

HANDBOOK FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We are extremely grateful to the following persons who have reviewed and contributed their technical expertise in developing this Handbook:

Mr Ng Chak Ngeng, a foster care case worker for 18 years and former programme director of the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Programme of the Lutheran Community Services Northwest in Seattle, Washington. Mr. Ng also worked with the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service in Baltimore, Maryland to assist the Federal Government to resettle unaccompanied refugee children in refugee foster care programmes across the country.

Mr. James Nayagam, a child rights advocate who has vast experience working within a residential institution with children who have been abused or neglected. Mr. Nayagam is a former Commissioner with the National Human Rights Agency of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) and is currently the Commissioner for the Enforcement Agency Integrity Commission

(EAIC) of Malaysia and a council member for the welfare and protection of children in Malaysia.

Mrs. Vijayakumari G.A. Pillai, a social work consultant with vast experience in the Department of Social Welfare of Malaysia, specializing in foster care, adoption, child protection and child rights.

Ms. Zoe Stewart, from the HOST International Candlelighters Programme, and who has over five years experience working with refugee children, families and communities in Nauru and Australia whilst in detention and awaiting resettlement. Ms. Stewart also has several years of experience working with children in care, supporting them through case management and family or parenting support programmes.

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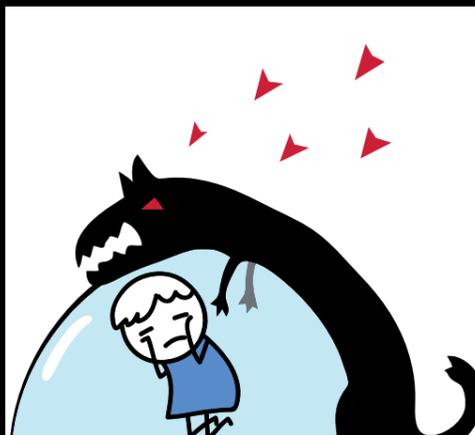
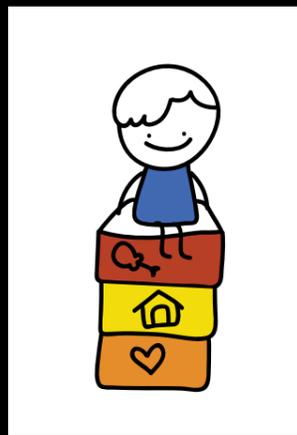
Finally, we would like to thank the unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) and foster families in SUKA Society’s case management programme who have inspired us to embark on this project to provide better care and protection for the UASC in Malaysia and better support for foster families who have opened their homes to provide safer placement for UASC.

We gratefully acknowledge all the contribution, support and assistance of persons named and unnamed. If we have inadvertently forgotten to acknowledge someone, please accept our heartfelt apologies and sincere appreciation for your valuable assistance.

1. WHAT IS FOSTER CARE?

Sometimes things happen and your mum and dad cannot take care of you. You are alone, in another country, and you don't know what to do. Well, there are grown-up aunties and uncles who will welcome you into their homes and look after you. This is called Foster Care. And each auntie-and-uncle couple are called Foster Parents. These foster parents may be members from your own family, or they may be other people. They will watch over you for only a short time until your parents can take you back again. They do not replace your own mum and dad.

Your foster parents are chosen by something called a Foster Care Agency. This is a group of people that will match you with the right couple and the right home. They will do their best to make sure that:

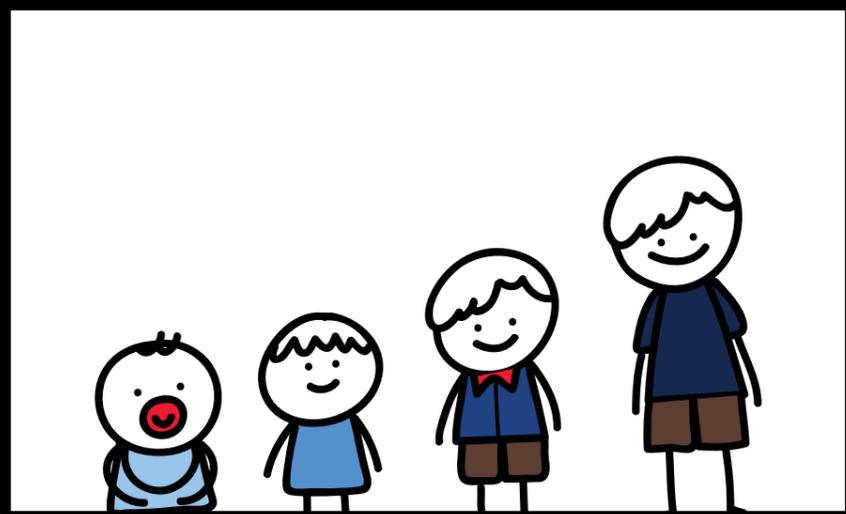
		
You are safe from anything that will hurt or frighten you	Your life will be happy and you will not worry if something unexpected happens	You will have what you need – like food, a home, good health and schooling

Remember if you take part in this programme, you don't have to pay anything – it is free. You also don't have to work or do anything special for anyone. If you are below 18 years of age, and you are here in Malaysia without your parents, this foster care programme is here to help you.

2. WHY DO I NEED TO STAY WITH A FOSTER FAMILY?

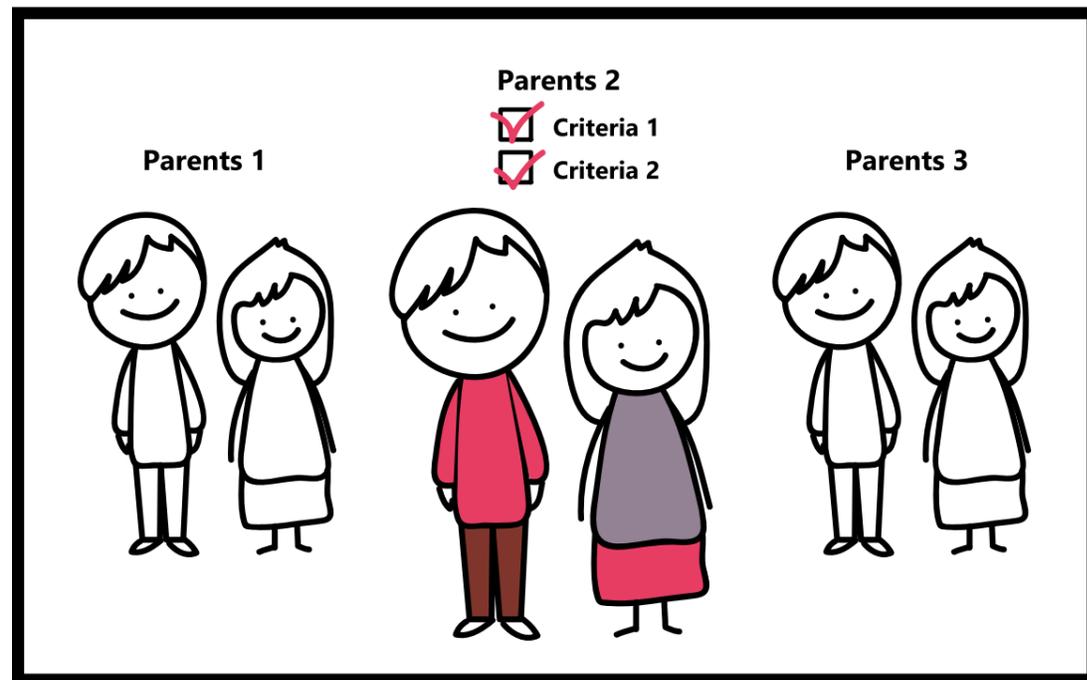
If you are below 18 years of age, you are still a child. You must be protected. You must be cared for in a loving home by grown-ups who are able to give you what you need and keep you safe.

