

Before care

A report of children's views on entering care
by the Children's Rights Director for England



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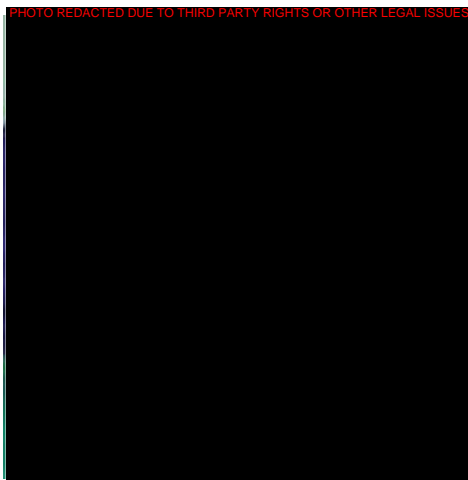


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Introduction

Roger Morgan, Children's Rights Director for England



As Children's Rights Director for England, the law gives me the duty to ask children and young people in care or getting any sort of help from social care services for their views about their rights, their welfare, and how they are looked after in England. My duties also cover children and young people living away from home in any type of boarding school, residential special school or further education college, as well as care leavers.

As well as asking children and 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 in care, getting children's social care support or living away from home. With my team, I do this both for individual young people and for whole groups of young people.

This report sets out what children and young people in care told us about first coming into care. We asked them what help they and their families had been given before they came into care, what it was like coming into care, and whether they agreed that they should have come into care. What they said is being sent to the Department for Education to help with their work on how care should develop in the future.

I am very grateful to all the Independent Reviewing Officers, from many different local councils, who helped us find out the children's views by giving children invitations to take part in the web survey for this report.

Our reports of children's views are all written so that they can be read easily by everyone – including children, professionals and government ministers. You can find and download copies of all our children's views reports on our children's website: www.rights4me.org.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roger Morgan'.

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How we asked for views

We invited children to tell us their experiences and views through a web survey for children who had recently come into care, using our children's rights website www.rights4me.org. We wrote to all the children's services departments in councils in England asking if they would take part in the survey. We then asked Independent Reviewing Officers in 53 different local authorities to give our invitations to children at their first reviews after coming into care. In the end, 50 children from 24 different local authorities filled in our web survey. This report gives the views and experiences of those 50 children. As always, we have written only what the children and young people themselves told us, without adding any comments, views or ideas of our own, and whether or not we agreed or disagreed with what the children said.

We need to be careful not to say that what these 50 children said goes for all children in care. But these 50 children were each filling in the survey independently of each other, so were not sharing their views before sending them to us, and no one person or organisation had chosen which 50 children were to be invited to take part. Because this report is about the views of fewer than 100 children, we have not given percentages anywhere in the report.

To make sure that the web survey was only filled in by children we had invited to fill it in, we gave children a log-in code and a password, written on their invitation to take part.

The children who took part

Out of the 50 children who took part in the survey for this report, 27 were boys and 23 were girls. The youngest was six, and the oldest was 16. Just over half were aged 14 or more. Two said they had a disability: one said they had ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), the other said that they had learning difficulties with speech and language problems. When we asked, none said they were asylum seekers. When we asked about their ethnic background, 43 said they were white, four said they had a mixed background, and two said they were black (one didn't answer this question).

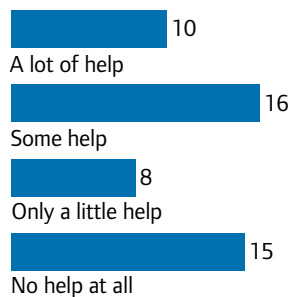
Thirty-seven told us they were living in foster homes, eight said they were living in children's homes, four said they were in care but living with members of their own family, and one told us they were boarding at a residential special school.

Help for children before coming into care

In the survey for this report, we asked the 50 children what sort of help they and their families had from social care services before they had come into care, or to try to stop them from having to come into care.

Here are the answers, from all but one of the children, about how much help they considered they had got for themselves from social care services before they had come into care.

Figure 1: Number of responses to the question 'Before you came into care, how much help did you get for yourself from social care services?'



Based on 49 responses.

Over half the children considered that they had either a lot of help, or some help, from social care services before they came into care. Just under one in three thought they had not had any help for themselves at all.

We asked children to tell us exactly what sort of help they had been given before they came into care. A few told us about help to prepare them before they actually came into care: 'They told me why I was coming into care and what the reason was and how it would help me in the future.' Another wrote that the help had been 'finding me a suitable foster home'. There was no one main sort of help the children told us about. Here are examples of how they told us they, or their families, had been helped by social care services.

'They took me out and talked to me about how things were going'

'Tried to rebuild the family back up but didn't work so went into care'

'I got help on my behaviour'

'How to control my feelings'

'Told my family what they needed to do to tidy house and look after us. No help for me, more for my mum'

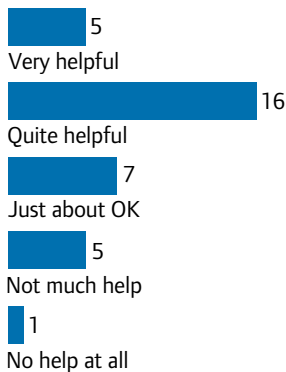
'A lady came most weeks to help my mum in the house. I went on some trips in the summer holidays. My younger brother and sister already had time with the carer'

'They just talked to me'

'Advice'

Figure 2 shows how helpful the children who had got at least a little help thought it had actually been.

Figure 2: Number of responses to the question ‘If you got help for yourself from social care services before you came into care, how helpful did you find it?’



