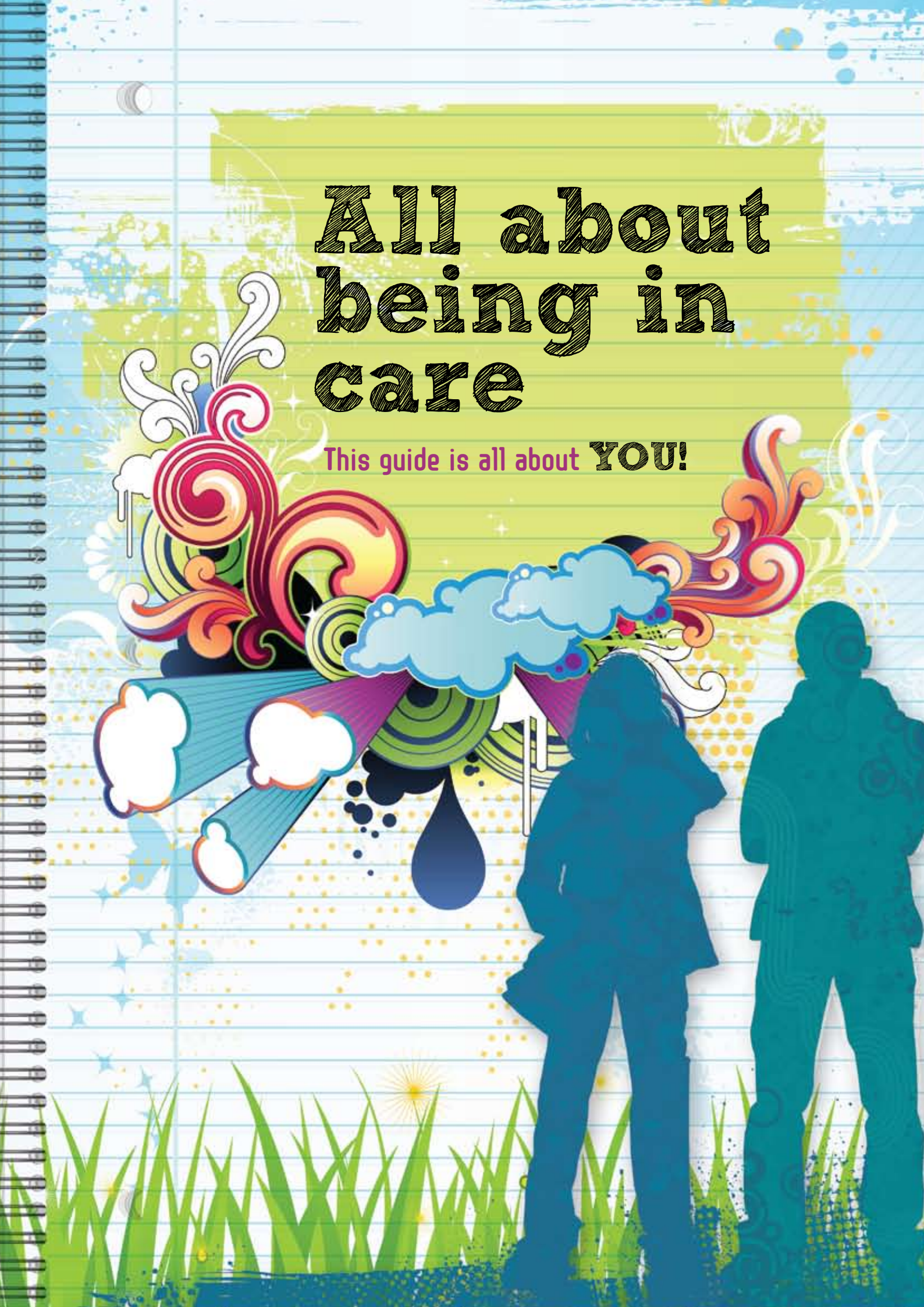



All about being in care

This guide is all about **YOU!**





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This guide is all about **YOU**;
it can help **YOU** understand:



why you are in care



what a care plan is



how to get a say in what
happens to you



who to talk to about how
you're feeling



who to ask when you have
questions or concerns.



