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Getting advice

A report of children's experience by the Children's Rights Director for England

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Introduction

Roger Morgan, Children’s Rights Director for England

The law sets out my duties as Children’s Rights Director for England. With my team, one of my main duties is to ask children and young people for their views about how children and young people are looked after in England. My duties cover children and young people living away from home in all types of boarding schools, residential special schools or further education colleges; children and young people living in children’s homes, in family centres, in foster care or who have been placed for adoption; and care leavers and children or young people getting any sort of help from council social care services.

As well as asking young people for their views and publishing what they tell us, with my team I also give advice on children’s and young people’s views and on children’s rights and welfare to Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector at Ofsted, and to the Government. I have a duty to raise any issues I think are important about the rights and welfare of children or young people living away from home or getting children’s social care support. With my team, I do this both for individual young people and for whole groups of young people.

Children and young people in care have often told us that they need to be able to get good personal information and advice, on particular subjects that are important to their lives, about their own past, about the reasons they came into care, and about plans for their future. This report gives their views and experiences of getting the information and advice they need on things that matter to them.

We try to write all our reports so that they can be read easily by children and young people, and by government ministers. Like all my reports, this report is being published for everyone to read. You can find copies of all my reports on our website: www.rights4me.org.

Roger Morgan

Summary

This report is based on the experiences of 351 children and young people in care and care leavers; 316 gave their views through a survey and 35 through discussion groups.

Social workers were the most usual source of advice and personal information overall for the children in care, though for foster children their foster carers were the most usual source. Apart from social workers and foster carers, friends and then parents came next, followed by teachers, siblings (especially for those in their first two years in care) and then doctors. Using the internet for advice and information came just below doctors, but above written material like leaflets and books. The boys who responded were more likely than the girls to turn to teachers and doctors. Disabled children in our survey were as likely to turn to doctors as to their friends for advice or information.

Eighty-seven per cent of those who answered the question in the survey said they were getting all, or nearly all, the advice they needed. Children wanted to know why they were in care. Sixty-eight per cent said they had been told everything they needed to know about why they came into care. Those who had been in care more than six years were less likely to know why they were in care.

Times when some of the children said they find they don't have the advice and information they need include times of change: when first coming into care, changing placements, or leaving care. They also include times when a child is without a social worker or when their social worker is changing. Children said they can miss out on information they want if adults think the information might be upsetting.

The areas where children in our survey most wanted more advice were about emotional and physical well-being, about how to look after themselves, and about plans for their future. This included plans for returning home, family contact, leaving care, further education and getting a job. Twenty per cent told us they didn't know enough about the plans for their own future, and 8% that they weren't told enough about their care reviews. Some wanted to know who was allowed to attend their reviews, and to have their own copies of review minutes. Some wanted to know what to expect when first coming into care, about any problems happening back at home, and about education, money, legal ages for various things, cooking and shopping. It was, however, possible to be given too much information.

Children told us the best ways of getting advice and information were either through booklets or websites, as long as they really were young-person-friendly, and through face-to-face discussions. Individual young people had a preference for one or the other, and some preferred not to use the internet. It was important to know where to go for advice when you needed it. Children told us that adults giving advice to children need to be prepared to explain as well as tell, and to look up what they don't actually know.

How we asked for views

We asked children and young people for their views in two ways. First, we invited children and young people in care to fill in a survey, using specially designed question cards. We sent invitations to take part in this survey to people in children's homes or foster care across the country. We picked their children's homes and fostering services at random from our national lists.

Second, we invited children and young people in care to join one or more groups to discuss or give us their views personally. Again, we chose the homes and services at random to send invitations to, and for this report we sent these around the southern part of the country. We send invitations around different parts of the country for different reports.

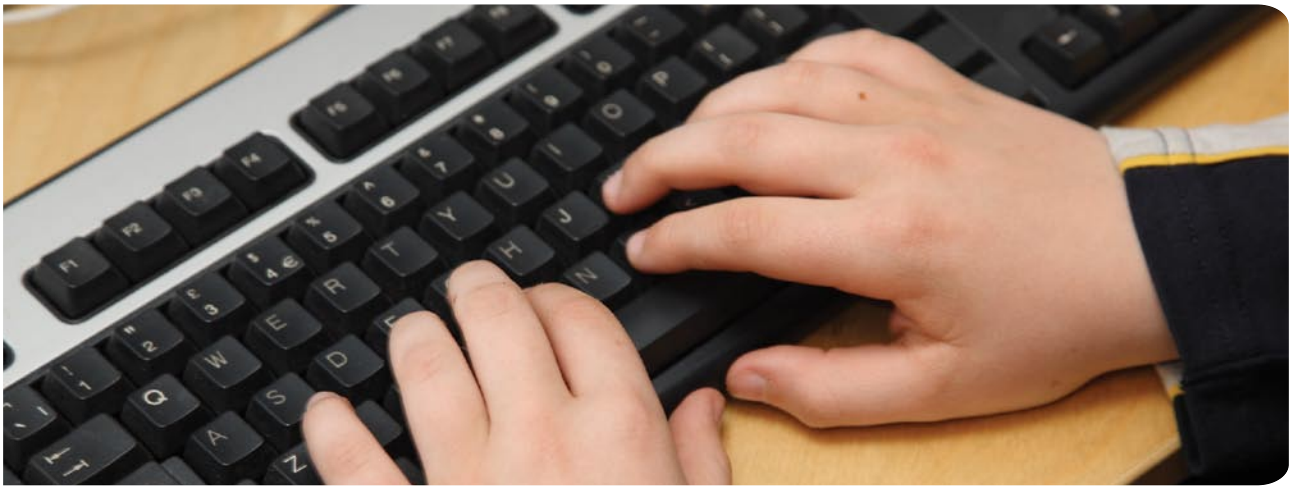
We held five discussion groups about getting advice and information, at the Milestones Museum, Basingstoke. At each of these we asked children and young people to give us their views about a series of issues for this report. Each group was led by a member of our team, and another team member took notes of the views people gave. Only the children and young people in the group, and members of our team, were in the room, so that people could speak as freely as possible. The adults who had brought children waited in another part of the museum.