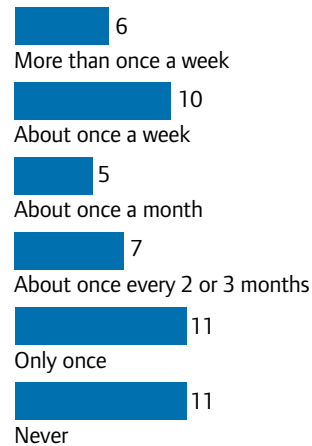
Based on 34 responses.

Most of the children who told us about help they had received thought it had been either quite helpful or very helpful. Only one thought it had been no help at all.

Because a social worker is a key person in helping or supporting children, and trying to stop them from needing to come into care, we asked children how often they had met with a social worker before they came into care. All 50 children in the survey answered this, and Figure 3 shows their answers.

Tried to rebuild the family back up but didn't work so went into care

Figure 3: Number of responses to the question ‘How often did you meet a social worker before you came into care?’

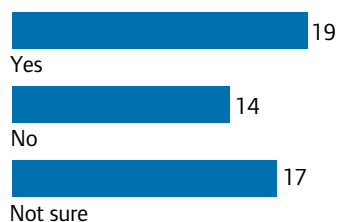


Based on 50 responses.

There seems to be a very clear division here between children who had a lot of contact with a social worker, and those who had very little. **Sixteen children said they met with a social worker once a week or more often before coming into care, but 11 said they only met a social worker once and another 11 that they had never met one at all before they came into care.** Much the same number (12) had met a social worker occasionally, once a month or once every two or three months.

As well as actually meeting a social worker, children have often told us in the past that knowing how to get in touch with one is an important part of getting help and support. We asked the children whether they had been told how to get in touch with a social worker before they came into care. All 50 answered this question, and their answers are set out in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Number of responses to the question 'Were you told how to get in touch with a social worker before you came into care?'

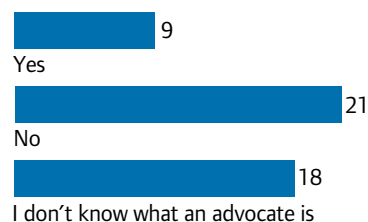


Based on 50 responses.

Fewer than half (19 out of the 50 children) said they had been told how they could contact a social worker themselves before coming into care. More than one in four told us they had not been told how they could contact a social worker. One in three children were simply not sure whether or not they had been told how to contact one at the time.

Another key person children also told us about in the past is an advocate – someone to speak on behalf of the child and to put their views across. Figure 5 shows what children told us when we asked if they had an advocate to speak for them when they came into care.

Figure 5: Number of responses to the question 'Did you have an advocate to speak for you when you came into care?'



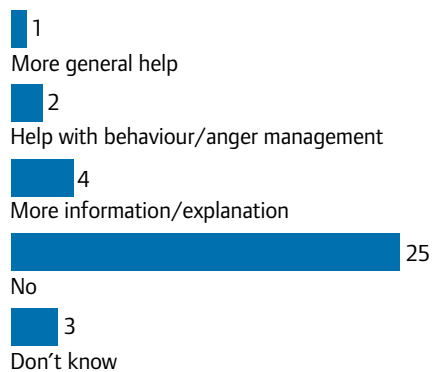
Based on 48 responses.

Out of the 48 children who answered this question, only nine said they had an advocate to speak for them when they came into care. This is about one in five of those children. Some may of course have had other people supporting them in the way an advocate could have done. As many as **18 told us they didn't know what an advocate is, even after they had come into care.**

Finally in this section, we asked children whether there was any sort of help they had needed before coming into care, but which they didn't get. Thirty-five of the 50 children answered this question, and their responses are set out in Figure 6.

No help for me,
more for my mum

Figure 6: Number of responses to the question ‘Is there any sort of help you needed before coming into care, but didn’t get?’



Based on 35 responses.

From their answers, it is clear that **not many children thought they had needed more help than they got before coming into care**. Twenty-five said no, there wasn't any sort of help they had needed, and only seven said there was. Of those seven, the most usual need was for more information or explanation about what was happening: ‘someone to tell me what was going wrong’. One child said they had ‘nothing explained properly’, another that they would have liked ‘someone to talk to in private’. One told us that they couldn't say what help they needed, because they simply didn't know anything about what it would be like to come into care: ‘I didn't have a clue as I've never been in someone else's house like this before.’ The only other sort of help mentioned by any of the children was help with their own behaviour or anger management. There was no strong demand from these children for extra sorts of help for themselves before coming into care.

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Help for families before children came into care

Social workers usually try to work with families in order to stop children having to come into care if that is the best thing to do for the child. When telling us about the sorts of help they had been given for themselves before coming into care, some children had also given us examples of help being given to their families. As well as asking the 50 children about any help or meetings with social workers they had for themselves before they came into care, we also asked them how much help they thought their families had been given.

