

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH AND CARE EXCELLENCE

Guideline scope

Looked-after children and young people (update)

This guideline will update and replace the NICE guideline on looked-after children and young people (PH28).

NICE worked with Public Health England to develop this scope. The guideline will be developed using the methods and processes outlined in [developing NICE guidelines: the manual](#).

This guideline will also be used to update the NICE [quality standard](#) for looked-after children and young people.

1 Why the guideline is needed

New evidence that could affect recommendations was identified through the surveillance process. Topic experts, including those who helped to develop the existing guideline, advised NICE on whether areas should be updated, or new areas added. Full details are set out in the [surveillance review decision](#).

Key facts and figures

In March 2018, 75,420 children and young people in England were looked after. Of these:

- 73% were in a foster placement
- 11% were in residential accommodation (including secure units, children's homes, and semi-independent living arrangements)
- 6% were placed with their parents
- 3% were placed for adoption
- 4% were with another placement in the community
- 3% were in residential schools or other residential settings.

The majority of looked-after children were of white ethnicity (75%), 9% were of mixed ethnicity and 7% were of black or black British ethnicity.

The main reason for children and young people entering care was abuse or neglect (reported for about 63%). Only 29% of placements were long term and 50% of long-term teenage placements broke down.

Looked-after children and young people have poorer outcomes in many areas, including mental and physical health, education and offending rates. The rate of mental health disorders in the general population aged 5 to 15 is 10%. For those who are looked after it is 45%, and 72% for those in residential care.

In 2017, 56.3% of looked-after children had a special educational need, compared with 45.9% of children in need and 14.4% of all children. At key stage 2, 32% of looked-after children and young people reached the expected standard in reading, writing and maths (compared with 61% of those who were not looked after). In 2016, 0.10% of looked-after children were permanently excluded from school, compared to 0.08% of all children. Looked-after children are 5 times more likely to offend than the general population.

Looked-after children are more likely to become a single parent and are at greater risk of teenage pregnancy and poor pregnancy-related outcomes. These include smoking during pregnancy, having a low birth weight baby, and depression.

Current practice

Local authorities have a duty to support looked-after children and young people. This includes providing personal adviser support to all care leavers up to age 25, if they want this support. Sectors cooperate to produce individual care plans covering health, education and placement.

In addition, clinical commissioning groups, NHS England and Public Health England have a duty to support local authorities to meet their health needs. But the lives of looked-after children and young people remain disrupted.

Frequent placement moves lead to disruption of treatment plans and access to services. They are also linked to poorer mental health and a lessened sense of belonging.

Policy, legislation and commissioning

The [Children Act 1989](#), the [Care Standards Act 2000](#), the [Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations \(2010\)](#), the [Children and Social Work Act \(2017\)](#) and accompanying regulations and statutory guidance provide the legal framework for local authorities, providers of fostering services and children's homes. The current guideline duplicates existing statutory guidance. The update will place a greater focus on the specific interventions needed to help professionals improve outcomes for looked-after children and young people. It will complement existing national statutory guidance which focuses more on service delivery aspects.

2 Who the guideline is for

This guideline is for:

- social care, health and education practitioners working with looked-after children and young people and care leavers
- commissioners and managers, policy makers and providers (including third-sector organisations) in the NHS, health and social care, public health and local authorities who have the health, education and wellbeing of looked-after children and young people as part of their remit
- commissioners, managers and providers of residential accommodation and housing for looked-after children and young people and care leavers
- foster care agencies
- criminal justice system, including police force
- looked-after children and young people and care leavers
- birth parents, foster carers, corporate parents and prospective adoptive parents
- organisations with responsibility for inspections and regulations.

It may also be relevant for:

- third-sector organisations that represent the interests of looked-after children and young people, their families, carers
- other groups, for example children in need under section 17 and children and young people on the edge of care¹, and their families.

NICE guidelines cover health and care in England. Decisions on how they apply in other UK countries are made by ministers in the [Welsh Government](#), [Scottish Government](#), and [Northern Ireland Executive](#).

Equality considerations

NICE has carried out an [equality impact assessment](#) during scoping. The assessment:

- lists equality issues identified, and how they have been addressed
- explains why any groups are excluded from the scope.

3 What the guideline will cover

3.1 Who is the focus?

Groups that will be covered

- Looked-after children and young people² and care leavers (wherever they are looked after) from birth to age 25³, and their families⁴ and carers

¹ Edge of care refers to children and young people 'whose safety and wellbeing are at sufficient risk for the authority to consider removing them from their current situation for their own protection'. (NSPCC and Action for Children (2015) Supporting adolescents on the edge of care. The role of short term stays in residential care. Action for Children. [Available online <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/media/5065/edge-of-care-report.pdf>])

² Under the Children Act 1989, a child is looked after by a local authority if he or she falls into one of the following: is provided with accommodation, for a continuous period of more than 24 hours (Children Act 1989, Sections 20 and 21), is subject to a care order (Children Act 1989, Part IV), or is subject to a placement order.