The survey and the discussion groups also gave us their views for two other reports we were preparing: *Care and prejudice* (about how being in care affects children, and how other people react to knowing someone is in care) and *Keeping in touch* (about how children in care keep in contact, or lose touch, with their parents, brothers and sisters, families and friends).[1]

In many of our survey questions, we asked for people's views without suggesting any answers, and we analysed their answers afterwards. This means the views in this report are the children's own and not ideas we had suggested for them to choose from. Where we say there is a 'big difference' in the answers given by different groups of children, this means that there was a difference of 10 percentage points or more between the different groups.

Not everybody answered every question, so we have given the number of people who did answer for each question in this report. Where we have given the percentage of people giving a particular answer, this is the percentage of everyone who answered that question.

In this report, we have not left out any views that we might disagree with, nor made our own comments on anything children or young people told us. We have not added our own views or ideas. What this report says is purely the views of children and young people.



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[1] These reports were published in 2009. You can find them on our website: www.rightsforme.org.

The children and young people who gave us their views

Altogether, we received survey responses from 316 children and young people. Another 35 children and young people took part in our groups about getting advice and information. In total, therefore, **351 children and young people gave us their views for this report.**

Of the 311 people who filled in our survey and who told us their gender, 166 (53%) were female and 145 (47%) were male. Five people did not tell us their gender. Out of the 305 people who told us their ethnic background, 271 (89%) said they were white, 17 (6%) said they were from a mixed background, 14 (5%) that they were Black and three (1%) that they were Asian. Eleven children did not tell us about their ethnicity. Out of 316 who told us whether or not they had a disability, 42 (13%) said they were disabled. Out of these 42, the most common disabilities were learning difficulties (12 children), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (eight children) and dyslexia (five children). Thirteen had other sorts of disability. Four did not tell us what type of disability they had.

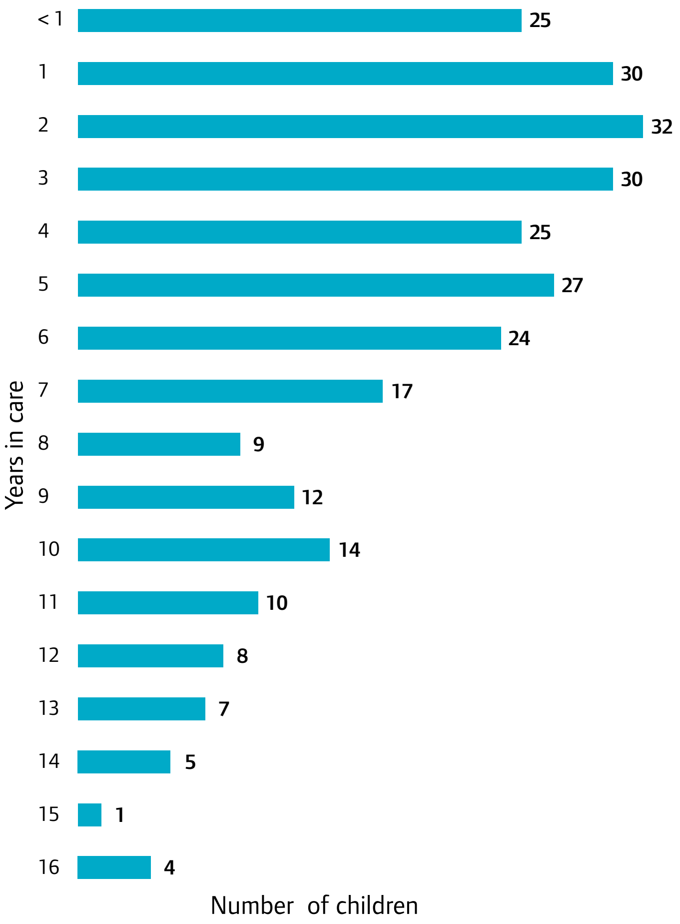
Out of the 299 people who filled in the survey and told us the sort of placement they were living in, 161 (54%) were living in children's homes and 123 (41%) were living in foster homes. Eight care leavers also filled in our survey, as did four children placed to live with their own parents with social care support, and three who lived in residential special schools. We have included all these in our results. Seventeen children did not answer this question.

