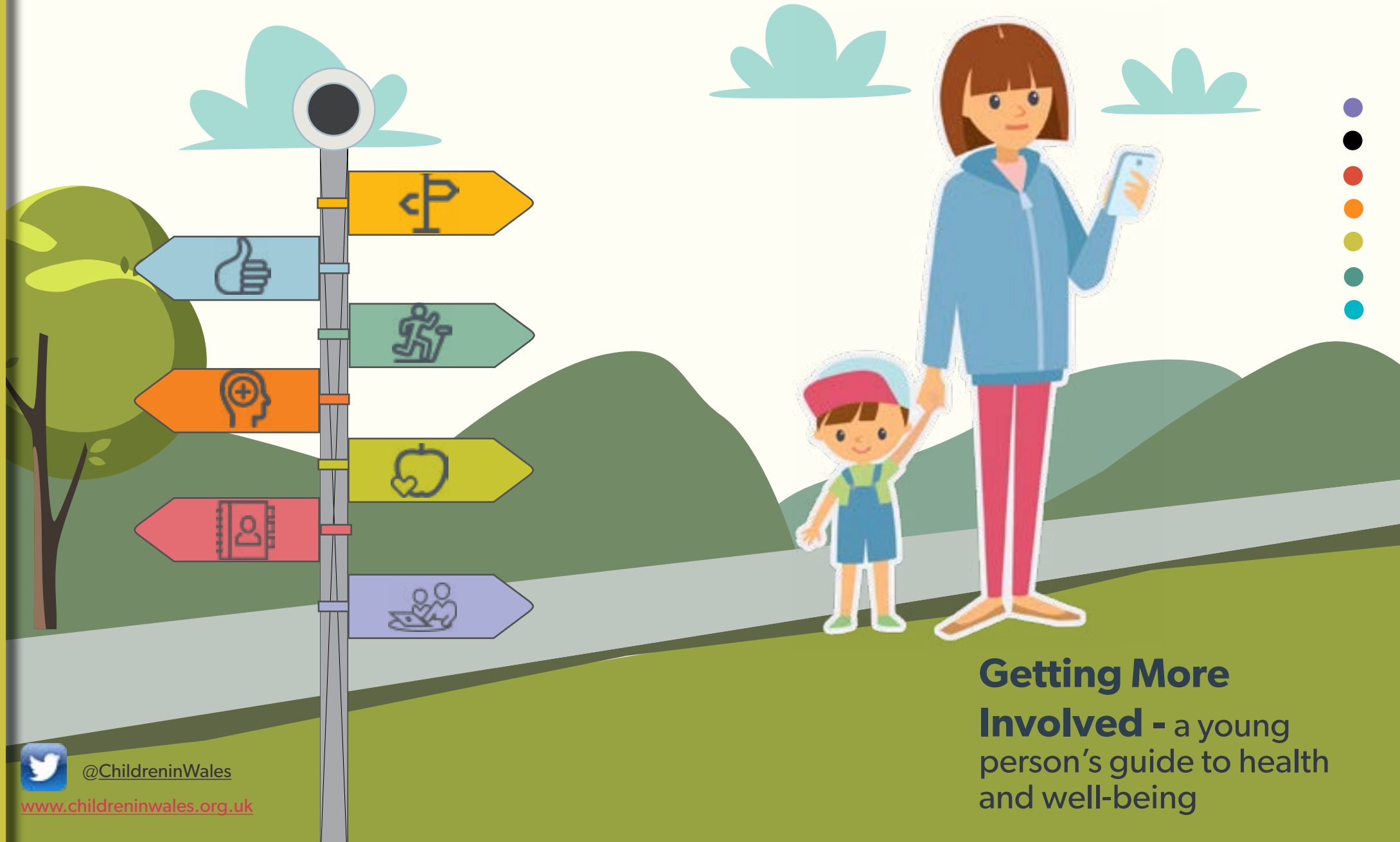




Keeping in touch with your family



Getting More Involved - a young person's guide to health and well-being



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Getting More Involved

- a young person's guide to health and well-being

"Ask me if I want to have contact, don't just tell me what's going to happen. Let me have a say!"