³ A child stops being looked after when they are adopted, return home or turn 18. But local authorities are required to support all care leavers up to age 25, if they want this support.

⁴ The guideline will cover interventions supporting the reunification of looked-after children with birth parents, but not the primary prevention of children being taken into care.

(including birth parents, connected carers⁵ and prospective adoptive parents).

- Children and young people who are looked after on a planned, temporary basis for short breaks or respite care purposes, only if the Children Act 1989 (section 20) applies and the child or young person is temporarily classed as looked after.
- Children and young people living at home with birth parents but under a full or interim local authority care order and are subject to looked-after children and young people processes and statutory duties.
- Children and young people in a prospective adoptive placement.
- Children and young people preparing to leave care.
- Looked-after children and young people on remand, detained in secure youth custody and those serving community orders.

Specific consideration will be given to:

- looked-after children and young people and care leavers with mental health and emotional wellbeing needs
- looked-after children and young people who are babies and young children
- looked-after children and young people who are unaccompanied children seeking asylum
- looked-after children and young people and care leavers who are refugees
- looked-after children and young people and care leavers who are at risk or victims of exploitation (including female genital mutilation) and trafficking
- looked-after children and young people and care leavers who are teenage and young parents in care and care leavers
- looked-after children and young people and care leavers with disabilities; speech, language and communication needs; special education needs or behaviour that challenges
- looked-after children and young people who are placed out of area.

⁵ Family or friends who care for a child full time if their parents are unable to do so. This may be for a short period or permanently.

Groups that will not be covered

- Children and young people who have been looked after in the past but are currently not looked after (not including care leavers).
- Children and young people on the edge of care⁶, and their families.

3.2 Settings

Settings that will be covered

- All settings where looked-after children and young people and care leavers live.
- All settings that deliver services for looked-after children and young people and care leavers.
- All settings that target a specific issue and have an element or service tailored to looked-after children and young people (or their parents, other family or carers) and care leavers or for which the impact on looked-after children and young people and care leavers is actively monitored and evaluated. This includes:
 - primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare
 - schools or other places of education
 - mentoring and advocacy schemes
 - mother and baby units
 - children and family centres
 - contact centres
 - reception centres for unaccompanied children seeking asylum.
- Secure settings, including police stations, young offender institutions, secure training centres, military facilities and secure children's homes.

⁶ Edge of care refers to children and young people 'whose safety and wellbeing are at sufficient risk for the authority to consider removing them from their current situation for their own protection'. (NSPCC and Action for Children (2015) Supporting adolescents on the edge of care. The role of short term stays in residential care. Action for Children. [Available online <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/media/5065/edge-of-care-report.pdf>])

3.3 *Activities, services or aspects of care*

Key areas that will be covered

We will look at evidence in the areas below when developing the guideline, but it may not be possible to make recommendations in all the areas.

- 1 Supporting care and placement stability.
 - Support for children and young people, birth families (with children and young people under a full care order), foster carers, key workers in residential care units, connected carers, prospective adopters and special guardians, and social care workers to improve placement stability.
- 2 Relationships.
 - Interventions to promote positive relationships.
- 3 Health and social care promotion: physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing of looked-after children and young people during the care journey and as care leavers.
 - Interventions and approaches to support practitioners assessing and supporting holistic health and wellbeing needs of children and young people during their care journey and as care leavers, including completing physical and mental health assessments and interventions for looked-after children.
 - Barriers to, and facilitators for, practitioners assessing and supporting physical and mental health and wellbeing needs of looked-after children and young people and care leavers.
- 4 Supporting learning needs:
 - Interventions to support readiness for school.
 - Interventions to support learning needs.
 - Interventions to support entry into further education.
- 5 Preparing children and young people for leaving care.

- Interventions to support children and young people transitioning out of care to living with their adoptive or birth parents or special guardians, or into connected care⁷.
- 6 Preparing care leavers for independent living.
- Interventions to support young people transitioning out of care (or from birth family homes with a full care order) into independent living including life skills as well as entry into employment, training, and higher education.