For each of the survey questions answered in this report, we have checked to see whether there are any big differences in the answers between boys and girls, from children with a disability, and between children living in children's homes and foster children. Where there are, we have said so.

We also wanted to know whether how long children had been in care made a difference to their answers, so we have checked this as well. Out of the 280 children and young people who answered a survey question about how long they had been in care, 87 (31%) had been in care for up to two years, 106 (38%) between two and six years, and another 87 (31%) for over six years. Thirty-six children (11% of those who took part in the survey) did not answer our question about how long they had been in care.

The chart shows the details of how long the children had been in care. We had views from children who had spent a fairly short time in care, and others who had spent many years and most of their lives in care.

How long the children consulted had been in care

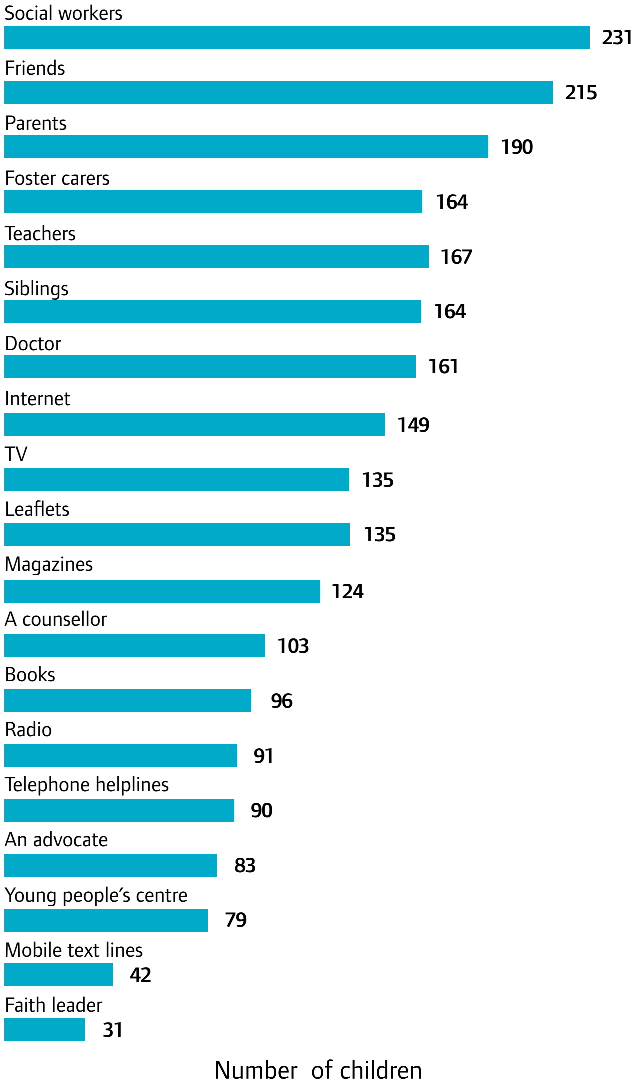


Based on responses from 280 children who answered this question. Out of the 316 children who filled in questionnaires, 36 did not answer this question.

Where children in care get advice and information

In our survey, children told us where they mainly got advice and information about personal things that mattered to them. We gave them a list of possible places to choose from, and they could choose more than one. The chart gives the answers from the 304 children and young people who answered this question.

Where children get advice and information



Based on 2,450 responses from 304 children who answered this question. Out of the 316 children who filled in questionnaires, 12 did not answer this question.

Overall, **social workers were the most usual source of advice and information on important personal things for the children in care in our survey.** This underlines just how important social workers can be for children in care. **Friends came ahead of parents as the next most important source of personal advice and information.**

For the foster children in the survey, their foster carers came top, above social workers, as the most usual source of advice and information. After their foster carers and social workers, next for foster children came friends and then parents.

After social workers, teachers were the next most important professional workers in giving advice and information to the children in our survey. Doctors were listed as the next most important professionals, after social workers and teachers.

There were some differences between boys and girls in the survey in the top sources of advice and information they used. **Adding all the answers from boys, their social workers came top, followed by friends. From all the girls' answers, friends came top, just above their social workers. Boys were more likely than girls to turn to their teachers and to the internet as sources of advice.** Boys' answers put teachers third, while girls' put them seventh. The internet came fourth among boys' answers, but 11th among girls' answers. **Girls were more likely to turn to their parents than boys were.** Overall, girls ranked their parents third, but the boys' overall ranking put them fifth.