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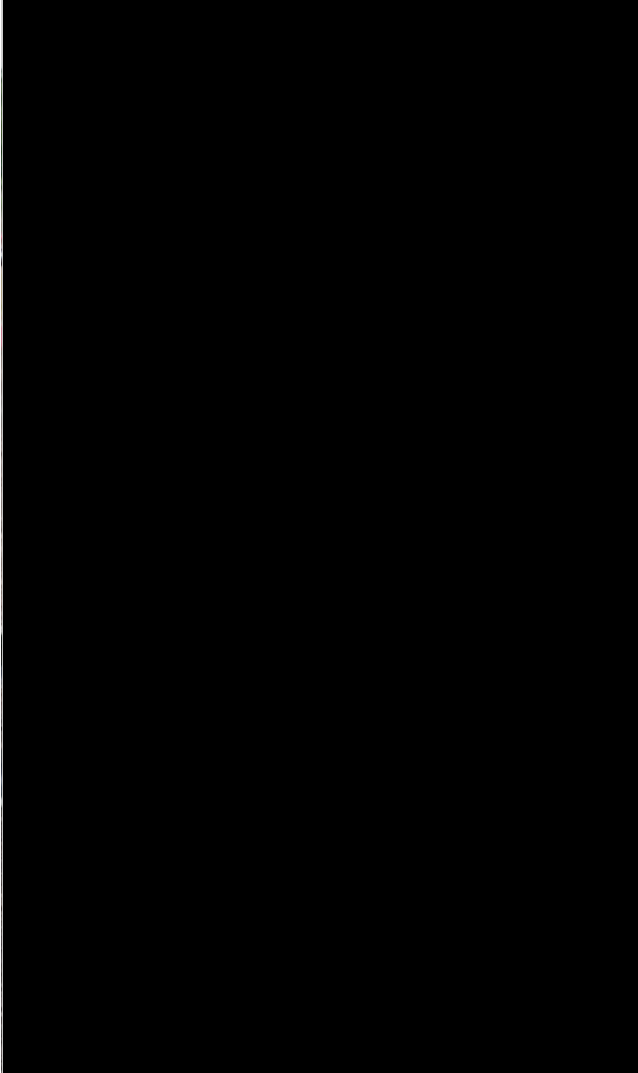
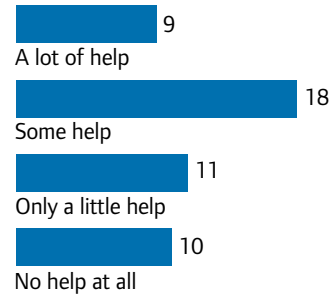


Figure 7: Number of responses to the question 'How much help do you think your family got from social care services before it was decided you would be coming into care?'



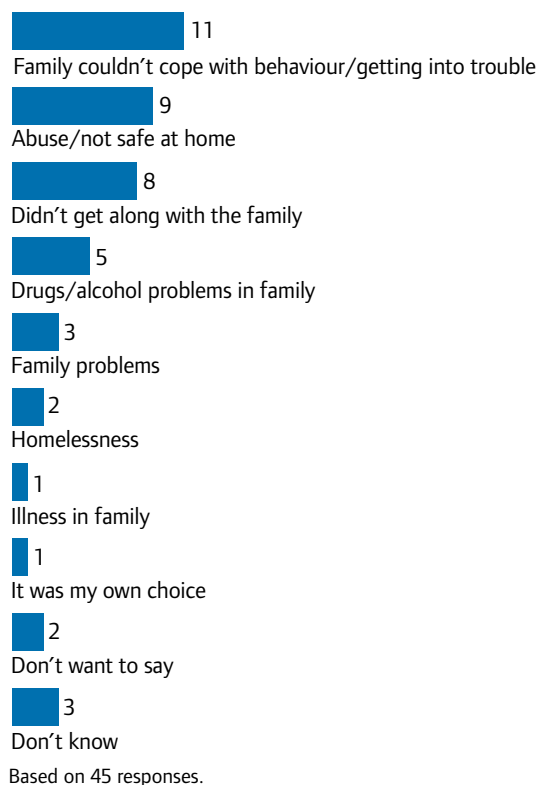
Based on 48 responses.

Over half the children who answered this question told us they thought their families had received some or a lot of help before it was decided that the child would come into care. In all, 27 of the 48 children said this. Another 11 said that their families had only received a little help. Ten, which is **just over one in five**, said they didn't think their families had been given any help at all.

Why children came into care

Figure 8 sets out the reasons the children gave us for why they had recently come into care. We have grouped the reasons the children wrote to give the figures below, but we did not give the children any suggestions to choose from. They simply wrote why they thought they had come into care.

Figure 8: Reasons children gave for coming into care



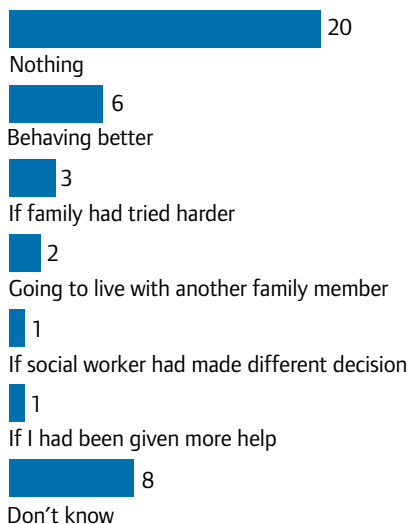
The top three reasons given by the children for coming into care were their own behaviour (they were getting into trouble, or their families were not able to cope with their behaviour), followed by the need to protect the child from abuse or other risks at home, and then problem relationships between children and their families.

Some of the reasons given by children for coming into care, in their exact words, were: 'because I was getting punched and stuff like that'; 'because my mum couldn't look after me'; 'because my mum hit me and then I started truanting school and just did my own thing'; 'because we had a family breakdown due to my behaviour caused by alcohol and drugs'; 'I hit my dad and was getting into trouble'; 'my temper and not getting on with my dad's girlfriend'.

Not looked after properly, mum dead, dad had drink problems

Alongside asking why children believed they had come into care, we also wanted to know whether they thought there was anything that might have kept them from having to come into care. This was especially important to know since so few had told us that they thought they had needed more help for themselves before coming into care. Again, the children gave their own answers without us suggesting any answers for them.

Figure 9: Number of responses to the question ‘What might have kept you out of care?’