Areas that will not be covered

- 1 Universal interventions and activities to promote and improve key outcomes that do not monitor or evaluate the impact of the intervention on outcomes for looked-after children and young people, or their families and carers.
- 2 Clinical treatments for specific conditions if the focus (for example, surgery or drug treatment) is restricted to treating the condition.
- 3 Issues relating to the transition from children's to adult health or social care services. This is covered in [NICE's guideline on transition from children's to adults' services for young people using health or social care services](#).
- 4 Issues relating to attachment of looked-after children and young people to carers and social workers. This is covered in [NICE's guideline on children's attachment](#).
- 5 Mental health and emotional wellbeing interventions covered in existing NICE guidelines:
 - [antisocial behaviour and conduct disorder in children and young people](#)
 - [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder](#)
 - [borderline personality disorder](#)
 - [depression in children and young people](#)
 - [eating disorders](#)

⁷ Family or friends caring for a child full time if their parents are unable to do so. This may be for a short period or permanently.

- [obsessive-compulsive disorder and body dysmorphic disorder](#)
 - [post-traumatic stress disorder](#)
 - [self-harm in over 8s: long term management](#)
 - [social and emotional wellbeing: early years](#)
 - [social and emotional wellbeing in primary education](#)
 - [social and emotional wellbeing in secondary education](#)
 - [social anxiety disorder](#).
- 6 Health promotion interventions covered in existing NICE guidelines:
- [alcohol-use disorders](#)
 - [alcohol: school-based interventions](#)
 - [contraceptive services for under 25s](#)
 - [drug misuse prevention: targeted interventions](#)
 - [harmful sexual behaviour among children and young people](#)
 - [immunisations: reducing differences in uptake in under 19s](#)
 - [physical activity for children and young people](#)
 - [sexually transmitted infections and under-18 conceptions](#)
 - [weight management: lifestyle services for overweight or obese children and young people](#).
- 7 Strategies, policies, system structure and the delivery of care (for example, national, regional and local policies, assessments, targets, standards, inspection and audit, multi-agency partnerships, referral mechanisms, recording and communicating information, commissioning and development) that is covered in statutory guidance about looked-after children and young people.

Related NICE guidance

Published

- [Stop smoking interventions and services](#) (2018) NICE guideline NG92
- [Child abuse and neglect](#) (2017) NICE guideline NG76
- [Drug misuse prevention: targeted interventions](#) (2017) NICE guideline NG64
- [Eating disorders: recognition and treatment](#) (2017) NICE guideline NG69

- [Immunisations: reducing differences in uptake in under 19s](#) (2017) NICE guideline PH21
- [Depression in children and young people: identification and management](#) (2017) NICE guideline CG28 (currently being updated, publication expected April 2019)
- [Autism spectrum disorder in under 19s: recognition, referral and diagnosis](#) (2017) NICE guideline CG128
- [Community engagement: improving health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities](#) (2016) NICE guideline NG44
- [Harmful sexual behaviour among children and young people](#) (2016) NICE guideline NG55
- [Transition from children's to adults' services for young people using health or social care services](#) (2016) NICE guideline NG43
- [Children's attachment: attachment in children and young people who are adopted from care, in care or at high risk of going into care](#) (2015) NICE guideline NG26
- [Contraceptive services for under 25s](#) (2014) NICE guideline PH51
- [Domestic violence and abuse: multi-agency working](#) (2014) NICE guideline PH50
- [Antisocial behaviour and conduct disorders in children and young people: recognition and management](#) (2013) NICE guideline CG158
- [Antisocial personality disorder: prevention and management](#) (2009, updated 2013) NICE guideline CG77
- [Social anxiety disorder: recognition, assessment and treatment](#) (2013) NICE guideline CG159
- [Weight management: lifestyle services for overweight or obese children and young people](#) (2013) NICE guideline PH47
- [Social and emotional wellbeing: early years](#) (2012) NICE guideline PH40
- [Alcohol-use disorders: diagnosis, assessment and management of harmful drinking and alcohol independence](#) (2011) NICE guideline CG115
- [Self-harm in over 8s: long-term management](#) (2011) NICE guideline CG133
- [Child maltreatment: when to suspect maltreatment in under 18s](#) (2009) NICE guideline CG89

- [Borderline personality disorder: recognition and management](#) (2009) NICE guideline CG78
- [Physical activity for children and young people](#) (2009) NICE guideline PH17
- [Social and emotional wellbeing in secondary education](#) (2009) NICE guideline PH20
- [Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: diagnosis and management](#) (2008) NICE guideline CG72
- [Social and emotional wellbeing in primary education](#) (2008) NICE guideline PH12
- [Maternal and child nutrition](#) (2008) NICE guideline PH11
- [Sexually transmitted infections and under-18 conceptions: prevention](#) (2007) NICE guideline PH3
- [Alcohol: school-based interventions](#) (2007) NICE guideline PH7 (currently being updated, publication expected August 2019)
- [Obsessive-compulsive disorder and body dysmorphic disorder: treatment](#) (2005) NICE guideline CG31
- [Post-traumatic stress disorder: management](#) (2005) NICE guideline CG26
- [Self-harm in over 8s: short-term management and prevention of recurrence](#) (2004) NICE guideline CG16
- [Autism spectrum disorder in under 19s: support and management](#) (2013) NICE guideline CG170