Disabled children in our survey were more likely than others to turn to teachers and doctors for advice and information. They put teachers second on their list, after social workers, and doctors came third for disabled children, compared with seventh position for children generally. **Disabled children ranked doctors the same as friends as a source of advice and information.**

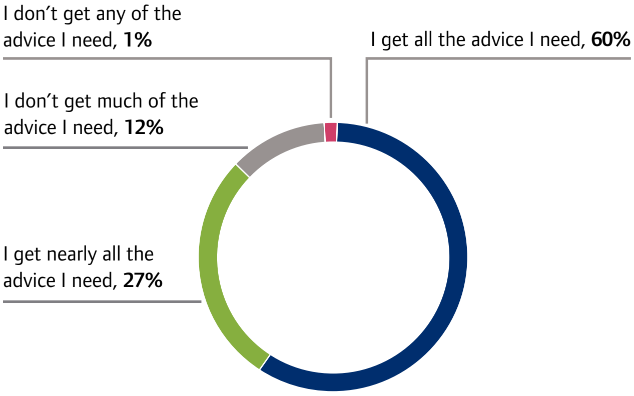
Brothers and sisters ranked sixth overall as a source of advice and information. However, **the longer children spent in care, the less likely they were to turn to their siblings for advice or information.** This is probably because the longer they spend in care, the more likely they are to lose contact with their siblings, as we found from our report *Keeping in touch*. Children who had been in care for less than two years put their siblings fourth on their list of where they would turn to for advice or information. This dropped to sixth for those who had been in care between two and six years, and then to ninth place for those who had been in care for over six years.

In our discussion groups, we also heard that Connexions is a good source of information about getting a job.

Do children get the advice they need?

The next figure shows the answers, from 282 children, on whether they were getting all the advice they needed.

Do children get the advice they need (percentages of responses)?



Based on responses from 282 children who answered this question. Out of the 316 children who filled in questionnaires, 34 did not answer this question.

Overall, 87% of children who answered this question told us they were getting all, or nearly all, of the advice they needed. There were no big differences between boys and girls, those in children's homes and those in foster care, disabled children and others, or between those who had been in care for different lengths of time.

We discussed in our groups the times that children in care are likely to find they don't have the information and advice they need. We were told that this happens for many children when they first come into care, when they are leaving care, and when they are moving from one placement to another and need to be prepared for the move. We heard that this can happen when your social worker is not there for you, or when there is a change of social worker. One person said: 'My social worker was off ill for a couple of months and I had three different social workers.'

We also heard in discussion groups that children can sometimes miss out on important information they need if adults are worried that the information might be upsetting: 'Sometimes they are scared of making me upset.' As someone in one group said, summing up the group's view on this: 'Even if it's something I don't want to hear, I still need to know.' As another person put it: 'There is more worrying when there is not knowing.' This was not the case for everyone though; for some, 'sometimes it's bad for you to know'.

> 'There is more worrying when there is not knowing'

What children need more advice or information about

In our survey, we asked children to tell us, if they weren't already getting all the advice they needed, exactly what else they needed advice or information about. We didn't make suggestions, and children could give more than one answer. The table shows all the things listed by at least one in 10 of the children who said they needed more advice.

What children need more advice or information about (percentages of children answering the question who gave each response)

Emotional, physical and sexual well-being	12% of children
How to look after yourself	8% of children
Future plans	8% of children
Becoming independent	7% of children
Information about their family	6% of children
Children's rights	5% of children

Based on responses from 149 children who told us they needed additional advice. Out of the 316 children who filled in questionnaires, 167 children did not identify any additional advice they needed.

As the table shows, **the top three areas in which the children wanted more advice or information were generally emotional, physical and sexual well-being, how to look after themselves, and plans for their future.** Examples of the advice children said they needed were: 'care plan and how it can be changed and what happens when you leave care'; 'handling emotions'; 'drugs, sex, social well-being and arguments'; 'how to cope in society'. Some wrote particularly about advice and information on the dangers of drugs: 'Drugs, even if they haven't done them, so they know what they would be doing before they get into a mess.' Some children described how important it is for children in care to have information on plans for their future, including leaving care: 'placement information ie how long there for and more about where they're going'; 'what happens when we leave care. What opportunities have I got?' One was concerned that 'leaving care information and preparation is left too late'.

Boys and girls wanted much the same sorts of advice and information, and there were no big differences in what foster children and children in children's homes wanted.

How long children had been in care made a big difference to whether they wanted more advice about emotional, physical and sexual well-being. Those who had been in care a short time (less than two years) or a long time (more than six years) wanted much more information and advice on these issues than people who had been in care between two and six years. **Emotional, physical and sexual well-being are things the children wanted help with when they first come into care, and after they have spent a long time in care.**

Disabled children were more likely than children generally to want more advice and information on emotional, physical and sexual matters, on becoming independent, and on keeping in contact with their families.

On children's rights, our discussion groups gave examples of the sort of information they needed. This included information about a whole range of entitlements for children, and information about leaving care support, independent living schemes and allowances (clothing allowances in particular). It included having information early enough to use it, for example right at the start of being looked after in care. For some, it also included information on what you could do if your social worker was not supporting you or was not visiting you regularly. For others, it included your rights if you were being searched, or were involved with the police. Children in one group told us that they had learned all they needed to know about citizenship and human rights at school.

Some in our groups said children often needed to know the **ages at which the law allowed them to do various things.** One said they needed to know if there was an age at which the law said they had the right to go out with their friends. Another person didn't want to keep their father's surname, and wanted to know the age at which they could legally change their own name.