We started this programme to help children like you who are here in Malaysia without their mums and dads. A foster family looks after you just like mum and dad would. That's why we would like you to be a part of the programme – so you get the best possible care. But we will not force you. It is your choice whether you want to join. You can also join, and then if you want to change your mind after a while, that's OK too. We will help you find another way to get good care.

	
Age 0 to 17 years old	18 years old and above

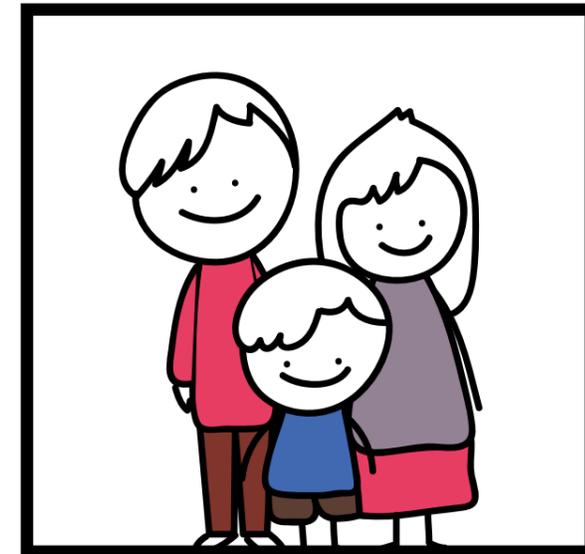
3. WHO WILL BE MY FOSTER PARENTS?

Your foster parents are carefully chosen. First, they must love children and be able to care for them. Then, when they apply to take part in our programme, they must be trained well to be good parents. The foster care agency may also give them extra help so they can look after you in the best way possible. Because just like your life has changed, they will also have to make changes to bring you into their home and meet your needs.



4. WHY ARE MY FOSTER PARENTS WILLING TO LOOK AFTER ME?

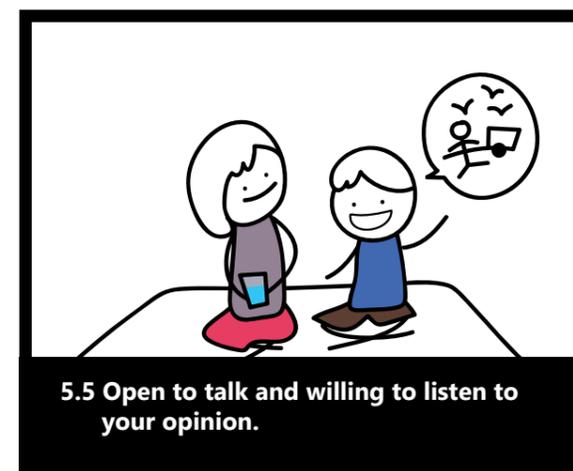
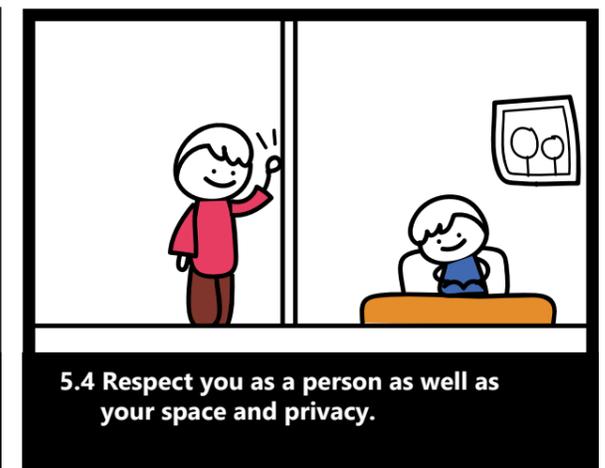
Your foster parents feel that children who are here in the country without their parents should be protected and cared for in a loving home. They may be people from your country. They may be people who know about your problems. And now they want to help you and other children.

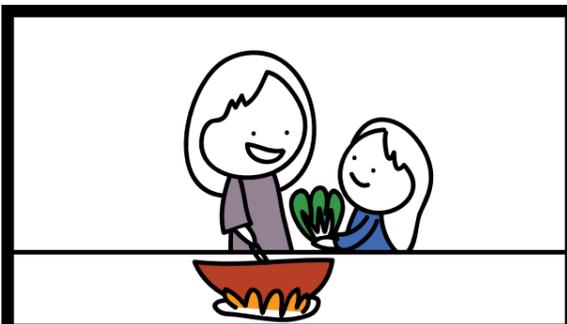


5. WHAT HELP CAN I GET FROM MY FOSTER PARENTS?

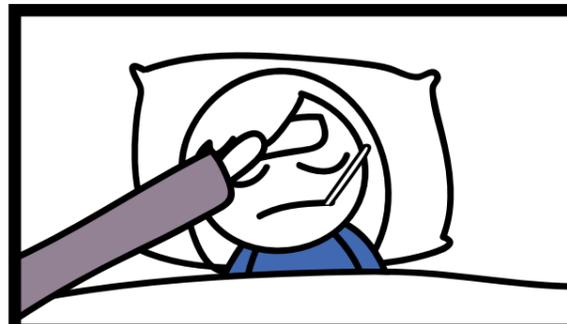
Actually you should both treat each other like family. So you should expect from your foster parents the same kind of help and care that your own parents would give you. Your foster parents should:

5.1	Give you a home to live in, food to eat and clothes to wear.
5.2	Welcome you into their family and treat you like their own child.
5.3	Keep you safe from harm and teach you how to protect yourself from danger.
5.4	Respect you as a person as well as your space and privacy.
5.5	Open to talk and willing to listen to your opinion.
5.6	Speak up for you to relevant authorities if necessary.
5.7	Help you find ways to learn and grow, which you can use later for work and when you are living by yourself as an adult.
5.8	Help keep you healthy and look after you when you are unwell.
5.9	Give you time to have fun, rest and play.
5.10	Take the trouble to learn the story of your life and give you confidence to be yourself.
5.11	Teach you how to mix and make friends with people.
5.12	Teach you right and wrong especially when you make mistakes. They will be firm but they will always try to teach you the right attitude, behaviour or action so you can learn from the experience.
5.13	Help you meet all the goals discussed in the care plan developed together with the Foster Care Case Worker.
5.14	Listen and act correctly on any complaints you may have regarding your case worker, your care plan and any other things that make you unhappy.





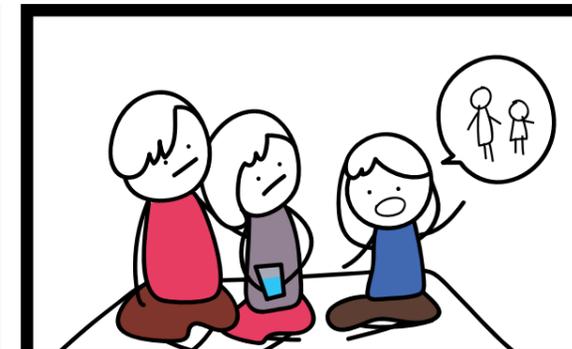
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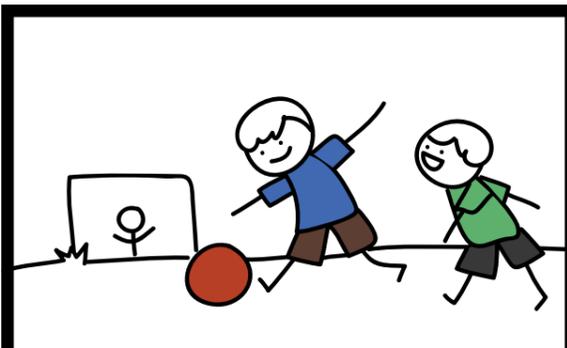
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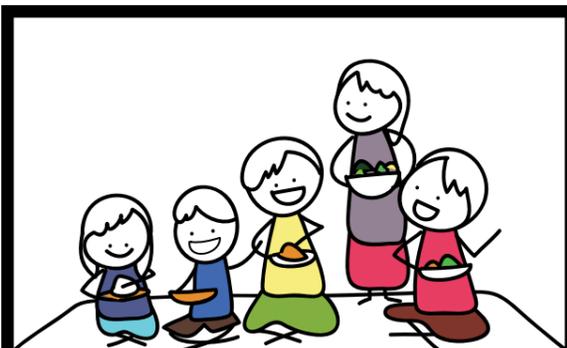
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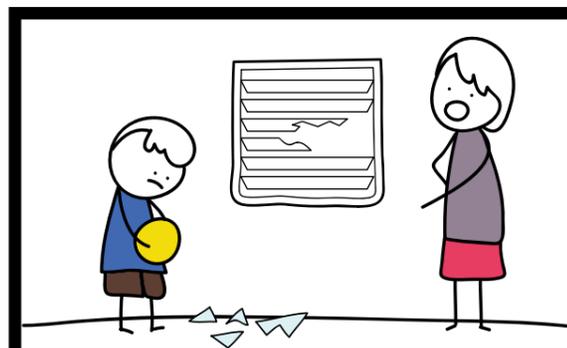
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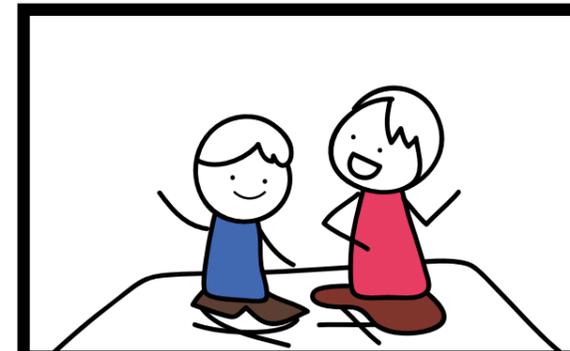


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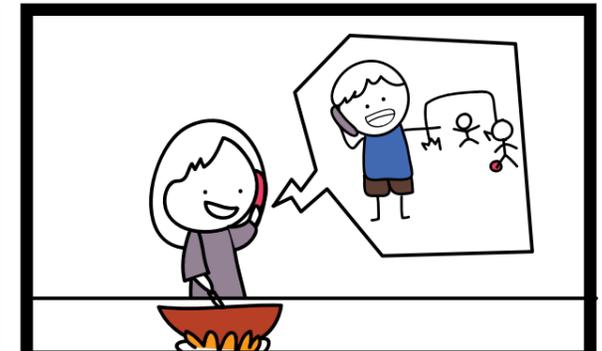
6. WHAT ARE THINGS I NEED TO DO TO WHEN LIVING WITH A FOSTER FAMILY?

There are things that you can do when living with a foster family that will help bring you all closer together. You don't have to do these things to stay in the programme but it would certainly help you to enjoy your time living with your foster parents. We encourage you to be good and behave well in your foster parents' family. Here are some things you can do when living with a foster family:

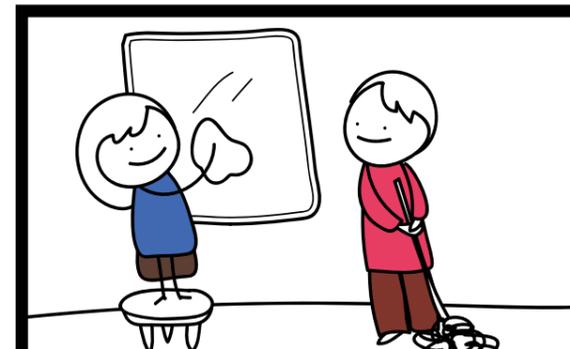
6.1	Be open and work well with your foster parents as they only want the best for you.
6.2	Get to know your foster parents well. This will make your stay a lot happier. Be willing to talk and share about yourself, and especially your everyday activities, with them.
6.3	Tell them what you're doing, who you're with, and where you'll be - especially when you are not at home. Make sure they know about any changes in your life.
6.4	Take part in family activities. This includes doing your duties or chores, and helping out as and when needed.
6.5	Show respect to your foster parents and all other members living at home. People will respect you more when you show them respect.
6.6	Be comfortable at home but also treat their home and their belongings with respect. Look after their things as how you would want other people to look after your things. Be careful when using anything that belongs to them. Those things may be difficult to get.
6.7	Be helpful to your foster parents. They too may be having a difficult time being a refugee in this country. Support them as much as possible.
6.8	Be patient with your foster parents as this might be the first time they're being parents. They may also need some time to adjust to you in their home.