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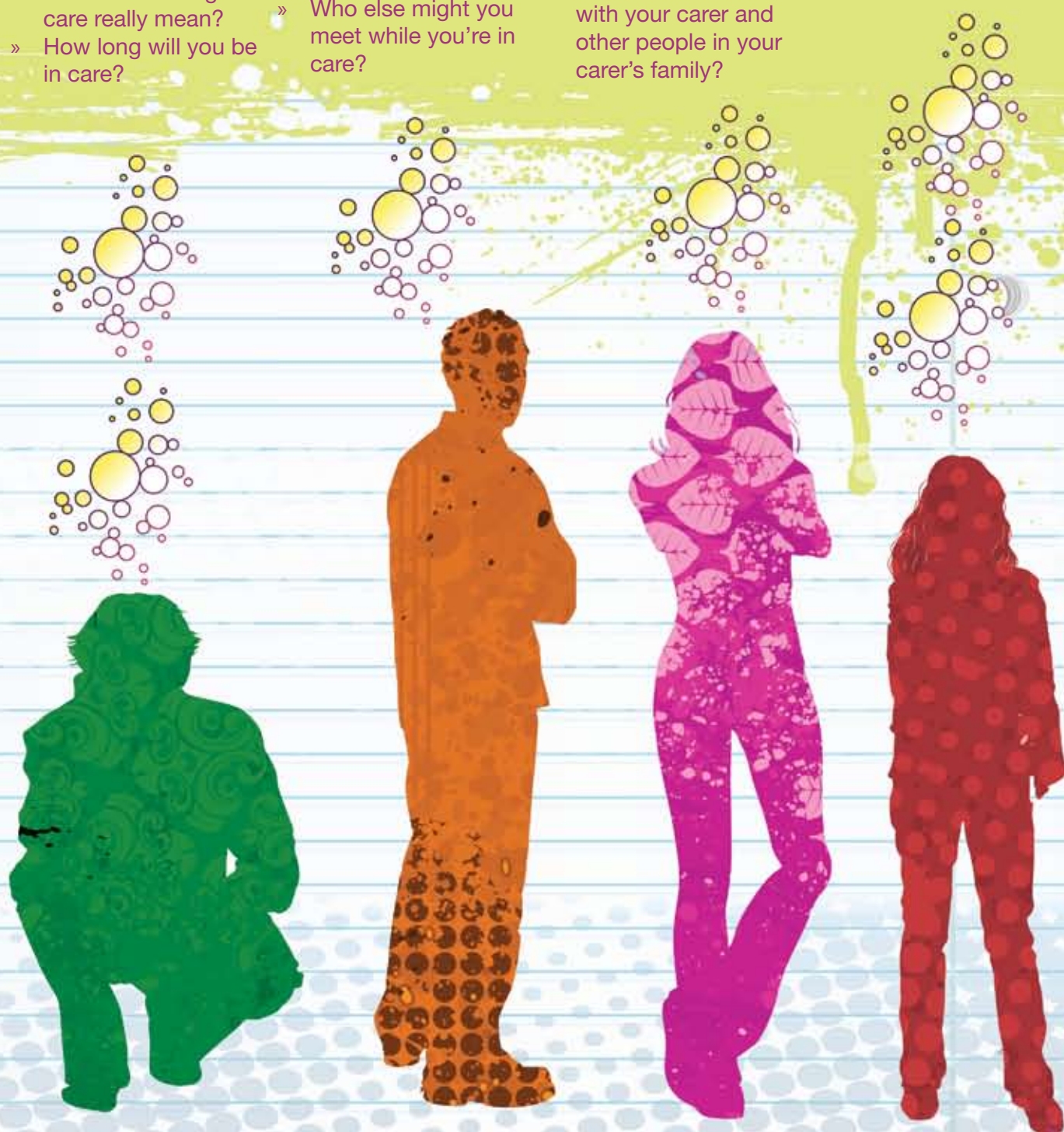
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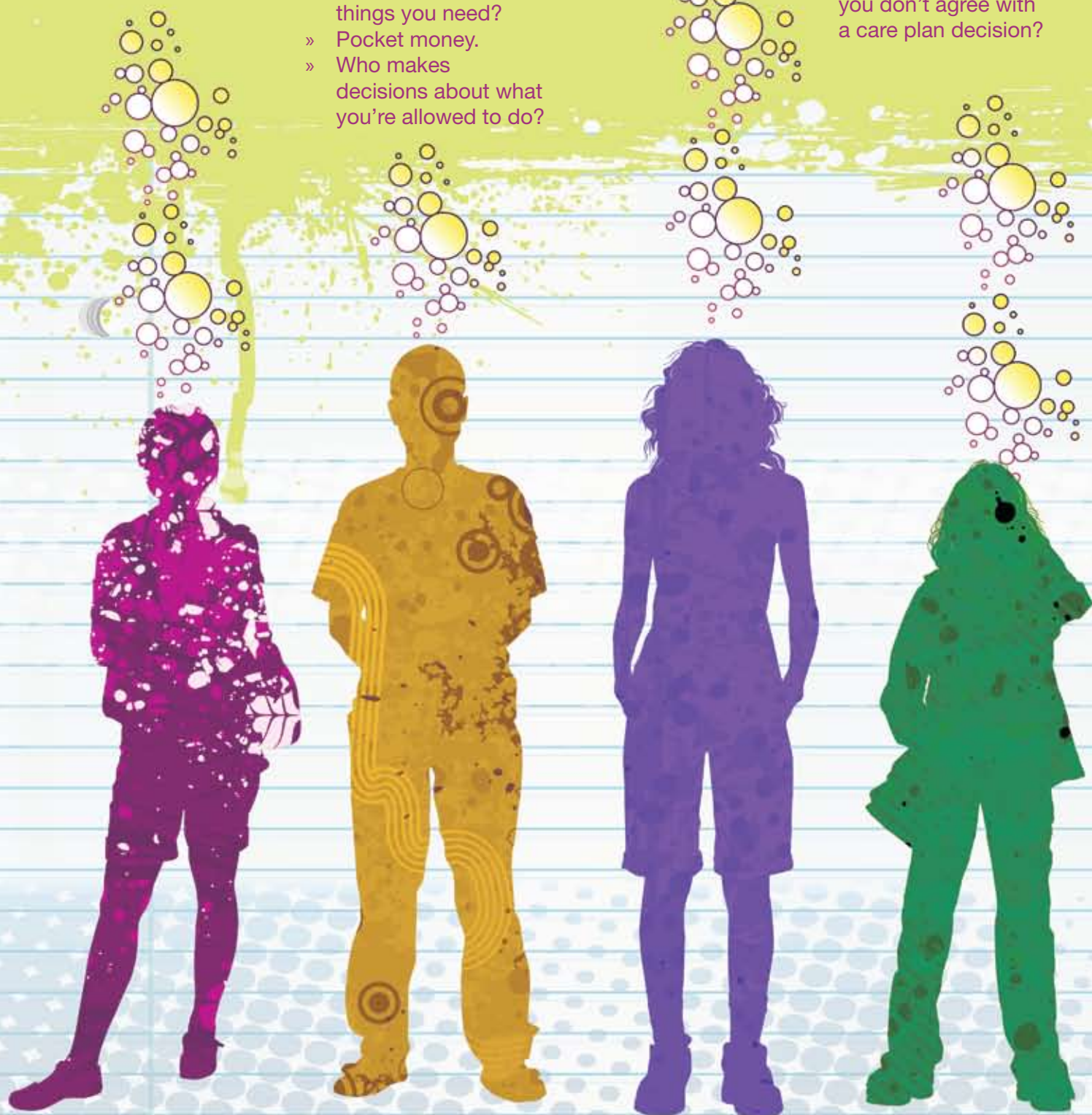
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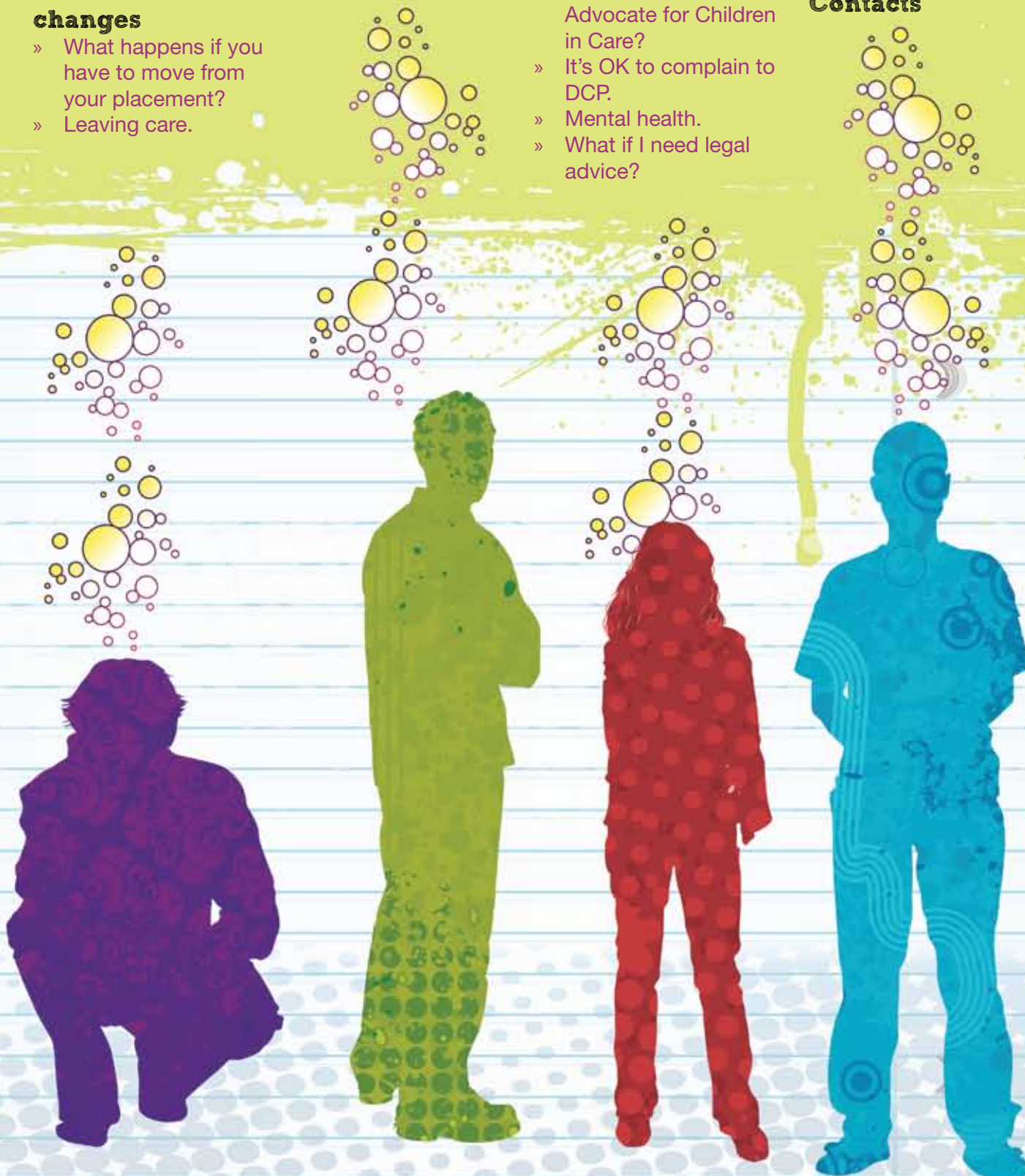
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for young people
in care

There are lots
of young people
in care. You're not
alone...



What's happening?

Why have you come into care?

Because the Department for Child Protection (usually called DCP or the Department) believes that it isn't safe for you to be at home right now. The Children's Court has probably decided that you need to live somewhere else for a while, or your family may have made an agreement with DCP about this.

Sometimes families have a hard time and need help from other adults or services to care for their children properly. This is what has happened to your family.


Young people come into care for lots of different reasons. The reason why you've come into care should be explained to you by your case worker. If you have any questions, you have the right to ask your case worker.

Here are some of the reasons why young people come into care:

- » they were being hurt in some way, or they were likely to be hurt
- » they weren't getting the care they needed at home
- » their parent(s) or family were sick.

It's very important for you to know that no matter why you came into care, it was **NOT** your fault.

Lots of young people are in care and being in care can create different feelings. You might be relieved, worried, confused, sad or have other feelings from time to time. It's important for you to know that this is normal and that you're not alone! There are people you can talk to about how you're feeling, like your carer, case worker, psychologist or school counsellor.



You have rights when you're in care, including the right to:

- feel safe where you're living
- have food and clothes
- medical treatment and education
- have contact with people who are important to you
- have your say about what you want to happen.

There is a Charter of Rights for children and young people in care, and you'll find it on page 31 of this guide.

What does being in care really mean?

It means that DCP has responsibility for you and, in most cases, they will be making decisions about your life – like where you will live, who with, where you go to school and when you'll see your family. Your case worker and team leader will make these decisions most of the time, but they need to talk with you about this and keep you and your family informed. You can say if you want to change what's happening or if you don't like something in your life. DCP's job is to make sure that you're well looked after and safe, and that you're getting everything you need. This is called **getting your needs met**.

How long will you be in care?

DCP will usually work with your family to try and make it safe for you to go back home to live. Sometimes you will be in care only for a short break then go back home. Other times, even though everyone works hard to try and get you back home, it may not be right or safe, so you may be in care for a longer time. Some children and young people stay in care until they're 18 years old and become adults.

The Department for Child Protection (DCP)

What is DCP and what do they do?

DCP is part of the Western Australian Government. The people who work for DCP have the job of protecting and caring for children and young people and keeping them safe – in their own homes and when they are in care. When you're in care, people sometimes say you're in the care of the CEO. The CEO is the Chief Executive Officer of DCP, who is the boss of the whole Department. You may never meet this person, but there are lots of other people who work under him or her, and they are the ones you'll come into contact with.

What is a case worker and what do they do?

Your case worker is the person you'll see and speak to the most. This is someone who works for DCP and who has special responsibility for you – making sure you're safe and well looked after and that your needs are being met.

Your case worker works in a team with other people in a district office. They have a team leader who is their everyday boss. The person who is in charge of the whole district office is called the district director. You might want to know the names of the team leader and district director as they help to make decisions about you while you're in care, and you can talk to them if you want to. Ask your case worker for their names.

Who else might you meet while you're in care?

There are other people you might meet. They all want to support and help you, and make sure that you are safe.

Here are some examples:

Education officer

This person works in the district office with your case worker, and can be involved if you need their help.

Psychologist

This person also works in the district office with your case worker, and can be involved if you need their help.

Aboriginal worker

If you're of Aboriginal descent, you will probably have contact with a specialist Aboriginal worker, who will help to keep you in touch with your culture and your people.

Crisis Care workers

They work in DCP's 24-hour Crisis Care Unit. You may have contact with them if there is an emergency or if you need help when your district office is closed.

Advocate for Children in Care

The Advocate for Children in Care can help you sort out problems with DCP and make sure you have a say in decisions that affect your life. The Advocate can also help you make a formal complaint about something if you want to, or get a review of a decision you don't agree with.

CREATE Foundation

A community organisation that offers programs and activities for children and young people in care aged five to 25 years. Programs and activities include Club CREATE, annual Christmas events and connection events for young people. As a member of Club CREATE, you will receive four newsletters a year, information about programs in WA, competitions, birthday cards, and a CREATE t-shirt and journal. There is also a group of young people with a care experience who provide feedback and advice to DCP, and support to each other and other young people in care.

For more information about CREATE visit www.create.org.au
or contact 1800 655 105.



Where will you live?

Where will you live and who with?

When you're in care, the place you live is called your placement and you may hear people talking about your placement arrangements.

Young people in care live in different types of placements:

With friends or people in your family

When you live with someone in your family other than your mum or dad (like an auntie or grandmother), or perhaps with family friends, they are called relative carers or kinship carers.

Foster care

This is where you live with another person or family in their home. They are called foster carers and you may not have known them before, but they have chosen to look after you because they care about what happens to you.

Residential care unit or group home

This is where a group of children and young people live together in the same house with adults, called residential care officers, who look after them. The residential care officers don't live there, but work in a team and on different shifts so there is always someone there to make sure you receive proper care.

It's important to know that wherever you live, your family will always be your family and love you.

Getting used to your placement

Living with new people can be difficult and it can take time to settle in. The way things are done in your placement may be different from what you're used to, and it's important that you know what's OK and what's not OK so you know how to behave while you're living there.



Rules

All families have rules, and wherever you live while you're in care there will be rules too. You need to know what the rules are in your placement and you have the right to ask questions if you're not sure. Rules include things like:

- » having a bed time
- » going to school
- » doing household chores
- » not staying out too late
- » being respectful to your carers and other young people
- » not bullying.

Punishments and consequences

There are times when we all break rules – sometimes because we're upset or angry. If you break a rule, there may be a consequence or punishment to make sure that you don't do it again in future. The sorts of consequences may be:

- » repairing any damage you cause or paying for it
- » missing out on doing something you enjoy like going out, watching TV or playing a computer game
- » being given extra chores in the home, like washing up or setting the dinner table.

No one has the right to punish you physically or to hurt or touch you in any way that you don't like. You can speak to your case worker or the Advocate for Children in Care if you think any punishment or consequence is unreasonable or harmful to you, or if you're uncomfortable about the way anyone is touching you.

Where will you live? - cont'd

What do you call your carer and other people in their family?

Everyone is different and it's important that you feel comfortable about the name you use for your carer and their family. In residential care units, this is a bit easier and the staff there will usually be called by their first names, like John or Barbara. In foster care it can be a bit more confusing, especially if your carer's own children call them 'mum' and 'dad', and you might be unsure what you should call them. You can speak to your carer or case worker about this and choose a name that you feel comfortable with.

Is it OK to have a good relationship with your carer and other people in your carer's family?

Sometimes you may feel like you're hurting your mum and dad or people in your own family if you get on really well with your carer. It's OK to care about your carers and their family as well as your own family.

What about your family?

Does your family know where you are?

Your family knows that DCP has found somewhere safe for you to stay. DCP may not tell them exactly where you're living if you or someone else has been hurt by a person in your family, or if they feel it's not OK for other reasons. You can ask your case worker more about this.

How can you contact your family or friends?

Some people will always be important to you and your case worker understands this. Tell your case worker or carer who you want to see and they will try to arrange it.

You have the right to keep in touch with your family and friends if possible. This is called contact, and can include visits, phone calls, emails or letters and photos. Sometimes there is a very good reason why you can't have contact with someone in your family, for example, if you are hurt or upset. Sometimes other adults may need to be there when you see your family to make sure you stay safe. This is called supervised contact. You can talk to your case worker more about this.

What if there's someone in your family you don't want to see?

Talk to your case worker about this. You don't have to see anyone you don't want to, and your case worker may have ideas about other ways of staying in touch, like phone calls, sending a letter, email or SMS, or swapping photos or pictures.

If you're not happy with a decision DCP makes about contact, you can ask why this decision was made and say if you want it changed. Your case worker or the Advocate for Children in Care can help you with this.

School

Will you still be able to go to the same school?

Your case worker will try to make sure that you can stay at the same school, but if your placement is too far away you may have to go to a new school.

Moving schools can be difficult and you might feel nervous, sad, worried or upset. You can talk to your case worker or carer about this and there may be ways you can get some extra support.

Will anyone at school be told that you are in care?

Some people at school will need to know that you're in care. Your case worker will only tell people who need to know so they can give you the best possible support. This may include your school principal, teacher or a support person like the school counsellor or chaplain. But it's nobody else's business. It's up to you who you choose to talk to about being in care. You can speak to your case worker to help you decide who to talk to about being in care, and what you can say to other people if they ask questions and you don't want to talk about it.

Who can you talk to about problems at school?

If you're having a problem at school with your school work, being bullied or if you're just upset or worried, then there are people who you can talk to. You can always talk to your case worker about these problems, but there are others who can help you too. They are:

- » your year coordinator
- » the chaplain or youth education worker
- » the school counsellor or psychologist
- » your teacher.

Your stuff and other issues

What about your stuff?

If there are still some things at your family home that you would like to have, you can talk to your case worker about trying to get them for you. It's a good idea to have a chat with your carer about how things are looked after in your placement. Every household is different, but remember that your personal needs and privacy are important wherever you're living.

Who will pay for the things you need?

Your carer receives some money from DCP to pay for your food, clothes and everyday things like your toothbrush, shampoo, haircuts, basic medical treatment and general items from the pharmacy. If you need money for extra things, you can talk to your carer or case worker. Sometimes they won't be able to make the decision straight away and will have to check with their team leader or district director. They'll tell you when a decision is made. You have the right to get the essential things you need, at the right time.

Pocket money

All children and young people in the CEO's care may receive pocket money until they are 16 years old. The amount you get will depend on how old you are. You can ask your case worker or the Advocate for Children in Care if you want information about pocket money. After you're 16 years old, you might be able to get a Centrelink allowance. DCP doesn't pay pocket money if you get a Centrelink allowance, if you have a job or if your parents are paying some money.

Who makes the decisions about what you're allowed to do?

This depends on what you're asking to do. Your carers can make some everyday decisions like signing most permission slips from school, and deciding if you can stay at a friend's house for a night.

Some bigger decisions can only be made by your case worker, your parents or your case worker's team leader or district director. These people have to make tough decisions, for example, letting you have an operation or giving you permission to do an activity where you could get hurt. Your district director is the person who decides whether you can travel to other parts of Australia or overseas.

Court and court orders

Why is the Children's Court involved in bringing you into care?


The Children's Court has the power and responsibility to decide if children and young people like you need care and protection by DCP. Decisions are made by a magistrate (who is like a judge), who has this job because he or she knows a lot about the law.

Sometimes your parents or family have made an agreement with DCP that you should be in care for a while. This is called a negotiated placement agreement. But in most cases, a magistrate in the Children's Court will make the decision about whether or not you need to be in care. This involves a legal process called a protection application, where your family and DCP tell the magistrate what they think is the best thing for you. This is usually done by lawyers who speak on behalf of each of the people involved. Often, each side (or party) has a different point of view.

You are part of this process too, and you may have your own lawyer (called a separate representative), who is chosen by the court. You may be able to attend court yourself if you want to. Tell your case worker or lawyer if you want to go and it may be possible for you to attend some of the time.