Other areas that children wanted advice about which didn't quite make the list of top subjects from our survey were advice on contact with their families, and information on why they had been taken into care. **Eight per cent of children wanted more information on why they were in care.** A typical quote about family contact was: 'When can I see my nan, brothers and friend, and why I can't see my dad.' One person in one of our discussion groups said they wanted to know 'if Mum is in the same place and if anything's happened'.

From our discussions, we heard that the most important things for a child coming into care for the first time to know about are why they are in care, who put them in care, roughly how long they are likely to be in care, and what happens when you are in care.

One discussion group drew up a list of the **practical things a child may want to ask before moving into their first placement in care.** Their list included where their bedroom would be, whether they would be sharing, what the house rules were, whether other people were allowed in your room, what would be seen as misbehaviour, what punishments they could get, what personal things they would have of their own and what pocket money they would get.

In one of our discussion groups, people made the point that very few children know anything about care before they know they are going into care themselves. They thought there needs to be more information about care on TV so that children generally know more about it, whether or not they go into care themselves.

Our discussion groups came up with some more examples of advice and information they needed or wanted. These included **information and advice about education, schools and college, and how to cope with changing schools when you moved from one placement to another.** Another example was advice on how to avoid smoking. We also heard that some needed advice on whether they were allowed to sleep over with friends without their friends' parents having to have Criminal Records Bureau checks. One person told us it was embarrassing to have to tell someone who had just invited you to stay at their house that their parents would have to be police checked before you could accept their invitation. (Friends' parents do not in fact have to be police checked before an overnight stay.)

Children told us they may also need and want **information when there are problems at home,** for example if one of their parents is ill. One group told us that children in care can sometimes hear about something that has happened at home second-hand from somebody else, and can be worried unless they are given the right information directly for themselves.

Not getting information about your family might not be social care services' fault, though. Some families are just not good at giving information themselves. One person told us about their own upsetting experience of not being told about something that had happened in their family: 'If a family member dies, they tell you months later. It makes you want to go to your room and smash everything up.'

One group said they needed more **information and advice about their own money.** They said that carers could put money into banks for them without them knowing, and there could be more there than they were expecting. Then they needed to know what they were allowed to spend it on.

Discussion groups told us some very practical things they thought children in care needed advice about. For example, young people needed to be advised on **how to cook for themselves**, on managing their money, and on shopping. One group thought schools should teach everyone to cook. One young person was worrying about this for when they left care: 'I can't cook. I've never been taught.'

In discussions, children told us that they often just need to be kept informed about what is going on that affects them. Younger children may not be told what is going on, and sometimes children get two different versions of the same thing and need to be told what is actually happening. One person said: 'the social worker told me one story and my mum told me another'; another said; 'it's hard to get the right information'. If they don't get enough good information, children can make the wrong assumptions. One child told us that when the police called at the house, 'I didn't know what was happening, I thought I was in trouble.' Not knowing things can, we heard, lead some children and young people to become aggressive: 'Aggression comes out of not knowing.'

One of our discussion groups gave a **warning that children and young people should not be given too much information.** 'It's all very good giving information but not too much of it'; 'you need to back off a bit sometimes. You can be given too much information.' For example, giving too much information and advice against taking some risks could encourage people to take those risks, rather than keep themselves safe: 'The more you bang on with kids, the more they're going to do it.' Another example was giving too much information about courts and the law, so that 'you know you won't go down for the first offence – it might encourage people to do it'.

One discussion group told us that **children sometimes need more advice and information before they feel able to answer questions that important people put to them.** They said that without enough information, they might not be able to give their views properly. One person said they had been questioned by a judge, but they did not really understand what was going on, so 'he asked me lots of questions which I didn't answer'.

'Aggression comes out of not knowing'

Ways of making it easier to get advice and information

The next table shows the main ways the children and young people suggested to make it easier for them to get the advice and information they need. Again, we did not make suggestions, and each person could give more than one answer. We have listed all the suggestions that came from at least one in 10 of the children who made suggestions.

How could getting advice and information be made easier?	
By making it more young-person-friendly, in booklets or electronically	36 children
By having someone to talk to directly	23 children
By more communication with social workers and the council	22 children
By having better internet access	11 children

Based on responses from 102 children who made suggestions. Out of the 316 children who filled in questionnaires, 214 did not make any suggestions for making advice and information easier to get.

These are very different suggestions for helping children and young people to get the advice and information they need. **Suggestions from our survey were to give advice and information in young-person-friendly formats, either on paper or electronically (for which internet access is important), but it was also suggested that it is important to be able to talk 'live' to someone rather than just read information. The suggestions also included more communication with social workers.** Children in our survey had placed their social workers at or near the top of their lists of givers of advice and information. It was important 'having someone they trust to talk to'. One suggested 'a 24 hour social services helpline' for children and young people. Another said there needed to be a single advice line for children in care, for all sorts of problems, as there were too many different places to contact at present.

Some children and young people told us they were already able to get advice and information easily when they needed it: 'I think it's OK the way it is.' Others thought getting advice and information should be made easier 'by making it more simple'. Getting information on the internet was seen as good, but we did hear about some worries about the safety of the internet, so using it for advice should be 'like MSN but safer'.

In one of our discussion groups, we heard that sometimes it is easy to ask for advice or information, but people don't always get back to you with the answers. As one person put it, 'You ask them… and then they forget.' Also, although social workers are a good source of advice and information, they are often not available when you need to ask them for advice or information.

'Having someone they trust to talk to'

Getting advice about personal things

In our discussion groups, children told us how they would prefer to get advice about personal things. **Many said they preferred to get advice face to face, from friends, family, teachers, carers or their social workers:** 'I need face to face contact.' One group did say that while they would often turn to their friends for personal advice, this was not a good source of advice, as their friends were inexperienced and might not know what to do. Other children in care were still a good source of advice and information about being in care, though. **Some said they preferred to be able to read advice about personal things**, and told us about booklets they had been given, either at school or at home.

We also heard about good advice being given through **letters they could read and keep**, especially letters giving them updates on things that were happening. People in one group told us they were sent a package of information through the post every month, and they found that this had everything they needed in it. Many were pleased with **information packs** their councils had given them, though some told us they had got these too late, and needed some of the information in the pack before it arrived. You really need your information pack about being in care before you come into care, not afterwards.

In one group, we heard that listening to teachers reading advice to the class was boring, but it could be exciting, as well as useful, when you had the same advice to read for yourself. **It all depends on what the individual feels is right for them.** One person in a group said they always wanted personal advice 'through social workers – I won't read a leaflet'.

One person said they had found useful information and ideas about personal issues by reading biographies and autobiographies about other people's lives. Some mentioned looking for advice on the **internet**, such as the BBC website, or a website about care, but this did not come up in our discussions as often as getting personal advice face to face or reading booklets and leaflets. Some thought it would be helpful if some of the information put into leaflets could be put on to **DVDs** instead. Others talked to us about getting personal advice from **telephone helplines.** One mentioned using their review meeting to ask for advice they needed. For some, the important thing was not having particular ways of getting advice, but of **knowing who to go to when you needed advice.**

Some groups commented about how people should give them advice. For example, people giving advice to a child about something very personal should speak 'nicely and calmly' rather than mumble. Another example was that it was sometimes **useful to be given more than one copy of an important leaflet**, perhaps one to have at school and another at home. Others said that it was important that **people they asked for advice should go and look up the information that was needed, if they didn't already know it.** One person said their social worker was very good at doing this for them. We heard that it is important to explain things, as well as just telling the child things.

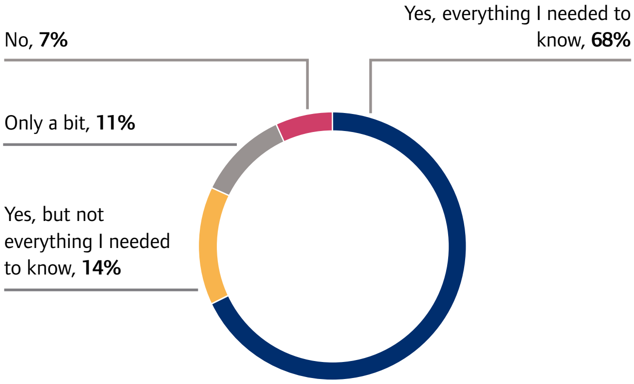
One discussion group talked about sometimes not knowing what to do with some of the information or advice they were given. This could sometimes happen with health advice: 'We have received brochures on asthma and pollen counts and told to stay indoors when the pollen count is too high. I go out anyway and just take my hay fever tablets.'

Information about the past

When we speak with children in care, we have often heard how important it can be to have information, when you want it, about your past life and about the reasons for what has happened to you. This has already come up as an issue in what children told us for this report.

In our survey, we asked children whether they had been told enough about the reasons they had come into care in the first place. The next chart shows their answers.

Have children been told why they first came into care?



Percentage of responses given. Based on responses from 304 children who answered this question. Out of the 316 children who filled in questionnaires, 12 did not answer this question.

Just over two thirds (68%) of those who answered this question told us they had been told everything they needed to know about why they first came into care, and just 7% said they had not been told anything about why they came into care. In our discussion groups, children also told us it was important to know why you had come into care, but we also heard that getting information about your own past can be hard to get when you are in care.

There were no big differences in answering this question between boys and girls, or between disabled children and all children. However, **children in foster homes were more likely than those in children's homes to say they had been told why they were in care.** Out of the foster children who answered this question, 76% said they had been told everything they needed to know about why they came into care. This compared with 61% of the children in children's homes.