If you are a child or young person in care, you have a right to say what you want to happen when decisions are being made about how often you see your birth family. This could include seeing or talking to your birth parents, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, cousins - anybody who is important to you in your life.

This guide will help you to think about who matters to you and how often you want to see them. It will give you information about the law, your rights and what to do if you are unhappy with any decisions that are made. We know this is a really important issue for lots of children and young people across Wales.



What do we mean by the word contact?

Contact is a legal word often used by adults when making decisions about children and young people in care keeping in touch with their family. This can include visiting your family, talking on the phone, writing letters or sending presents or cards. You will have your own care and support plan which will say who you will see, for how long, and where and when it will take place.

It should also say whether any time with your family will be supervised. **Supervised contact means another person will stay with you when you see your family.**

Any plans to see your family may have been agreed in a family court when you first came into care - but these arrangements may change over time depending on what works best for you. Your views should always be considered in court. If you're unsure about court proceedings and want to know more check out CAFCASS Cymru's website here: www.cafcass.gov.wales

CAFCASS Cymru ensure children's voices are heard in family courts across Wales so that decisions are made in their best interest.

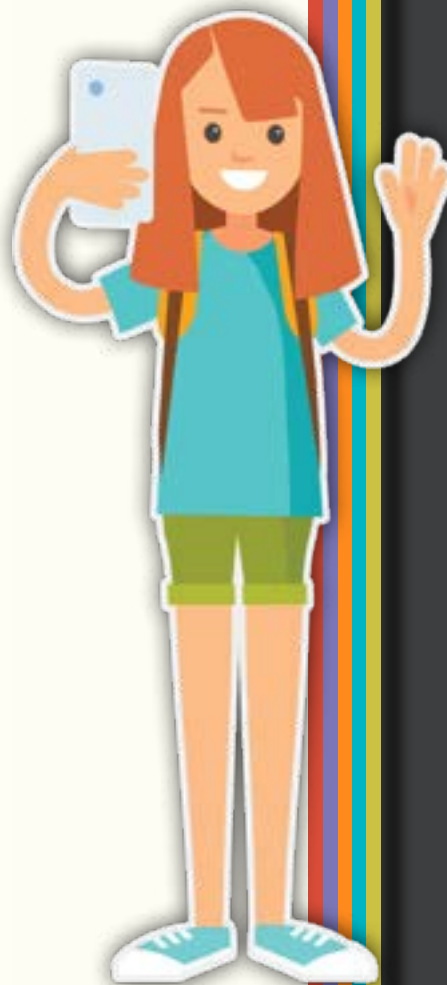
What does the law say about your right to see your family?

The **Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014** is the law in Wales that tells children's services how they should look after children and young people who need care and support. If you are in care, you will have a care and support plan. The plan should include a section on seeing your family.

When your social worker is making any plans about what will happen, they have to think about what is best for you in both the short and long term. **You have a right to say how you feel and this will be helpful for your social worker to know.**

Your social worker and independent reviewing officer should regularly ask you how you feel about seeing your family. You might think you are seeing them too much or not enough, or you may want to go to a different place to see them or do something different.

The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is the person who usually chairs the review meeting. They may visit you before and after the meeting.



These questions may help you think about what you want to happen:

- Who would you like to see or speak to, and how often?
- Where would be a safe place for you to see them?
- What would you like to do?
- Who would you like to go with you?
- How do you think you might feel before or after seeing your family?

Best interests & wishes and feelings

You may have heard these words before but may not understand what they mean:

Your **best interest** means what is considered to be the best thing for you overall. Your social worker, foster or residential carer and other people who look after you all have to think about what is best for you when making any decisions about seeing your family.

Your **wishes and feelings** are what you want to happen, and how you feel about any decisions being made.