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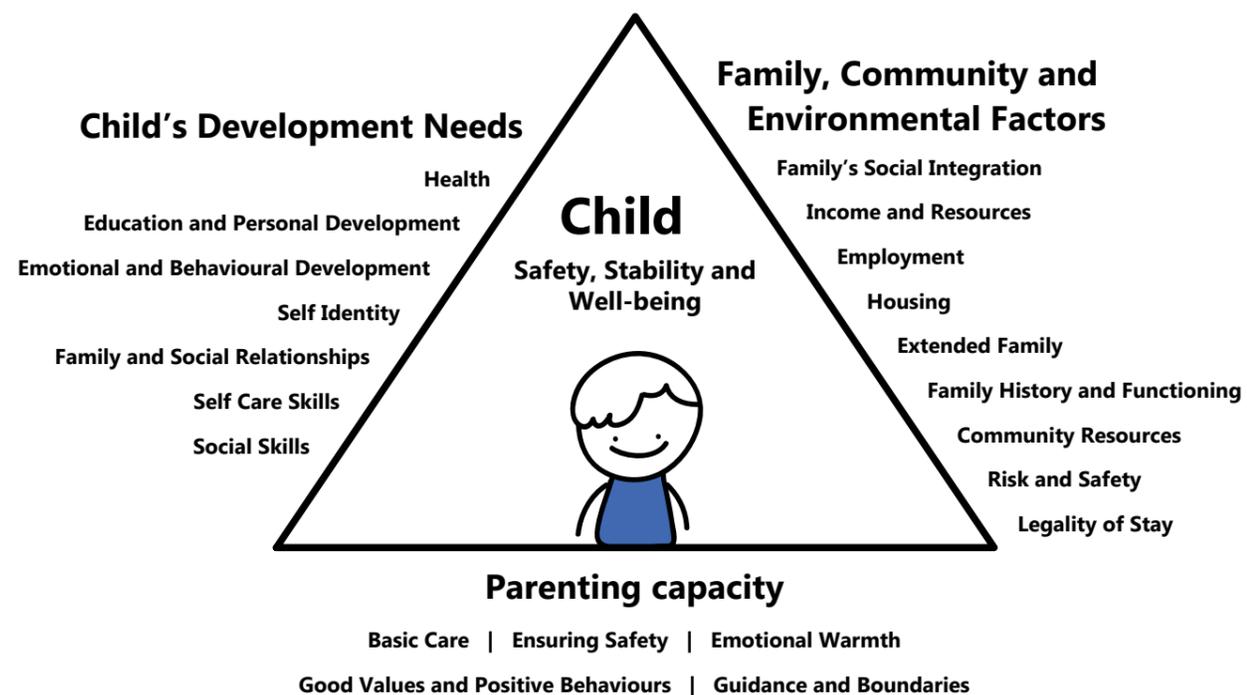
6.8 Be patient with your foster parents as this might be the first time they're being parents. They may also need some time to adjust to you in their home.

7. WHAT IS A CARE PLAN?

Care plans are plans that are made between your foster parents, your case manager and yourself. Two things are important here: What are your needs? And what are some goals you want to achieve for yourself? The care plan also states how to help you meet these needs and goals.

For example, if at this moment, you do not have a proper place to stay, the need in the care plan would be to find you a safe home. Therefore your case manager's goal is to place you in a foster care parents' home. Another example is, if you cannot speak the local language, you will find it difficult to get a job when you become an adult. So in the care plan, it will be stated that you need to learn the local language. Then, to fulfil the care plan, your case manager will help you find a place which will teach you the local language. Your foster parents will support you and guide you as and when they can. And you yourself will have to put in the effort to meet the goal of learning the language.

Here are some key areas the care plan will cover –

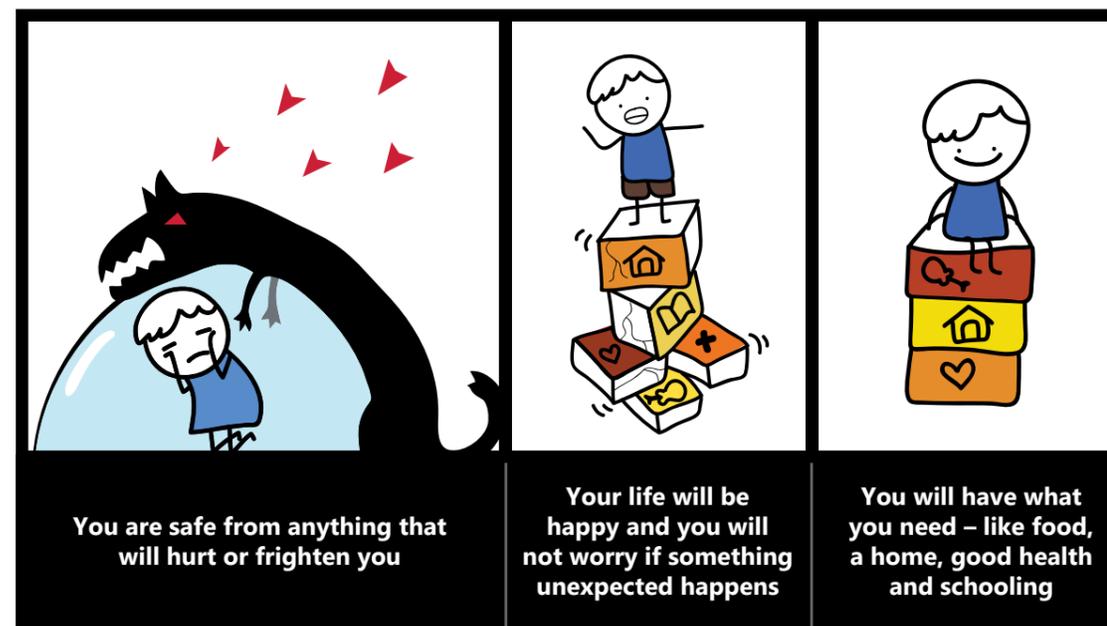


Together with your foster parents, your case manager will help you develop the care plan. He or she will explain each area in the care plan and guide you in sharing your needs and developing your goals. You should be honest with your case worker in sharing your needs and what you want to do or be in the future. Your case worker will listen to you and try to help you. The care plan can only be carried out once your foster parents, your case worker and you agree to it.

8. WHAT IS A FOSTER CHILD CASE WORKER?

A Foster Child Case Worker is someone who will work with you to meet some of your needs and goals. He or she will ensure you get the best advice from the time you start in the foster care programme until you leave. Your case worker's main duty is to identify what your problem is now, and see how to help you for the future. The case worker will also want you to –

- be safe from anything that will hurt or frighten you
- have a happy life where you will not worry if something unexpected happens
- get what you need – like food, a home, good health and schooling

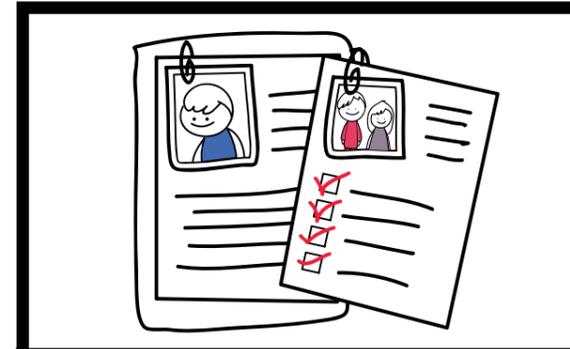


9. WHAT HELP CAN I GET FROM MY CASE WORKER?

Your case worker wants what is best for you, to be a good support for you and to work well with you. But you must remember that your case worker is NOT your parent. Your foster parents are the ones who will provide for you day to day just like a real parent. Your case worker looks after your care plan and makes sure it is being carried out. What both your foster parents and your case worker does is very important during this time in your life.

Here are some important things your case worker would be doing for you:

9.1	Will make sure that you and your foster parents are the right match.
9.2	Develop and carry out a care plan with you and your foster parents.
9.3	Come up with a plan that works well for you now and for the future.
9.4	Visit you regularly and check with you and your foster parents to see if you are being cared for properly.
9.5	Give you good advice in helping you live happily with your foster parents and other members in their home.
9.6	Inform your foster parents about your progress in carrying out the care plan.
9.7	Help you adjust to living by yourself once you move out from your foster parents' home.
9.8	Will make sure that your personal information is kept safe and ensure that only those who need to know will know your personal information.
9.9	Help your foster parents find ways to support your stay with them.
9.10	Will listen and act correctly on any complaints you may have regarding your foster care parents, your care plan and any other things you may be unhappy about.



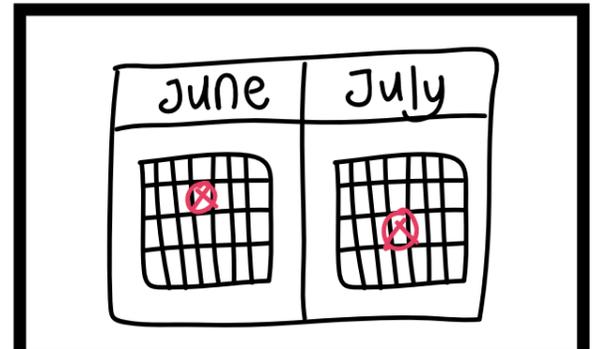
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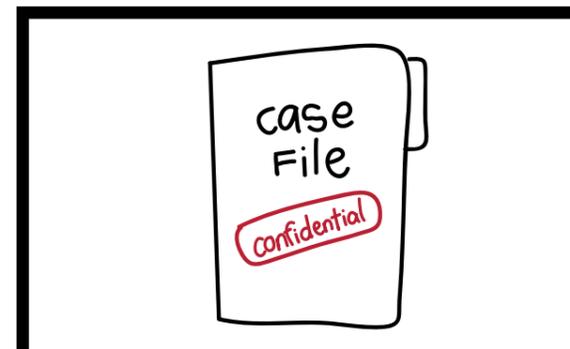
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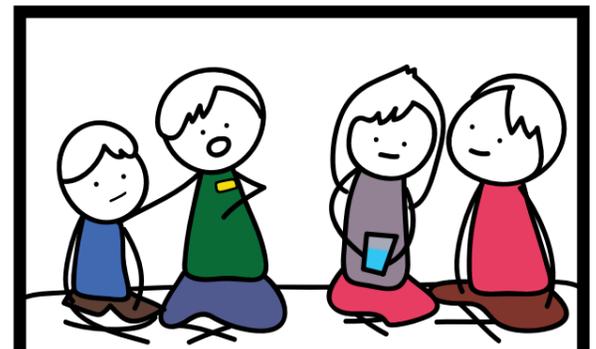
9.3 Come up with a plan that works well for you now and for the future.



9.4 Visit you regularly and will check with you and your foster parents to see if you are being cared for properly.



9.8 Will make sure that your personal information is kept safe and ensure that only those who need to know will know your personal information.



9.10 Will listen and act correctly on any complaints you may have regarding your foster care parents, your care plan and any other things you may be unhappy about.

10. HOW CAN I MAKE IT EASIER FOR MY CASE WORKER TO HELP ME?

You can actually help your case worker help you better. If you work closely with your case worker, then he or she can do the job properly. Here's what you can do:

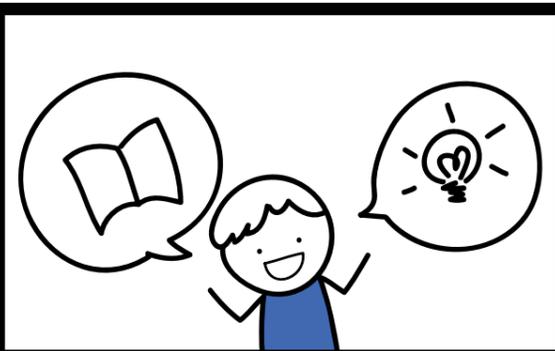
10.1	Be clear, open and honest when working with your case worker – especially in interviews and when he or she is developing and carrying out the care plan with you. This is very important.
10.2	Get to know your case workers because then it will be easier for you to talk with and trust him or her.
10.3	Keep your case worker updated on what you do, where you go and also changes in your life.
10.4	Always attend appointments with your case workers, and always arrive on time.
10.5	Be polite and show your case worker respect as he or she is working hard to help you. You must be respectful even if he or she does not agree with your opinion and is firm in making you carry out your care plan.
10.6	Be patient with your case worker as he or she may be helping many children like you. Also some goals in your care plan take a long time, and your case worker may not be able to control everything.

