself to any GUM clinic for advice and treatment. The service is completely confidential and you don't have to go to your nearest clinic if you don't want to. The contact details of the Gum clinics are:

Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast

Tel: 02890 634 050

Mon, Wed & Fri - 9.30am to 11.00am
and 1.30pm to 3.00pm
Tues & Thurs 8.30am - 11.00am

Altnagelvin Hospital Londonderry

Tel: 02871 611 269

Mon & Fri - 9.30am to 11.00am
Wed & Thurs 9.30am to 11.00am
and 1.30pm to 3.00pm

Causeway Hospital Coleraine

Tel: 02870 346 028

Tues - 5.30pm onwards
Fri - 2.00am onwards

Daisy Hill Hospital Newry

Tel: 02830 835 050

Wed - 9.00am to 11.00am

Tests for STIs vary. Some involve taking swabs from the cervix or tip of the penis. Others involve taking a blood sample. Before being tested it is usual to see a Health Adviser who will discuss safer sex with you so that you can avoid infections in the future. Counselling is usually offered before testing for HIV so that you are prepared for the implications of the test result if it is positive.

If you test positive for any STI, the clinic will encourage you to talk to your current partner and, where relevant, previous partners, so that they can also be tested.

If you prefer, the clinic can do this for you without revealing your identity.

Most STIs are treatable with antibiotics.



Sexuality

When you are growing and developing it is common for a lot of people to have feelings for someone of the same sex. Many people report having a crush on someone of the same sex as they grow up, or a very close loving friendship. Experiencing these feelings does not necessarily mean you are gay. Only you can decide in your own time if this is so, as your feelings may either grow or change.

All these experiences are completely normal, and you can reach a decision about your sexuality. It is important not to feel pressured in any way when it comes to deciding your sexuality, and to remember that there are people you can talk to for help and support if you are worried. If you have any questions or feel you need more information there is help and support available.

Gay & Lesbian Youth Northern Ireland, known as GLYNI is an organisation for young people in Northern Ireland who identify as being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or non-heterosexual. They have offices in Belfast and Derry.

Gay & Lesbian Youth Northern Ireland (GLYNI)

64 Donegall Street
Belfast
BT1 2GT

Website: www.glyni.org.uk

The best way to get in touch with GLYNI by telephone is via mobile: **07707 216 921**. Please note however that this number is used to collect voicemail and text messages. It is unlikely that you will get to speak to someone directly. If you leave them a message though, they will get back to you as soon as possible.

Other sources of advice and support might be:

Cara Friend Gay Helpline

PO Box 44,
Belfast,
BT1 1SH

Gay Helpline: 02890 322 023

Line Open Mon, Tues & Wed 7.30pm - 10.00pm

Lesbian Line: 02890 238 668

Line Open Thursday 7.30pm - 10.00pm

Website: www.cara-friend.org.uk

Rainbow Project (For young gay men only)

Belfast Office
2-8 Commercial Court
Belfast
BT21 2NB

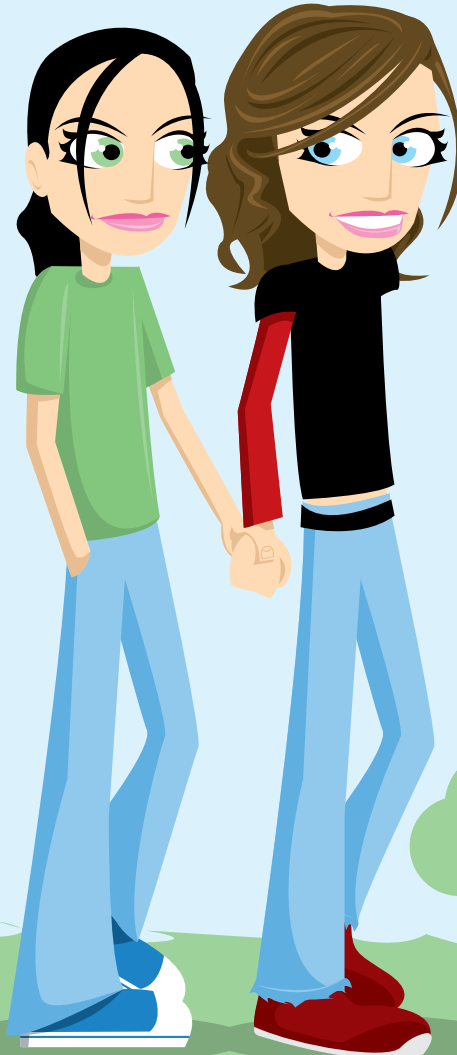
Tel: 02890 319 030

Foyle Office

12a Queen Street
Derry
BT48 7EG

Tel: 02871 283 030

Website: www.rainbow-project.org







VOYPIC

voice of young people in care

9-11 Botanic Avenue,
Belfast, BT7 1JG, Northern Ireland

T: 02890 244 888

F: 02890 240 679

E: info@voypic.org

W: www.voypic.org

ISBN Number: 0-9553454-3-X AND 978-0-9553454-3-2

Supported by:

