

The Big Wide World

Thurrock Council Aftercare Team's Guide to independence

Health and well-being

It's important to look after your physical health, mental health and emotional wellbeing.

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Health assessments

Before your 18th birthday you will have been invited to attend a health assessment once a year. This will either be with your school nurse, GP or the named nurse for Looked After Children.

The health assessment usually takes about one hour, depending on your health needs. It covers both your physical and emotional health.

The doctor or nurse will talk to you about your health, how you are feeling, whether you have any problems and if there are things you are worried about. They can give you information on health services in your area and help you access any health service if you're having a problem.

Health passport

Your health passport includes information about your medical history and some facts about your health needs. It contains confidential information about your health, together with information on the NHS (who is who, and what you can expect) and some useful contact numbers and websites in case you need these in the future.

You can take it with you when you go to the doctor, dentist or anybody else you might see about your health.

Registering with a GP

You should make sure you're registered with a GP (General Practitioner) in the area where you live. By now, you should be in possession of your medical card. This will make it easier for you to register at another practice.

When you move home or to a different area, your Personal Adviser will help you to register with a GP, dentist and optician. You'll then be responsible for your own health – which means you must book your own health appointments, eat healthily, get plenty of exercise and enough sleep – but you can also ask your Personal Adviser for support.

Support you will get with my health after your 18th birthday

After the age of 18 you may be able to receive free prescriptions, glasses and dentistry if you are still in full time education or claiming benefits. To find out if you are eligible you will need to speak to the health provider or your Personal Adviser, who will be able to point you in the right direction.

If you have a long-term illness or disability that you need support with, your Social Worker and Personal Adviser will discuss it with you before you leave care. Your planned support will be written clearly in your Pathway Plan. The Transitions Team (Preparation for Adulthood) may also be involved.

Mental health and emotional wellbeing

At some point in our lives, adults can feel overwhelmed or sometimes just can't cope with daily tasks or situations. It's at times like these that we need to be able to talk to someone and not be afraid to ask for help.

We don't want people to tell our personal issues to others and feel judged. Yet most of us would want to help our friends and family if we thought they were having a hard time, so why would they feel any differently towards you?

People providing support will not judge you, they are there to support you.

If you do feel you are not being listened to, however, don't give up. You can seek alternative support from your Personal Adviser, GP (doctor), practice nurse, counsellor, helplines, a friend, a teacher or college tutor, or a family member.

It's your right to be listened to and supported.

Identity

The Aftercare Team supports your individuality, whatever makes you unique. We have young people of many different religions, sexualities and ethnic backgrounds, from other communities around the UK and other countries around the world.

We support contact with your family, where possible. This can be discussed within your Pathway Plan.

We support religious practices, attending places of worship and attending religious festivals or gatherings. We can help you identify communities from your family's cultural background.

If English is not your first language, we are able to support you by providing an interpreter, if you need one.

Official documents are needed in many different situations. The Aftercare Team can support you in applying for these documents. You will benefit from having a:

- National Insurance number
- birth certificate
- provisional driving licence
- passport or travel document
- biometric residence permit, if applicable
- Asylum Registration Card (ARC), if applicable

Gender and sexuality

Gender can be identified as more than just male and female, and there are many different sexual identities. 'LGBTQ+' stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or sometimes questioning), and others.

The Aftercare Team will support you around your gender and sexual identity and how to gain professional advice and support, if needed. This support can come from community groups, charities and national organisations.

Healthy relationships

Relationships can be great and full of fun, romance, excitement and intense feelings, but they can also have their difficulties, pain and frustration.

They can be difficult as a teenager as you're still growing with your personality still developing during your early adulthood.

It's important that you choose your friends carefully, who you share your life with and who get close to you.

A healthy relationship includes:

- trust
- honesty
- support
- being able to talk about things
- respect for yourself
- respect for others
- being able to be yourself
- fairness
- equality

Unhealthy relationships

You may not realise a relationship is unhealthy, but It is really important that you look after yourself and your own happiness.

If a relationship or friendship is making you feel bad or unhappy, it is important that you recognise this and feel able to change things. Relationships where someone is trying to control you, being disrespectful, or hurting you are not healthy.

An unhealthy relationship could include when someone:

- gets angry when you don't drop everything for them
- raises their hand when they are angry, like he or she is about to hit you or does hit you
- wants you to quit an activity or stop seeing a friend even though you want to
- criticises the way you dress or look
- stops you from seeing other friends or talking to others
- forces you to go further sexually than you want to, or do things you don't want to
- offers you money, alcohol, drugs, or gifts in return for sex
- asks you to have sex with other people

We can make excuses or misinterpret violence, possessiveness, or anger, as an expression of love or affection. If you believe the person who is hurting you loves you, it is not healthy.

No-one deserves to suffer domestic violence, or be forced into anything they don't want to do.