11. WHAT DO I NEED TO DO FOR MYSELF?

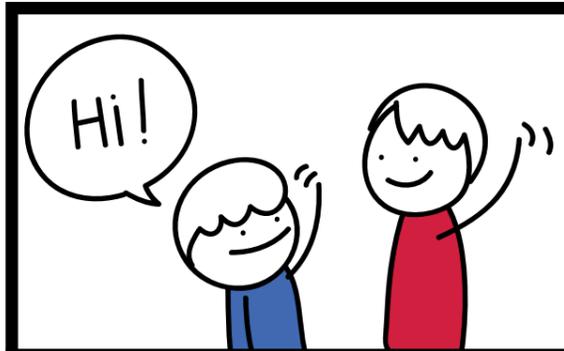
When you do things to make yourself better, you will enjoy rewards! It can be as simple as going to school or learning the local language of the country you are in. Or you can learn new skills to help you at work, or even to find out how you can keep healthy.

Below are some things you should do for yourself in a foster care programme:

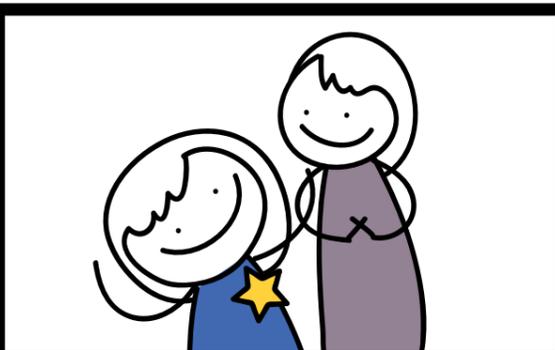
11.1	Share freely your opinion when developing your care plan. Set goals for yourself and put them down in the care plan.
11.2	Be positive – even if plans take time, or can't be done. Remember that the people helping you want only what's best for you and are working really hard to meet your present and future needs.
11.3	Take every chance to speak and share what you think, especially when it comes to things that concern you.
11.4	Work with those who are helping to keep you safe. That will include following the rules, and listening to good advice.
11.5	Know your own country well – its culture, traditions and religions. Make friends with others from your community so you don't feel homesick.
11.6	Develop good values, attitudes and behaviour and don't be afraid to meet new people.
11.7	Accept yourself as you are, but also allow yourself to grow into a better person. Others around you should also accept you as you are and help you grow and develop as a person.
11.8	Keep yourself healthy by eating properly, and get rest whenever it is needed. You should ask to see a doctor whenever you feel unwell. Your home environment should also be clean and healthy.
11.9	Play whenever you can - maybe football or just games with your friends. You're a child – have fun!
11.10	Allow good-hearted people to help you with your schooling or with learning useful skills.
11.11	Prepare to look after yourself when you turn 18 years of age. Learn skills that can be used for work. Also learn how to keep yourself safe, how to manage your money, and how to deal with difficult times. Make good friends with people from your community who can help you when you are staying on your own.



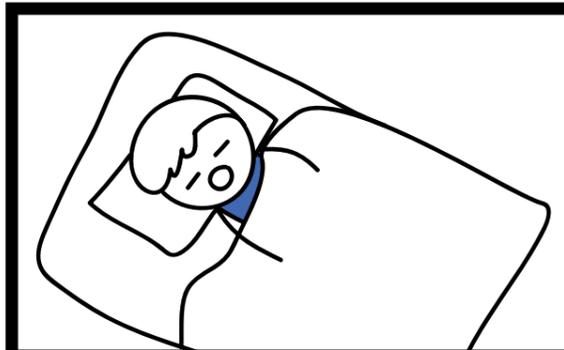
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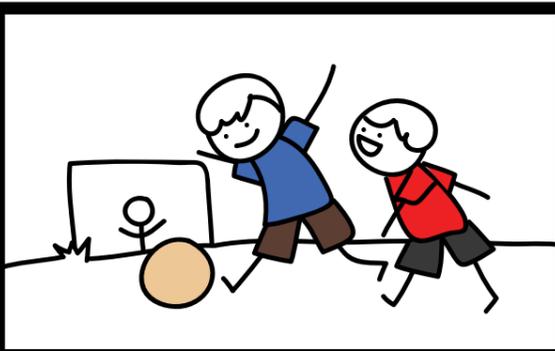
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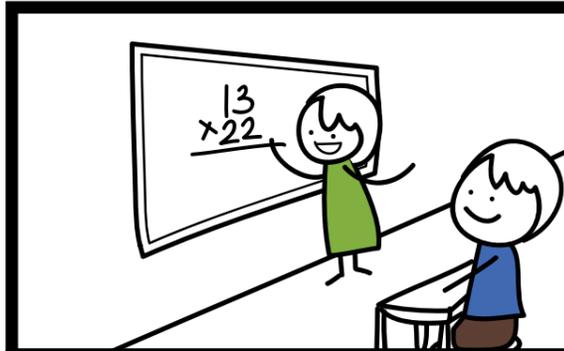
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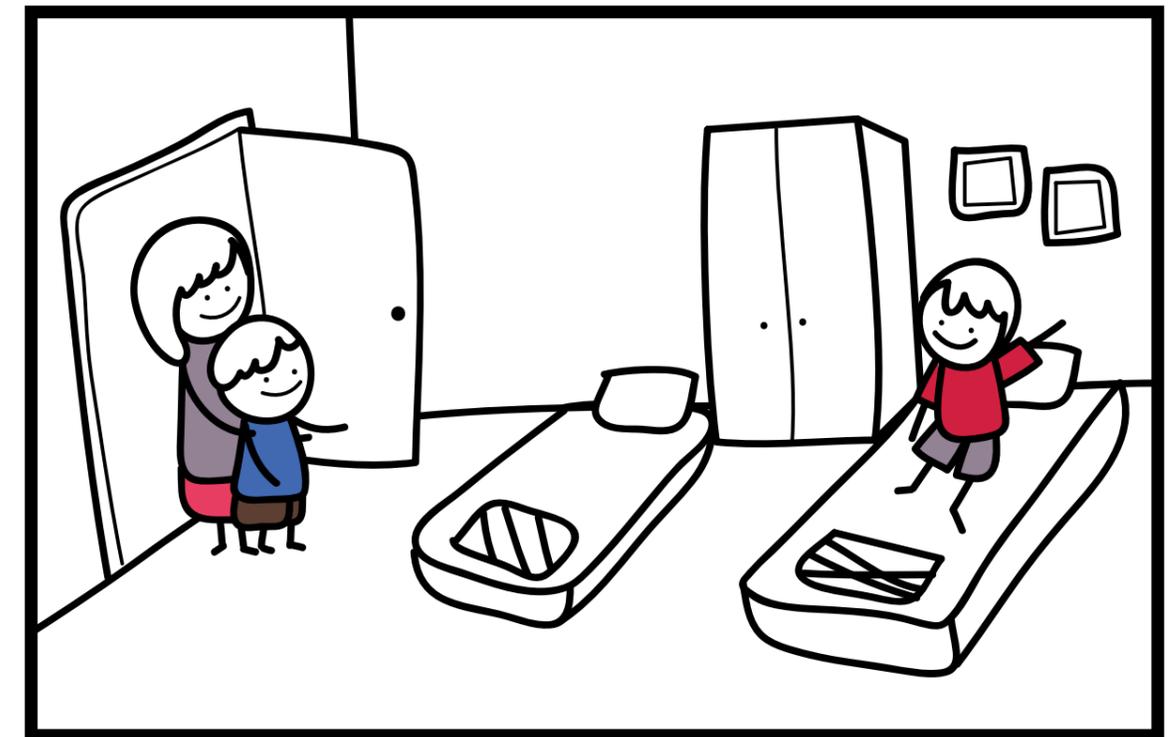