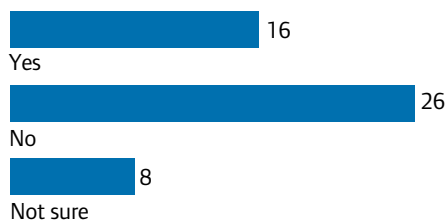
Based on 41 responses.

As the figure shows, **very few children thought that extra help would have been able to keep them out of care.** Only one child said that they might not have had to come into care if there had been more help beforehand. Around two thirds of those who answered this question either said that they could think of nothing that would have worked to keep them out of care, or said that they didn't know whether there was anything that would have done this. Nine thought they might not have had to come into care if people had tried harder; six of these thought they wouldn't have needed to come into care if they had behaved better, and three thought that they might have stayed out of care if their families had tried harder. Some children wrote to us about things either they, or their parents, could have done to keep them from needing to leave and go into care: 'not getting so angry with my family and trying to control my temper'; 'staying in school and abide by the curfews and rules my mum gave me'; 'if my mum didn't let her ex boyfriend into the house'; 'being good and my mum should have tried harder'. One person thought that help for their parents' problems would have kept them out of care themselves: 'if someone had made my mum and dad stop using drugs'.

Do children agree with coming into care?

Children are not usually asked independently whether or not they think they should have been taken into care. We asked the 50 children two key questions: first, whether at the time they came into care they had wanted to come into care, and second, whether or not by the time of their first in care review they thought coming into care had been the right thing for them. All 50 children answered both these questions, so we can directly compare their answers.

Figure 10: Number of responses to the question 'At the time, did you want to come into care?'



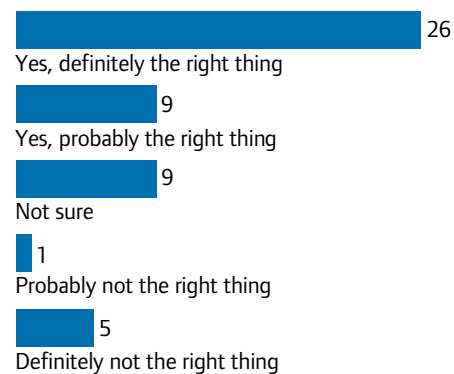
Based on 50 responses.

As this figure shows, **just over half (26) of the children did not want to come into care** at the time they actually came into care. Eight were not sure – but 16, **almost one in three, said that they had wanted to come into care** when they did.

Their answers to the second question, given in Figure 11, show us that by the time of their first care review, when they were invited to complete our web survey, just over half (26) now thought that whatever they had wanted at the time, coming into care had definitely been the right thing for them. Another nine thought it had probably been the right thing, so **by the time their first review came around, seven out of 10 of these children thought coming into care had either probably or definitely been the right thing for them.**

At the time of their first in care review, only six children (around one in eight) told us that they thought coming into care was probably or definitely not the right thing for them. Just as eight children had not been sure whether or not they had really wanted to come into care, much the same number (nine this time) said at the time of their first review that they were not sure whether coming into care had or had not been the right decision.

Figure 11: Number of responses to the question 'Do you think NOW that coming into care was the right thing for you?'

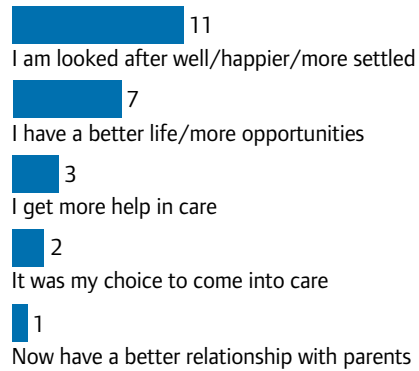


Based on 50 responses.

We asked the children who thought that coming into care had been right for them to tell us why they thought it had been the right decision. Twenty-four wrote down their reasons, and these are set out in Figure 12.

Being in care has given me a life

Figure 12: Reasons given by children for saying coming into care was the right thing



Based on 24 responses.

From this, it is clear that for these children, the top reason for saying that coming into care had been the right thing for them was that it meant they were looked after better than before. For many, this meant they felt safer, happier and more settled than they had felt before: 'My mom is not capable of looking after children, she puts the needs and wants of others first'; 'my life has been a fair amount happier and quite a lot more settled since'; 'I am very well looked after by my foster carers. They make me go to school and help me with my homework. They take me on holiday. They have now let my sister move [in] with me so it's much better.'

The next most common reason was that being in care meant they had better chances and opportunities in their lives: 'starting to learn how to read, more opportunities, better life'.

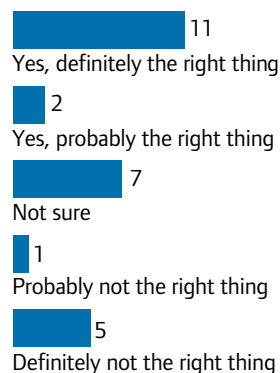
Just one child told us that coming into care had meant that they could now get on better with their parents than when they were living with them. Some children wrote that they thought coming into care was the right thing for them, but they were worried about how it would affect their family: 'I'm just not sure it was the right thing for people around me.'

We wanted to look more closely at whether children who had not wanted to come into care felt afterwards that it had after all been the right decision. All 26 children who had told us they had not wanted to come into care answered this question, together with two of those who said they had not been sure.