If a relationship develops where a person starts using verbal insults, nasty put-downs, hitting, or forces you into sexual activity, you must talk to a professional or someone who you trust and not suffer in silence.

Young people over the age of 18 can seek advice and support around issues of emotional wellbeing via their GP or with Thurrock Community Mental Health Team. Contact the team:

- phone 01375 402 276
- Grays Hall, Orsett Road, Grays, RM17 5TT

[Open Door](#) also provides support with emotional welfare issues.

Sexual health

Sexual health is about taking care of yourself in relation to sex. This might include protecting yourself from – and testing yourself for – sexually transmitted infections. It also includes contraception and questions you might have about your body.

In Thurrock you can get information, advice and support around sexual health issues from the following – all other local authorities will have similar:

NHS Genitourinary Medicine (GUM) service:

- phone 01268 592 214 or 01268 592 347
- Orsett Hospital, Rowley Road, Orsett, RM16 3EU

The NHS provides a range of sexual health and contraceptive services throughout the week. Young people can obtain emergency contraception at NHS clinics.

Young people in Thurrock have access to the C-Card Scheme. This provides free condoms and sexual health advice to those under 25 years-old.

For more advice, go to [Thurrock Sexual Health Service \(thurrocksexualhealthservice.org.uk\)](http://thurrocksexualhealthservice.org.uk).

Sex and the law

As a young person, you have rights and responsibilities when it comes to sex. The age at which it is legal to have sex is called the 'age of consent'. In the UK the age of consent is 16 years-old for everyone, whether they have sex with someone of the same or opposite sex.

Remember that if you have sex with someone under the age of 16, even with their consent, you could get into trouble with the law. The age of consent is designed to protect young people from harm rather than prosecute them, but when it comes to sex you need to act responsibly and make mature decisions.

Sexual violence

Sexual violence is the term used to describe any unwanted sexual attention including:

- child sexual abuse
- rape
- sexual assault
- harassment
- sexual exploitation

These are serious crimes that have a significant impact on the welfare of the victims. Possible effects of sexual violence include shock, fear, anger, confusion, powerlessness, being out of control, anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, nightmares, suicidal thoughts and isolation. This applies to young men as well as young women.

There are warning signs for possible sexual violence and abuse. Engaging in sexual activities in exchange for treats, gifts, attention, accommodation, money, drugs and alcohol is one of those warning signs. Being asked to keep unwanted sexual attention a secret is another warning sign to consider.

Young people in Thurrock can seek advice and support via Essex police and social services.

South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre (SERICC) is a dedicated local service helping victims of sexual violence:

- phone 01375 380 609
- The Church Hall, West Street, Grays, RM17 6LL

If you are not living in Thurrock you can contact your local NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) – go to [NSPCC: reporting abuse](#).

Child sexual exploitation

Child sexual exploitation is a type of sexual abuse in which children are sexually exploited for money, power or status.

Children or young people may be tricked into believing they're in a loving, consensual relationship. They might be invited to parties and given drugs and alcohol. They may also be groomed online.

Some children and young people are trafficked into, or within, the UK for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation can also happen to young people in gangs.

Child sexual exploitation is a crime.

The official definition created by the UK National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People (NWG) and is used in statutory guidance for England is:

"Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities.

Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the Internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources.

"Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability."

More information on can be found on [NSPCC](#) website. You can also seek further advice, support and intervention via the police and your allocated Social Worker or Personal Adviser, who can refer you to a specialist within Thurrock Council's social services.

Pregnancy

If you have had unprotected sex, or a condom has split during sex, there is a risk pregnancy will occur.

A young woman can become pregnant:

- the first time you have sex
- during her period
- if you forget your contraception pill
- if you are sick while on the pill or take antibiotics and doesn't use another form of contraception

Signs that you might be pregnant include:

- a missed period, or a period that is shorter or lighter than normal
- having to go for a wee a lot
- feeling sick or tired or both
- feeling bloated or having period-like cramps
- changes in mood
- changes in what someone like to eat

Taking a pregnancy test can put your mind at rest or confirm what you have been thinking. If your pregnancy test is positive, you need time to think, to make the right choice for you.

Some people know immediately what they want to do and some need time to think. It is really helpful to talk to someone – it could be a friend, someone in your family, your partner, or someone completely separate, like a social worker or carer.

More information on pregnancy can be found at [NHS: pregnancy](#).

Online safety

Online abuse is any type of abuse that happens on the web, whether through social networks, playing online games or using mobile phones. Young people may experience cyberbullying, grooming, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or emotional abuse.

Young people can be at risk of online abuse from people they know, as well as from strangers. Online abuse may be part of abuse that is taking place in the real world – for example, bullying or grooming – or it may be that the abuse only happens online, such as persuading young people to take part in sexual activity online.