11.10 Allow good-hearted people to help you with your schooling or with learning useful skills.

12. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I MOVE INTO MY FOSTER FAMILY'S HOUSE?

Your case worker will work closely with your foster parents to make sure that the place is right for you. This means having a proper room with a bed. Depending on your foster parents, you may have a whole room to yourself or you may have to share the room with another child. You will also be given basic things such as clothes, soap, shampoo, etc. What you need to do is pack all your personal belongings and follow your case worker when he or she takes you to the home of your foster parents.

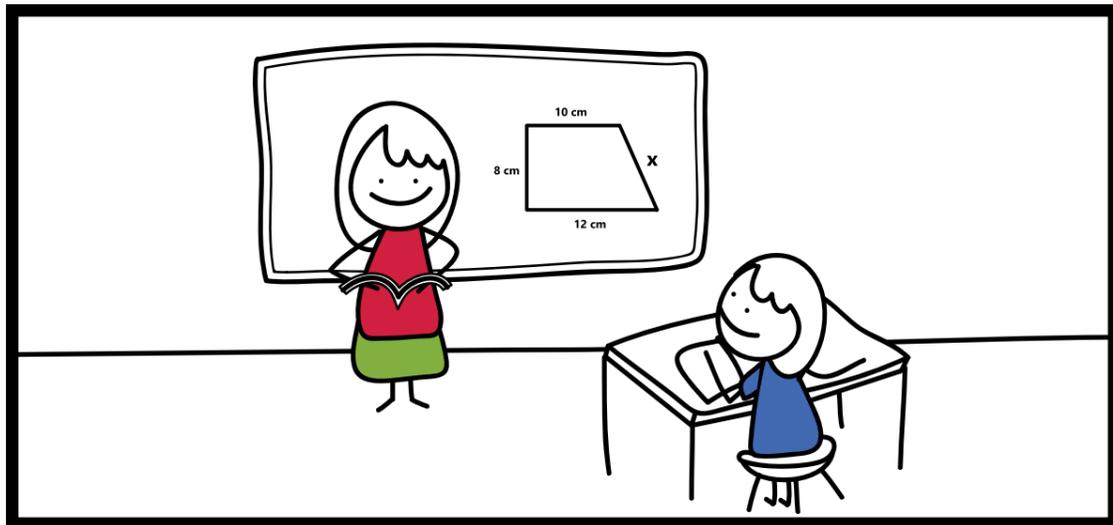
During the first few days or weeks with your foster parents, your case worker will organise a few get-to-know-you activities. These will help you find out more about your foster parents and their family members living in the home. Keep an open mind and take part in the activities. This is to help you and your foster parents make a good start in developing a connection with one another so you feel welcome in the home. At this time, your case worker and foster parents will also talk about some of the house rules and things expected of you, such as doing duties and chores.



13. OTHER CONCERNS I MAY HAVE DURING MY STAY WITH MY FOSTER PARENTS

13.1 – Can I go to school?

Yes, of course you can. Your education is an important need in your care plan. Your case worker will try his or her best to make sure that you are able to attend school. However, there may be difficulties – sometimes due to a lack of schooling options available in the community or whether you can fit into a current school programme. Then, your case worker may work with individual volunteer teachers who are able to provide personal lessons, or with skilled people who are able to give you skills training as another form of learning.



13.2 – Am I allowed to work?

This is a difficult issue. We know your community faces many problems here in Malaysia and also back home. We also know that your family may need you to work here in order to send money home. But you are a refugee child – and refugee children are not allowed to work here. If you do, you may be arrested by the police or immigration officers. If you are 15-17 years old, the Malaysian law only allows limited part-time work in safe work places. It is important to make sure children like you are protected and not badly treated by bosses. Also, as a child you need the time and space to grow as a person and as well as to enjoy your childhood.

Your case worker will work closely with you to find out how you can still be of help to your family back home while keeping the law.

13.3 – How do I stay healthy?

There are many ways to stay healthy. Exercise regularly. Eat and drink properly. Keep clean. Avoid things that can make you sick, such as being out in the rain. But at times, even when you try your best to remain healthy, you can fall sick. If you feel sick, tell your foster parents or your case worker. If it is not serious, they will give you some basic medicine and good advice to help you get better. You should listen and follow their instructions.

If you are very sick or taking a long time to recover, tell your foster parents or case worker. They will take you to the nearby clinic/hospital and a doctor will help you.



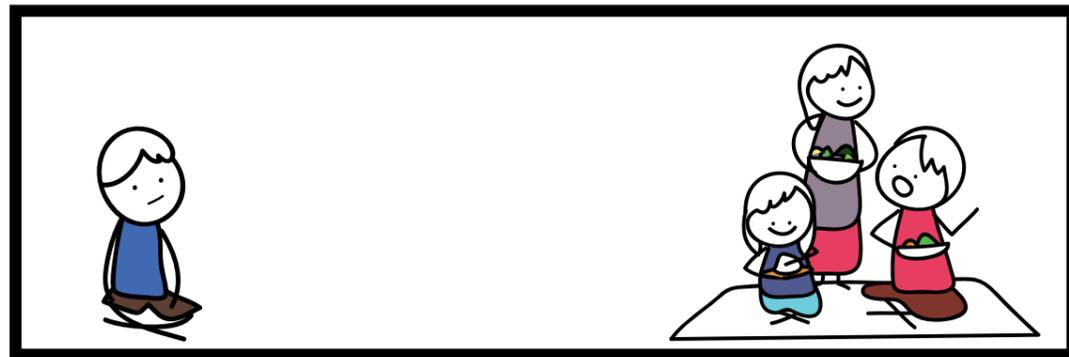
13.4 – How do I practice my culture, language, tradition and religion?