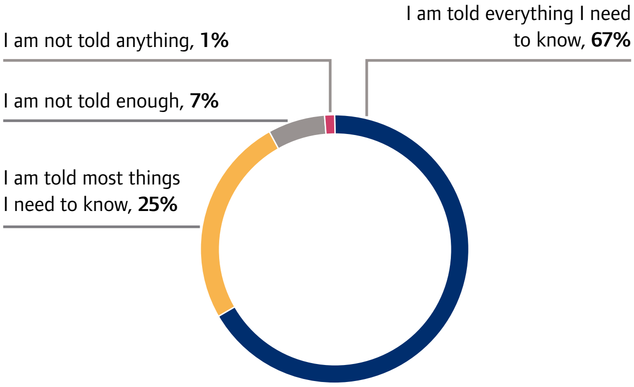
Children who had been in care for more than six years were less likely than those who had been in care for less than six years to say that they had been told why they were in care. Out of those who had been in care for less than two years, 76% said they had been told everything they needed to know about why they were in care. Out of those who had been in care for between two and six years, the figure was 77%. For those who had been in care for more than six years, the figure went down to 58%.

In discussion groups, children told us more about the need to know about the past. This led to discussion of the need to be allowed to see what was in your social care file, and not to have to wait until you were 18, as some had been told was the rule. 'They should show us our files and explain what's in them.'

Information about reviews and future plans

For children in care, review meetings are where how they are doing at home and at school is discussed, decisions are made about what help they need, and plans for their future are made or changed. In our survey we asked whether children were told everything they needed to know about their reviews. The next chart shows the answers they gave us.

Are children told what they need to know about their reviews?



Percentages of answers given. Based on responses from 304 children who answered this question. Out of the 316 children who filled in questionnaires, 12 did not answer this question.

From those who told us about their reviews, just over two thirds (67%) said they were told everything they needed to know about their reviews, and another quarter (25%) said they were told most things they needed to know. Eight per cent said they were not told enough, and 1% of the children said they were told nothing. Some children told us they wanted to know the things discussed about them at their reviews that they weren't being told about: 'what adults talk about when I'm not there'; 'all the bits I'm not there for'. Some wanted things to be explained better: 'Just sometimes things need to be explained a bit more.' One summed up the suspicions others had talked about: 'I don't know, but I'm sure I'm not in the loop about something.'

Disabled children were more likely than others to say that they were told everything they needed to know about their reviews (33 out of the 39 disabled children who answered this question said this). There were no big differences between girls and boys, between foster children and children in children's homes, or between children who had been in care for different lengths of time.

> 'I don't know, but I'm sure I'm not in the loop about something'

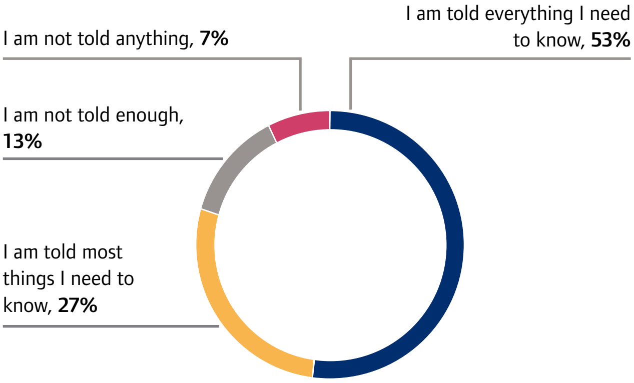
We asked children in the survey to tell us anything else they would like to know about their reviews. Altogether we had seven suggestions from 44 children. The most common (from 16 children) was that children would like to **have their own copy of the minutes of their review meetings**, setting out the decisions and details of what had been discussed. Fourteen children said they wanted to **be told more about what would be happening at their reviews.** Eleven told us they wanted **to know who was allowed to be at their review meetings.** One wanted to know: 'Does my carer have to be there when I am?'

Children's comments about their reviews and what they needed to know varied a lot. One person, for example, told us: 'I go to all my reviews and take part in the discussions and decision-making'; another said: 'I know everything I need to know'; but at the other extreme another said: 'I don't really have reviews, so [I don't know] what they are and when I should have them.'

When we asked children whether they had been told what they needed to know about the plans for their future, not quite so many said they had been told.

The next chart shows their answers.

Are children told what they need to know about plans for their future?



Percentages of answers given. Based on responses from 304 children who answered this question. Out of the 316 children who filled in questionnaires, 12 did not answer this question.

This time, **53% of the children in our survey said they had been told everything they needed to know about the plans for their future, and 20% told us they were either not told enough, or not told anything.** There were no big differences between girls and boys, disabled children and other children, or between children who had been in care for different lengths of time.

As we had found with being told why they had come into care in the past, **children in foster homes were more likely than children in children's homes to say they had been told about the plans for their future.** Out of the foster children who answered this question, 86% said they had been told most things, or everything, they needed to know about the plans for their future. This compared with 75% of the children in children's homes.

We asked children in the survey to tell us what sorts of things, if anything, they wanted to know about plans for their future. We had 11 suggestions, from a total of 110 children. Top came simply **wanting to know what their plans said**, which came from 44 children. Next, from 23 children, came **knowing when they would be able to live with their family again**: 'I want to know when to go home to my mum.' Linked to this, 13 children said they wanted to know more about **plans for keeping in contact with their own families**: 'Will I still see my sisters?' In one of our discussion groups, we were told that information about family details and plans for contact with your family was often the hardest information to get.