As Figure 13 shows, 11 out of the 26 children who had not wanted to come into care now thought that it had definitely been the right thing for them. Only five now told us that they had not wanted to come into care, and that now they were in care it had definitely not been the right thing for them. Seven were still unsure. In short, **the children who had not wanted to come into care were about twice as likely afterwards to think it was the right thing after all, as to think it was the wrong thing.**

I wanted to come into care but did not know that it would be for so long

Figure 13: Whether children who had not wanted to come into care now thought it was the right thing for them

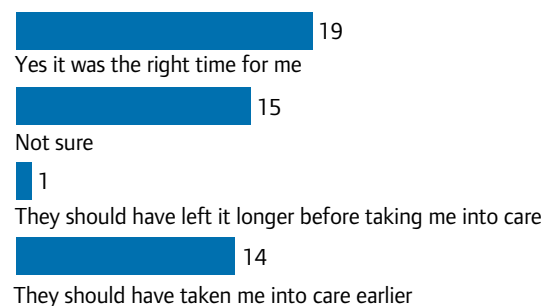


Based on 26 responses.

Where children thought coming into care had been the wrong thing for them, this was often either because they had wanted to stay with their family, or because they felt it had separated them from other members of their family such as brothers and sisters: ‘I want to live with my father’; ‘I think it was definitely not the right thing for me and my sisters because we are so sad we miss our mum and our family’; ‘because it broke our family apart, it’s not fair I hardly see my brothers’. We know from our other consultations that being separated from your brothers and sisters is one of the biggest worries about coming into care, and that 74% of children in care who have a brother or sister in care at the same time have been separated from at least one brother or sister (this figure comes from our *Children’s Care Monitor 2010*).

The last question we put to the children about the decision to come into care was about when in their lives this decision had been made. Whether children had come into care in an emergency, or whether social workers had been trying to avoid them having to come into care, it was important to know whether the children thought the decision to bring them into care had been made too early, made at just the right time, or left too late. All but one answered this question, and their answers are in Figure 14.

Figure 14: Number of responses to the question ‘Do you think you came into care at the right time for you?’



Based on 49 responses.

I have a place to call home instead of moving from sofa to sofa

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Nineteen children thought they had been taken into care at just the right time. Fifteen were not sure. Fifteen thought that they had not been taken into care at the right time – out of these, all but one thought they should have been taken into care earlier, and only one thought they had been taken into care too soon.

Out of the 19 children who thought they had been taken into care at the right time for them, eight had wanted to come into care and six had not wanted to come into care. Fifteen of the 19 who thought they had been taken into care at the right time thought coming into care was definitely the right thing for them; the other four thought it was probably the right thing.

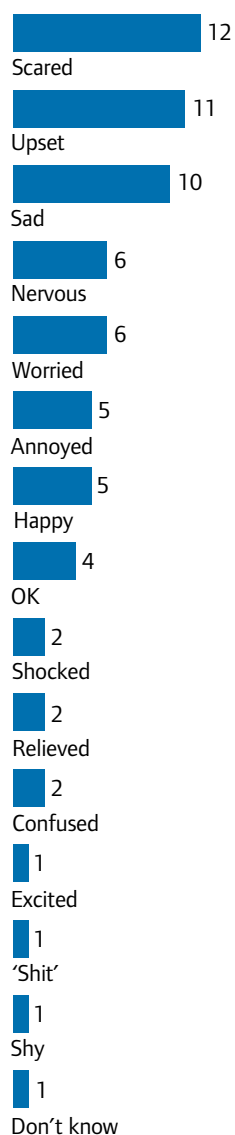
Out of the 14 children who thought they should have been taken into care earlier, six had wanted to come into care, and another six had not wanted to come into care. Nine thought coming into care had been the right thing for them.

I have had a better life than I ever would have got at home with my family

The day children came into care

Coming into care is a major change in a child's life, and we asked our 50 children how they had felt on the day they came into care. Forty-seven answered this question, and Figure 15 summarises their answers. We did not suggest answers for the children to choose from, so these are the words they themselves wrote back to us. We did not limit the number of answers that each child could give.

Figure 15: Number of responses to the question 'How did you feel on the day you came into care?'



Based on 47 responses. Children could give more than one answer.

Three words sum up the most common feelings on the day children came into care: scared, upset and sad. Out of the 15 different answers we had, 10 described negative or bad feelings and four described positive or good ones – feeling happy, OK, relieved or excited.

A few children wrote about being taken by people they didn't know, to live with people they didn't know: 'meeting the carers before would have helped'; 'not to just dump me in a placement, pass over my bags and some forms and leave me with strangers !!'; 'someone I knew could have been allowed to come rather than escorts picking me up in the night, driving me out of London to someone's house I knew nothing about'. A few more wrote to us about how hard it was to be separated from members of their family, and had wanted 'me and my sister being kept together', and time 'to properly say bye to my dad and brothers'.

The quotations below describe how children felt on the first day in care, in their own words.

'I felt excited but nervous and I was thinking how my Nan was going to cope with everything that I used to do for her like her tablets and the cooking and taking her shopping. I also felt nervous because of meeting all of the family and other friends'

'A bit shocked but knowing that I would like it there'

'Scared and nervous because I didn't know what the family was going to be like and what to expect'

'I was very angry and let down at my mum but I was scared and worried, I did not know what to expect'

'Scared, frightened, upset, unhappy'

'Very upset, confused, scared, wanted to go home!'