Your case worker will try his or her best to choose foster parents of the same culture, language, tradition and religion. So you should not have any problems practising them. Even if your foster family is from a different culture, language, tradition and religious practice, they will respect you and allow you to practise your own culture, language, tradition and religion. However, some cultural and traditional practices may not be suitable for your age, or they may be against the law, such as child marriages. In these cases, you will not be allowed to practise them as they are not good for you.

13.5 – Can I get married?

We know this may be a common practice in your community and even your parents in Myanmar may tell you that you must get married. But as a young child below 18 - you are not allowed to marry under the law. Also if you are below 16, anyone who tries to marry you is also doing a wrong thing by the law. This is to protect you and to make sure no one makes you do things you are not ready to do. Marriage comes with a lot of responsibilities which you will not be ready for. As a child, your body is also not ready to have a baby. In this programme, we want to have a safe place for you to grow as a person and enjoy your childhood without taking on adult responsibilities.

13.6 – What should I do if I am harmed?



Issues related to mistreatment or harm are treated very seriously. If anyone treats you badly or hurts you, it is very serious. This happens when you are attacked - physically, emotionally or sexually. People should not touch you in the wrong way; they should not take away your food to punish you; they should not lock you out of the home, or shout at you. Other bad things include forcing, bribing, or bothering you to do something that you feel is wrong – like asking you for sex, making you get married when you are still a child, or demanding that you work for them or another person.

A person may attack you to punish you for a mistake. Or they may attack you for no reason at all. Either way this is wrong. No one, including your foster parents, your case worker or anyone else has the right to treat you badly and/or cause you harm. If this happens, you have the right to make a complaint. And you don't have to be actually hurt to make a complaint. As long as you feel threatened or feel that you are in danger, you should make a complaint against the person who frightens you. All complaints will be looked into and urgent steps will be taken to protect you from any more mistreatment or harm.

The following steps are to be taken whenever you feel that you are being badly treated or harmed –

Step 1 – Make a report

Tell your case worker whenever you feel that you are being mistreated or harmed. No incident of harm or danger is too small to be reported. Your case worker should be able to advise you what to do next. If your case worker is the one causing you trouble, report the matter to your foster parents. If no one is willing to listen to you, report it to the UNHCR. If that is also not possible, report it to the nearest police station. Make sure you speak clearly and honestly.

Some important phone numbers you can call are:
15999 (Talian Nur - National Helpline);
010-4211274 (ICMC from 9am-9pm; Myanmar only)
03-7956 3488 (WAO hotline)

You can also go to UNHCR offices from 8am-4pm to make a report to the OPI unit.

Step 2 – First responses

Once you have reported to your case worker or your foster parents, they know that they must immediately inform the foster care agency about the report. The agency will urgently meet to decide the next steps. You may need to give more information. If you are in danger, they will take you away from the home (if the one harming you is a foster parent or someone in the home) or prevent the person who is causing you harm to have any contact with you (if it is your case worker or any other person who is in contact with you). During this step, the foster care agency will assign a different case worker who will help you and be with you through the whole process. The new case worker will also inform you about the actions taken or to be taken in writing.

Step 3 – Take action

If a crime has taken place, the case worker will help you make a police report against the person who harmed you. The local authorities will take charge of the investigation and the prosecution of the person. Your case worker will help you if the authorities need your cooperation. If what was done to you is not criminal but is still not right, the person may still be punished by the foster care agency.

Step 4 – Stabilize situation

If your complaint is against a foster parent or case worker, you may be sent to a new foster family or be assigned a new case worker. Steps will be taken to help you feel comfortable and rebuild trust in the new home or with the new case worker.

Step 5 – Provide care

If you have experienced physical or sexual harm, the case worker may take you to see a doctor to check your injuries and provide you treatment. Some bad treatment or harm is not just physical but also hurts you emotionally. You may feel upset or angry with yourself. You may even feel like hurting yourself because of what you have been through. Don't worry and most importantly, don't blame yourself. What happened is not your fault. You can speak to a counsellor about what you have been through. The counsellor will help you deal with the difficult emotions you are feeling.

Step 6 – Feedback

Your new case worker will ask for your feedback on how the agency handled your complaint. If you are unhappy with the way it was handled, please share this with your new case worker.

14. HOW LONG DO I NEED TO STAY WITH MY FOSTER FAMILY?

We believe it is best that you stay with your foster parents throughout your entire foster care period. There are four ways your foster care can end: when you reach 18 years of age; when you are resettled by UNHCR; when you are reunited with your own parents or siblings in Malaysia; or when you choose to go back home.

Before we place you with your foster parents, they have to agree that they will take care of you until you turn 18. But sometimes things can change, and your foster parents may not be able to continue providing care for you. If that happens, we will help you find a new home.

15. WHAT IF I DO NOT WANT TO STAY WITH MY FOSTER FAMILY ANY MORE?

It is good to talk to your case worker about why you do not want to stay with your foster parents anymore. Sometimes we can take care of the problem without you needing to move out from your foster parents' home. We will listen and carefully take note of your reasons for not wanting to stay with your foster parents. But we ask you to remain patient, talk to your case worker and think about some of the advice he or she gives you. If we think you are right in not wanting to stay with your foster parents, we will help you make the changes.

16. WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME ONCE I LEAVE FOSTER CARE?

Before you leave the foster care programme, there will be a clear plan to prepare you to live on your own as an adult. The plan looks into various areas such as: helping you develop skills that can be used for work; learning how to manage money; knowing how to look after yourself; connecting you with your community, and so on. This preparation begins as soon as you enter the foster care programme - it is part of your care plan goal to help get you ready for the future.

Unless there are special reasons for you to remain in foster care, once you turn 18, you will be moved into a 6-month programme to prepare you for the future. In this programme, your case worker will help you settle down to live in the community and show you how you can support yourself with your own money. To help you adjust to this new independent life, you will receive help with your meals and housing during this 6-month period.

We want you to keep in touch with your foster parents, even when you no longer live with them. The love and care formed during your time with them is very special, and you should contact them even after you are living on your own as an adult. The foster care agency will also sometimes organise get-together events so you can enjoy catching up with those who supported you when you were in the foster care programme.

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