In development

- [Children and young people with disabilities & severe complex needs: integrated health & social care support & service guidance](#) NICE guideline. Publication expected February 2021.
- [Infant, children and young people's experience of healthcare](#) NICE guideline. Publication expected April 2021.
- [Social and emotional wellbeing in primary and secondary education](#) NICE guideline. Publication expected May 2021
- [Reducing sexually transmitted infections](#) NICE guideline. Publication expected September 2021

NICE guidance about the experience of people using NHS services

NICE has produced the following guidance on the experience of people using the NHS. This guideline will not include additional recommendations on these topics unless there are specific issues related to looked-after children and young people:

- [Medicines optimisation](#) (2015) NICE guideline NG5
- [Patient experience in adult NHS services](#) (2012) NICE guideline CG138
- [Service user experience in adult mental health](#) (2011) NICE guideline CG136
- [Medicines adherence](#) (2009) NICE guideline CG76

3.4 *Economic aspects*

We will take economic aspects into account when making recommendations. We will develop an economic plan that states for each review question (or key area in the scope) whether economic considerations are relevant, and if so whether this is an area that should be prioritised for economic modelling and analysis. We will review the economic evidence and carry out economic analyses, using a public sector and other perspectives, as appropriate.

3.5 *Key issues and draft questions*

While writing this scope, we have identified the following key issues and draft questions related to them:

- 1 Supporting care and placement stability:
 - 1.1 What is the effectiveness of health and social care interventions and approaches to support care placement stability?
 - 1.2 What are the barriers to, and facilitators for, supporting care placement stability?
- 2 Relationships:
 - 2.1 What is the effectiveness of health and social care interventions and approaches to support positive relationships for looked-after children and young people and care leavers?

- 2.2 What are the barriers to, and facilitators for, supporting positive relationships for looked-after children and young people and care leavers?
- 3 Health and social care promotion: physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing:
- 3.1 What is the effectiveness of interventions and approaches to support practitioners in completing physical and mental health and wellbeing assessments for looked-after children and young people, and act on findings during the care journey?
- 3.2 What is the effectiveness of interventions and approaches to promoting physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing of looked-after children and young people and care leavers?
- 3.3 What are the barriers to, and facilitators for, promoting physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing of looked-after children and young people and care leavers?
- 4 Supporting learning needs:
- 4.1 What is the effectiveness of interventions to support readiness for school?
- 4.2 What is the effectiveness of interventions to support learning needs by either a learning provider or carer of school-aged looked-after children and young people?
- 4.3 What is the effectiveness of interventions to support entry into further education or training?
- 4.4 What are the barriers to, and facilitators for, supporting learning needs?
- 5 Preparing children and young people for leaving care:
- 5.1 What is the effectiveness of interventions and approaches to support looked-after children and young people transitioning out of care to living with their adoptive or birth parents or special guardians, or into connected care?
- 5.2 What are the barriers to, and facilitators for, supporting and developing looked-after children and young people to transition out of care to living with their adoptive or birth parents or special guardians, or into connected care?

- 6 Preparing care leavers for independent living:
 - 6.1 What is the effectiveness of interventions and approaches (including entry into employment, training, life skills and higher education) to support looked-after young people transitioning out of care into independent living?
 - 6.2 What are the barriers to, and facilitators for, supporting and developing looked-after young people to transition into independent living?

3.6 Main outcomes

The main outcomes that may be considered when searching for and assessing the evidence are:

- 1 mental wellbeing and quality of life
- 2 behavioural, cognitive, educational and social functioning
- 3 emotional wellbeing
- 4 quality of the relationship between child or young person and significant people in their life, such as parent, caregiver and siblings
- 5 experience of parenting and parenting behaviour
- 6 social and economic independence
- 7 experience of interventions and care processes
- 8 knowledge and beliefs
- 9 criminal outcomes
- 10 health outcomes
- 11 re-entering care
- 12 homelessness rates
- 13 unintended consequences.

4 NICE quality standards and NICE Pathways

4.1 *NICE quality standards*

NICE quality standards that may need to be revised or updated when this guideline is published

- Looked-after children and young people (2013) NICE quality standard QS31

4.2 *NICE Pathways*

When this guideline is published, we will update the NICE Pathway on [looked-after babies, children and young people](#), which brings together everything we have said on this topic in an interactive flowchart.

5 Further information

This is the final scope, which takes into account comments from registered stakeholders during consultation.

The guideline is expected to be published in April 2021.

You can follow progress of the [guideline](#).

Our website has information about how [NICE guidelines](#) are developed.

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