'I felt really sad and angry with myself'

'Sad and then nervous and then you get over all that and it is like you are part of the family'

'Upset and OK'

'Very upset and crying because my sister could not live with me because there was no room. My mum was shouting at everyone and did not want us to go'

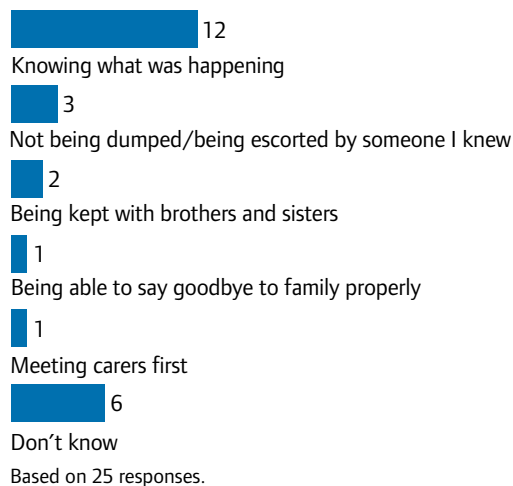
'Happy to begin with then I was sad when I arrived at my carers'

'Mixed emotions, weird, a bit scared, worried about what sort of home I was going to'

'Scared, alone, slightly shocked, relieved, happy to be away, worried'

Figure 16 gives the children's answers to a question on whether anything could have been done to make the day they came into care easier for them. One answer stands out from all the others – **coming into care would have been easier if the child had known better what was happening to them.** In the children's own words, 'Someone could have talked to me and told me what was happening'; 'what was going to happen, when, where, how long'; 'they could have told me who I was going with and where'.

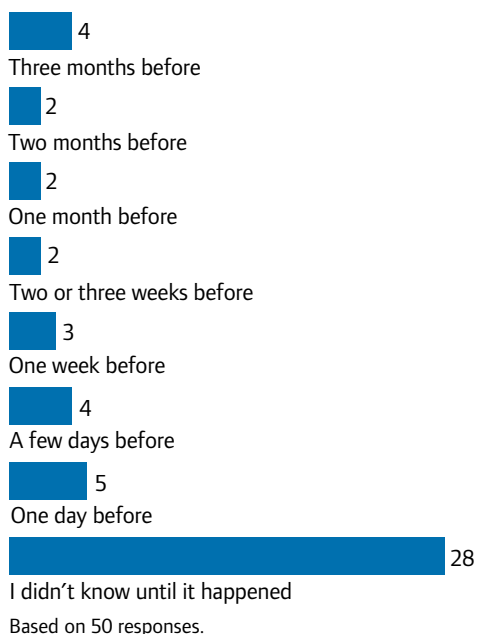
Figure 16: Number of responses to the question 'Is there anything that would have made your first day in care easier?'



Part of knowing what is happening is knowing what is going to happen in good time. This is also important because the law says that before making important decisions about children they are going to be looking after, they should ask what the child's wishes and feelings are and take those fully into account. We asked the 50 children how long they had known they were going to be coming into care before it happened. Figure 17 gives their answers.

Meeting the carers before would have helped

Figure 17: Number of responses to the question ‘How long had you known you were going to come into care?’



More than half the children (28 children) had not known they were coming into care until it actually happened to them. Eighteen of these children told us they had come into care in an emergency.

Fourteen children said they had not come into care as an emergency, and 10 didn't know whether it had been an emergency or not. Altogether, only **13 out of the 50 children had known they were coming into care a week or more before it happened.**

Someone could have explained things so I could understand what was happening

In other consultations, children have told us that the choice of where a child is to be placed to live is a highly important decision, and that they want to have some choice over where, and with whom, they are to live. They have also told us that being sent to live with strangers is very difficult and makes a child feel unsafe, so it is important that a child visits a new placement before they move in and has the chance to meet and begin to get to know the people they will be living with.

We asked our 50 children whether they had been given a choice of placement when they had come into care, and whether they had been able to visit the place they were going to live before actually moving in. Figure 18 gives the answers to the first of these questions.

Figure 18: Number of responses to the question ‘When you came into care, did you get a choice of where you were going to live?’



The great majority of the children (37 out of the 48 who answered) told us they had not had any choice of where they were going to be placed when they came into care. Only eight said there had been a choice.

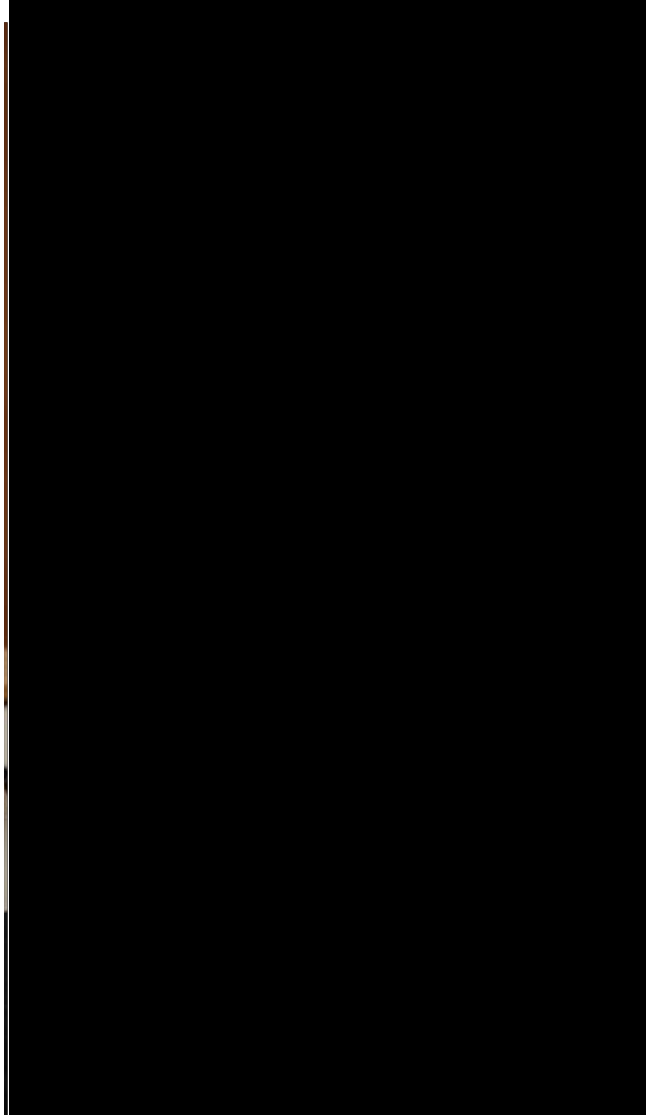
All 50 children answered our question about whether or not they had been able to visit their first placement before moving in. Here are their answers.