Young people can feel like there is no escape from online abuse. Abusers can contact them at any time of the day or night, the abuse can come into safe places like their bedrooms, and images and videos can be stored and shared with other people.

You can get advice and support from the NSPCC:

- help@nspcc.org.uk
- 0808 800 5000 – helpline with trained counsellors, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Drugs and alcohol misuse

Some drugs come in pill or tablet form, which are usually swallowed, some come in a powder form which can be snorted, smoked or injected, and some are in an herb or resin form which is usually smoked.

Depending on the drug, the effects vary greatly but most give the user a 'high' or a 'low' feeling. It is this sensation, combined with the chemicals in the drug itself that can become highly addictive.

After someone misuses drugs there is often a very unpleasant after-effect, commonly known as a 'come-down', which can affect your physical and emotional well-being.

Drugs and alcohol dependency is often the symptom, or the cause, of other challenges, such as domestic abuse, homelessness, mental health conditions, difficult family and social relationships. Young people's vulnerabilities are often increased through substance misuse.

Open Road is a young people's substance misuse service. Their team of experienced workers specialises in supporting children and young people under the age of 18 – and their families – across the Thurrock area. They offer confidential advice, information and support to help young people cut down or stop using substances such as drugs, alcohol or so-called 'legal highs'.

Psychoactive substances (previously known as 'legal highs')

'Legal highs' are substances that produce similar effects to illegal drugs but that were not controlled by law under the Misuse of Drugs Act. A number of substances previously referred to as legal highs have now been banned under the Misuse of Drugs Act.

Remember, just because someone calls a drug a 'legal high' it doesn't mean it is safe. In fact, 'legal highs' often state on the packet they are "not for human consumption".

Some of these drugs mimic the effects of drugs such as cocaine and ecstasy. One of the biggest problems with 'legal highs' is that little research has gone in to their effects, especially their long-term effects. It's reasonable to assume, however, that if they produce similar effects to cocaine or ecstasy, they are also likely to carry similar risks, or new risks that we don't yet know about.

Alcohol

You are legally allowed to buy alcohol at the age of 18, but be mindful that it is still against the law to purchase drinks for anyone under this age if you are out with younger friends.

Prolonged use of alcohol and also binge use can have detrimental effects on your physical health and mental well-being.

Remember:

- if you are intending to drink alcohol, remember pace yourself, keep safe and drink water to keep hydrated
- never leave your drink unattended in bars and clubs as it could get spiked
- never accept drinks from strangers
- don't put yourself in risky situations if you have been drinking, such as swimming, climbing or going off with strangers
- do not drink and drive
- don't get in a car with someone you know may have been drinking or taking drugs
- drinking very large amounts in one session can lead to unconsciousness, alcohol poisoning, coma or even death – if it all goes wrong, it's essential to get emergency help

The main thing is to drink responsibly, make sure you are in a safe environment when drinking and with people you trust.

Where to get help or information

Drugs and alcohol

Under 18s can seek help through the **Open Road** young people's substance misuse service:

- www.openroad.org.uk/thurrock-young-person-drug-and-alcohol-service-ypdas

Over 18s can receive support via **The Forward Trust** adult substance misuse service:

- www.forwardtrust.org.uk/service/thurrock-drug-and-alcohol-service

Frank is a national agency offering non-judgmental advice, information and support about legal and illegal substances. Their service is confidential, and you'll get a reply from a trained expert:

- www.talktofrank.com
- 0300 123 6600 – free helpline, 24 hours a day
- 82111 – text your question

Don't forget you can also talk to your carer, Social Worker or Personal Adviser.

Gender and sexuality

Stonewall lets all lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people, here and abroad, know they're not alone, so communities can continue to find ways to flourish, and individuals can reach their full potential. They support those who can't yet be themselves:

- 0300 330 0630 – 10am to 10pm
- info@stonewall.org.uk

MindOut is a mental health service run by and for lesbians, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer people. They work to improve the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTQ communities and to make mental health a community concern:

- mindout.org.uk
- 01273 234 839
- info@mindout.org.uk

Mental health

Inclusion Thurrock offers a simple gateway for adults in Thurrock to access talking therapies for common mental health difficulties, including depression and anxiety disorders such as obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and social phobia:

- inclusionthurrock.org
- 01375 898 680

Sexual health

Brook provides free, confidential sexual health services in Thurrock. This includes access to contraception, sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing, and emergency contraception:

- www.brook.org.uk/thurrock

Refugees

Children's Refugee Council supports unaccompanied asylum-seeking children:

- refugeecouncil.org.uk
- 0207 346 1134
- children@refugeecouncil.org.uk

Special education needs and disabilities – our local offer

Families of children and young people with special education needs and disabilities can get the information they need in one place. The Ask Thurrock website is maintained by Thurrock Council, listing organisations and support services. There is also a phone line for support:

- www.askthurrock.org.uk
- 01375 652 801