Dominik is 13 and sees his Mum every Saturday which is supervised by his residential worker. Dominik doesn't like that his time with his Mum is supervised. He doesn't see that there is 'any need for anybody to listen to his conversations with his Mum'. Dominik's social worker says that his behaviour needs to improve, but Dominik says that she has been saying this for ages and nothing ever changes even when he does well at school and at home.

People who make decisions for you will usually try to balance your best interests and your wishes and feelings. If you are unhappy about any decisions being made and feel like your wishes and feelings aren't being heard you can always speak to an advocate.

An advocate can speak for you to tell others what your wishes and feelings are. They can also help to challenge any decisions that you don't agree with.

What do you think Dominik could do in this situation?



Do I have a right to see or speak to my family?

You don't have an automatic right to see or speak to your family whenever you want. It has to be safe and in your best interests.

You have a right to say what you want to happen. Article 12 under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that children and young people have a right to have a say and be listened to when decisions are being made.

Article 8 states that the government should respect your right to family relationships.

Article 20 states that you should be looked after properly if you can't live with your own family.

Do I have a right to say I don't want to keep in touch with my family?

Yes! You have a right to say what you want to happen and to be listened to. If any time with your family is making you unhappy, try and speak to somebody you trust - maybe your foster carer, social worker or advocate.

Seeing your brothers and sisters in care

We know that for a lot of children and young people, seeing their brothers and sisters regularly is really important.

They may live in a different place to you - and you might want to see them more often. **You have a right to ask for this.**

When decisions are being made, adults will think about:

- What kind of relationship that you have with your siblings
- If it is safe
- If it makes you both happy and is in your best interests

What to do if you want to see your siblings:

- Speak to your foster parents/carers
- Talk to your IRO at your next review meeting (or sooner if you want to)
- Work with an advocate who can speak to your social worker



My brother or sister has been adopted? Do I still have a right to keep in touch?

If you have siblings who have been adopted, you don't have an automatic right to see them. When children are adopted, any form of contact has to be agreed in court when an adoption order is being made. If it's in your best interest and the best interest of your brother or sister who is being adopted, plans might be set early on, and this could include sending letters.

The Children's Legal Centre has been working with the National Adoption Service to create a new factsheet for children and young people to explain how the law works when decisions are made about seeing your brothers and sisters.

You can read the factsheet in English and Welsh here <https://childrenslegalcentre.wales/contact-and-what-it-means-for-you/>

What are the good things about good contact?

“It’s fun and enjoyable”

“I have an understanding of where I came from and my family story”

“I felt happier and more settled in my placement”

“It was important to keep that family bond, I think in the long term it’s important as I won’t always be in care”

“To just be in contact with my family and see them regularly”

“I just wanted to feel part of my family and know what’s going on, how people are doing and tell them how I’m doing”

“The chance to be a role model for my younger brothers and sisters”

“To do nice things with my family”



Need someone to talk to?

If you are unhappy with any plans about seeing your family and want something to change you can speak to your social worker, foster carer or IRO and tell them how you feel.

Your review meetings usually take place every 6 months and this meeting gives you a chance to say what you want to happen.

Do you need help telling your social worker or IRO how you feel? An advocate is somebody who can support you to do this. You can find out how to get an advocate by visiting www.meiccymru.org or calling 080880 23456.

Voices from Care Cymru is a charity that supports young people who are in care. You can contact them for information and advice on 02920 451431 or visit their website on www.vfcc.org.uk



Advice from care experienced young people

“Just keep telling people, keep mentioning it to your social worker, foster carer and to anyone who will listen”

“Use an advocate to get your views heard”

“Use the questionnaires given before your review”

“If contact got cancelled or my Dad was late, I would feel so angry and sad, it would ruin the rest of my day, I think it’s important to say what you want to happen, and if that doesn’t happen, that’s ok. Seeing your family shouldn’t be something that makes you unhappy”

“Write a letter and say what you want”

“Make sure you bring it up in reviews”