Figure 19: Number of responses to the question 'When you came into care were you able to visit the place you were going to live before you moved there?'



Two thirds (33 out of 50) told us they had not been able to visit their first placement in care before actually moving in. A quarter (13) said they had been able to visit the placement before moving in.

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I liked coming on a visit with my social worker before I came to sleep at my foster carers

The first weeks in care

Our group of 50 children told us what the good, and the bad, things had been for them in their first weeks in care. Again, we did not suggest any answers for them, so these are entirely their own answers.

Here is the list of what children told us were the good things about their first few weeks in care.

Figure 20: Number of responses to the question 'What were the good things about your first few weeks in care?'

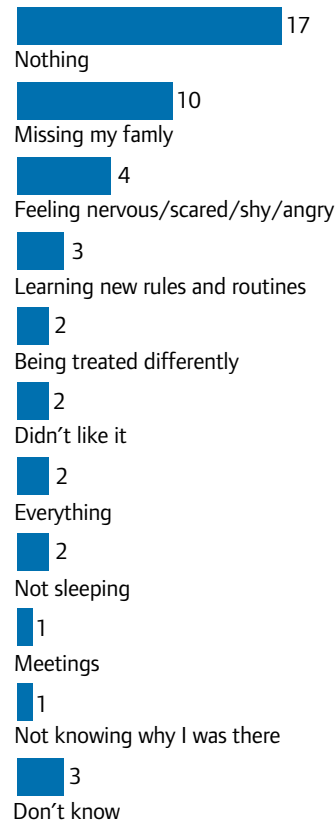


Based on 45 responses. Children could give more than one answer.

The two top good things in the first few weeks in care were having friendly carers and having fun activities to do.

Next is the list of what children told us were the bad things about their first few weeks in care.

Figure 21: Number of responses to the question 'What were the bad things about your first few weeks in care?'



Based on 46 responses. Children could give more than one answer.

Everyone being friendly and helpful helped me to school, make new friends and do activities

The **top two bad things in the first weeks in care were missing family, and the negative feelings children had about coming into care**, such as being nervous, scared, shy or angry about what had happened.

It is interesting to note that, without us suggesting any answers, as many as 17 children told us there was nothing bad at all about their first few weeks in care, compared to only four children who said there was nothing good about those weeks. Two children said 'everything' was bad, and one said 'everything' was good.

Here, in their own words, are some examples of the good things children told us about their first weeks in care.

'Everyone being friendly and helpful helped me go to school, make new friends and do activities'

'Getting to know my foster parents and spending time with them was brilliant'

'Got support, looked after well, better life'

'Help in going to see my family'

'I felt welcome'

'I got to sleep and didn't have to be on edge and got my room here done'

'I know some of the people I live with and because I knew them it made it feel easier to make it feel like home'

'I was happy because I was where I wanted to be'

'Just having a stable house to live in'

'My Foster Carer being nice to me'

'People were nice to me, got a new school uniform, went to the beach for the first time, even though it was cold'

'There was routine, I felt included, everyone was nice and the house was amazing'.

I knew the people before
I got put in their care

Here, again in their own words, are some examples of the bad things children told us about their first weeks in care.

'Meetings'

'I could not sleep every night'

'Not seeing my family, not being told where my sister was'

'Being scared and missing my family and getting used to their rules'

'Not knowing what they was going to think about me and would I get along with them. I did not want them 2 judge me'

'Being treated differently'

'Not understanding the reason why I was in care'

'Didn't talk because was too shy'

'Well lots of people at school were asking me are you not at home, I'm really worried about you, and well I missed my family a lot'

'Everything was strange and new, there were new routines and rules and everything changed'

'Getting back into the swing of things at school and living in a home with rules and boundaries'

'Living in a children's home that was scruffy with older kids in'

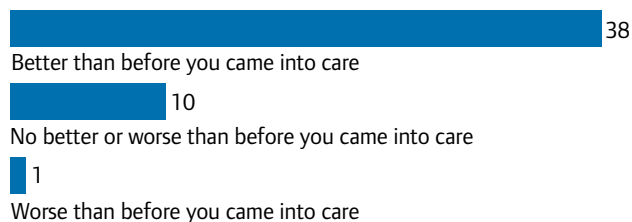
There was no good weeks,
I was in a mood

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Lastly in this section, we asked children how they thought their lives were generally now they were in care, by the time their first in care review had taken place. Forty-nine children answered, and here is what they told us.

Overall, three quarters of the children (38 out of the 49 who answered the question) said that their lives generally were now better than before they came into care. Of the others, 10 said their lives were neither better nor worse; **only one child said that their life had got worse** since they had come into care.

Figure 22: Number of responses to the question 'Now you are in care, how is your life generally?'



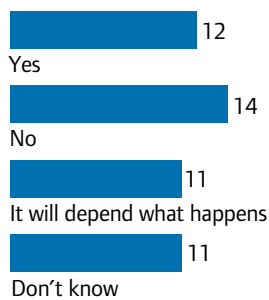
Based on 49 responses.

Plans for leaving care

The final set of questions in our survey was to find out what the children thought about leaving care again in the future. As they had only recently come into care, and were being asked these questions at their first in care review, we were finding out what they knew at the start of their time in care about how it might end in the future.