One discussion group said it was important to have advice about moving on to semi-independent accommodation. Others wanted to know about what was planned for their future after leaving care: 'I worry about where I am going to live when I am older.' Nineteen wanted to know **what support would be planned for them when they became care leavers**, and 18 wanted to know **more about plans for getting further education and a job**. One person summarised this when they said they wanted to know 'who is gonna help me with my education and my life after care. Who is gonna take care of me after care.'

Some people wrote to us about how they were given all the information they needed: 'My carers don't hide anything from me and if I need to know anything they will tell me', and some told us things they wanted to know more about, but everyone who wrote to us about this question wanted to know about the plans for their future. For some, this was to do with getting information about their next placement: 'future home, I would like to view the place and the carer'; 'the social worker needs to explain to the person being taken into care why they are being moved, and a summary of how long they will be there'. For some there was a particular worry because they were asylum seekers: 'I would like to know if I will be able to stay in this country'; 'I'd like to know when the embassy are going to make a decision on my status.'

For some, they **had the information they wanted, but often not soon enough.** They thought they should be 'told things earlier, not a couple of days before it happens'. If you were going to move placements, you needed the information earlier than people usually got it, to give you time to challenge the decision if you wanted to, to sort yourself out and to say your goodbyes. For most, it could all be summed up in this quote from one young person, who simply wanted to know 'where I'll be in six months' time'.

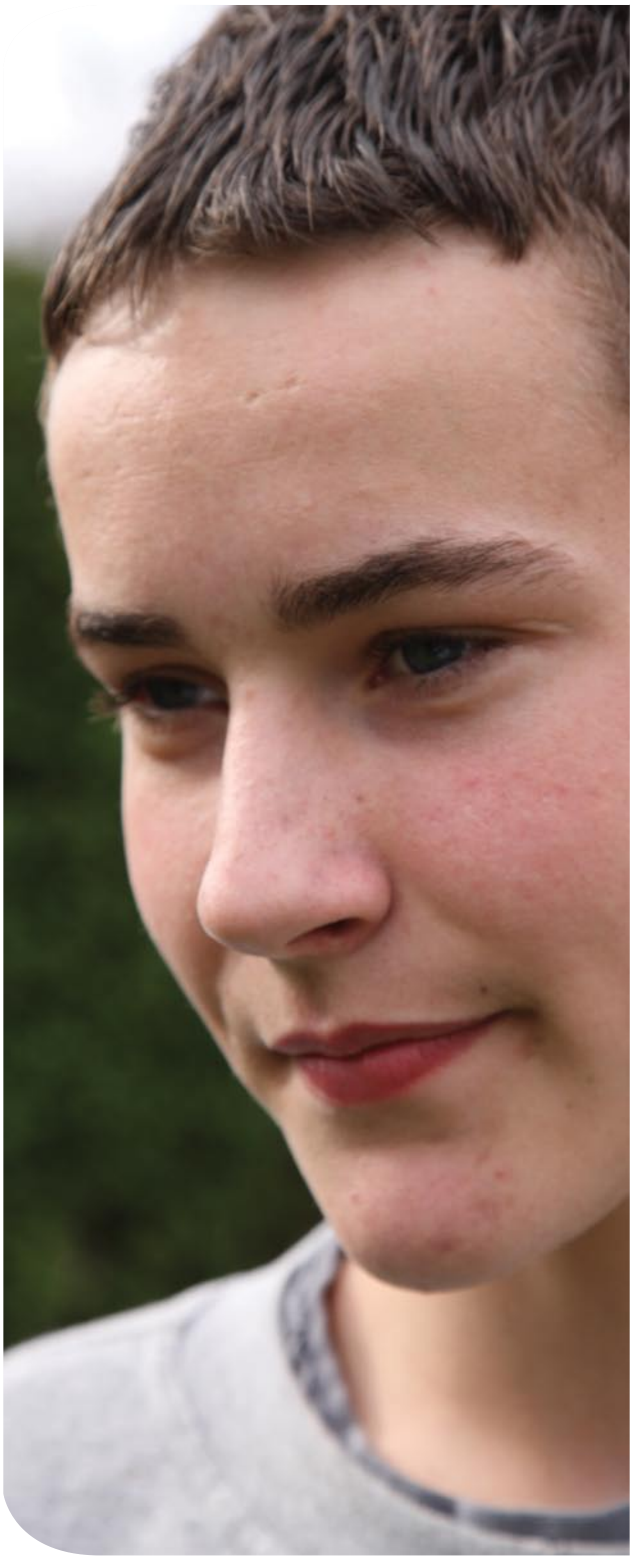
One group said we were asking the wrong question. They thought the issue wasn't that young people should be told what plans other people were making for their future and consulting them about; they should be leading on making those plans themselves: 'It's not always up to social services – it's up to you.' 'How can someone give you advice on what you want to do? They're your plans!'

Last words

Finally, one of our discussion groups summed up what they thought children coming into care needed to know:

‘Why, how, what, where, who’

‘Summary of what will happen’



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