The first question was to find out what children’s care plans, at the start of their time in care, said about going back home one day. We wanted to find out both what children knew about this from their care plans, and whether children thought their care plans answered this major question. The answers, from 48 children, are in Figure 23.

Figure 23: Number of responses to the question ‘Does your plan say you will be returning to your birth family one day?’



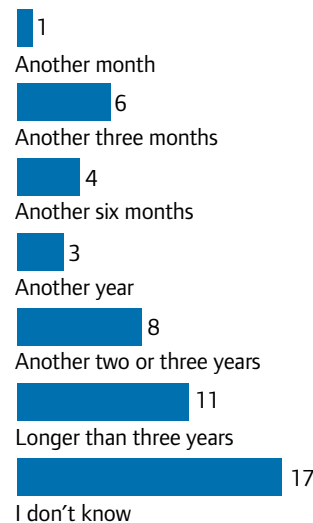
Based on 48 responses.

Thirty-seven out of the 48 children who answered us knew what their care plan said about going back home. That is, **just over three quarters of the children knew what their plan said about going back to their birth family, but just under a quarter did not know whether or not it was planned to return them to their birth family one day.** We do not know of course whether or not this was something that had been left out of their plan entirely, or whether it was there but the child did not know or had not been told about it.

Out of the 37 children who knew what their plans said about going home, there was a fairly even balance between the number whose plans said they would not be going home in future, that they would be going home in the future, or that whether they went home depended on something else happening first. Fourteen children said their plans said they would not be returning home, 12 that they would, and 11 that it depended on what happened.

Next we asked how long the children thought they would be in care. All 50 children answered this question, and their answers are set out in Figure 24.

Figure 24: Number of responses to the question ‘How long do you think you are going to be in care?’

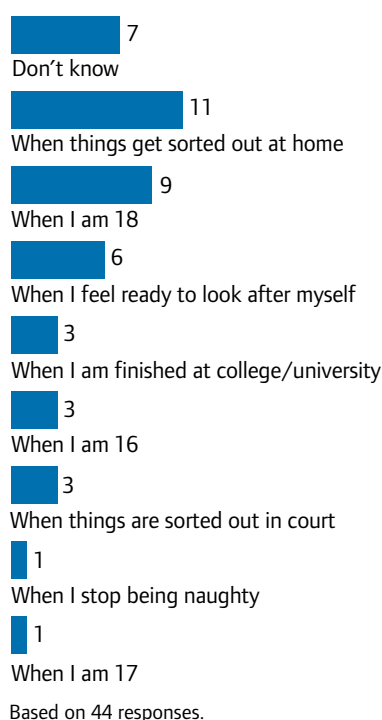


Based on 50 responses.

One in three children did not know when they would be leaving care. Of those who knew when they expected to leave care, most expected to spend over two years in care, one in three thought they would be in care for less than six months, and another one in three thought they would be in care for more than three years.

Our last question was about whether the children expected to leave care when a particular thing had happened or they reached a particular stage in their lives. Forty-four children answered this last question. We did not suggest any answers. The final figure in this report sets out what they told us.

Figure 25: Number of responses to the question ‘Will you probably leave care when a particular thing has happened?’



Many of the children who told us they would be leaving care when things were sorted out at home wrote about how they, or their parents, or both needed to improve things first: ‘when I sort my life out and so does my mum’; ‘when my dad gets better’; ‘when my mum gets a house’; ‘when I stop being naughty’; ‘when my dad gets some help from the doctor and I go back to school all the time’; ‘when my family is better and I want to go home and trust has come back’. One child thought they would leave care if their mother learned to care for them, but didn’t think this would ever happen: ‘when my mom can learn to look after children, but a pig is more likely to fly before that happens’.

Others wrote more about how they would leave care when they reached a particular age or stage of their lives: ‘when I am 17 and can live on my own’; ‘when I feel I can stand on my own two feet’; ‘when the time is right for me to go to university to achieve my goals in life’.

When the assessments of my mom have finished

Children's final messages to the government

At the end of the survey, we invited our 50 children to write any other messages they wanted us to pass on to the government for them about taking people into care. Here are some examples of those messages, as usual in the children's own words and without any suggestions from us.

'You should help before taking children into care'

'You are doing a good job keeping us kids safe'

'They should let families know that fostering is not the last resort for both families and young person. That fostering is there as an assistance to both families and the young person'

'That going into care is about helping your family sort themselves out'

'Tell them whereabouts they are going first'

'Only move children into care if it is best for them and most important only put us in places that are close enough for our families to see us often'

'Listen to what young people say. Don't just dump us anywhere'

'Keep brothers and sisters together, listen to us, tell us what is happening, give us nice places to move to'

'It is a horrible thing to do to people because it destroys people's life'

'I want to know when I'm going home'

'For everyone to have the same social worker instead of different ones all the time'

'Find places that can take both brothers and sisters together'

Being in care can be OK, even a good experience if you have the right placement and a good social worker. I think the care system's main priority should be making sure both those things are OK

The local authorities that took part in this survey

Here are the names of the 24 local authorities that took part in the survey for this report. I am grateful for their help.

Bath & North East Somerset

Bolton

Bracknell Forest

Bristol City

Cheshire

City of Bradford

City of York

Durham

Essex

Gloucestershire

Halton

Hampshire

Haringey

Kirklees

Knowsley

Milton Keynes

Portsmouth

Somerset

South Tyneside

Southwark

St Helen's

West Sussex

Wigan

Wiltshire

1. Listen to us
2. Tell us what is happening
3. Don't be quick to separate families
4. Try everything else first
5. Put us with our brothers and sisters if we have to move
6. Tell the public good stuff about children in care

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