The magistrate listens carefully to what everyone involved says, and can also listen to other people who know about what has been happening to you, like doctors, teachers or neighbours. These people are called witnesses and the information they give to the court is called evidence. The magistrate thinks carefully about what everyone has said, and decides if you need to have DCP involved in your life. If you do, then this is written down in a protection order.

Sometimes, a protection order says that a child or young person can continue to live with their family but DCP must check up or monitor how things are going. This is called a supervision order.

A yellow butterfly with orange and green floral patterns is in the top right corner. Below it are several stylized flowers in orange, yellow, and green, with green leaves and stems. The background is a light blue sky with white clouds.

But if you're in care now, this probably doesn't apply to you and the magistrate will have made a protection order that says you need to be in DCP's care for a certain length of time, like a year, two years or until you turn 18. This usually means you will live somewhere other than at home.

Another kind of protection order can put you in the care of someone other than your parents, like a relative or carer.

You can ask your case worker which type of protection order you have.

Sometimes it can take a long time for your story (or case) to be sorted out in the Children's Court. There may be lots of short hearings and discussions and this may take a few months. Your case worker can tell you what's happening and if you're not sure, you should ask.

Will your parents be told what you have said about them?

Your case worker will try to make sure that anything you don't want your parents to know is kept private, but this isn't always possible. The magistrate will want to know your thoughts and feelings about what is happening for you, so your case worker or lawyer will have to tell the court. Talk to your case worker or lawyer about this if you're worried.



Care plans and meetings

What is a care plan?

Once you're in care, DCP has to make a care plan for you that says what's going to happen and how you're going to be looked after.

For example, it may say how long you're likely to be in care or what needs to happen before you can go back home. It will also include things like:

- » where you're going to live
- » the school you'll go to
- » what contact you'll have with your family and friends
- » the sports and activities you'll take part in (like music, dance and art)
- » other things you might need, like medical or dental treatment, counselling or help at school.

What is a cultural plan?

If you're of Aboriginal descent then you will be able to have a yarn with a special Aboriginal worker about what's best for you and how to keep in touch with your family, culture and community. There are people from lots of different cultures in Australia. DCP will help you stay in touch with your culture. This can be built into your care plan and is called your *cultural plan*.

Who decides what's in your care plan?

DCP talks to everyone involved to see what they think should be in your care plan. This can include people like your family, your carer and case worker and of course **YOU!** It's important that you have your say about what you want to happen.



What is a care plan meeting?

It's when people get together with DCP to discuss your care plan. They will talk about how you're going and make plans and important decisions about your life and future. Care plan meetings are a chance for you to sit down with people who care about you. They want to hear about what's happening in your life and what you want to happen in the future.

How can you have your say?

Lots of different adults take part in care plan meetings, like your parents or other members of your family, your case worker and team leader, your carer, your psychologist, or anyone else who is involved in your life.

There may be one big meeting or lots of small ones but it is all about **YOU** and it's good for you to take part if you can.

You can pick **where** your part of the meeting is held. For example, if you don't want to go to the district office, you can choose somewhere you feel safe and comfortable like where you live or a park. You can also say if there is anyone you don't want to be at your part of the meeting. You can choose to bring an adult friend to the meeting for support, or you can ask the Advocate for Children in Care to come with you.

Sometimes it's hard to say what you want in front of a group of people, so you might like to write down what you want to say when you're at the meeting. You can ask your case worker, carer or the Advocate for Children in Care to help you with this.

It's really good if you can go to the meeting, but you don't have to if you don't want to. You can have your say in other ways instead. For example, you can **tell your case worker** what you want or send a **letter** or use the '**child's report to meeting**' to help you have your say. Again, your case worker, carer or the Advocate for Children in Care can help you with this. You can say if you don't want what you've written to be shared with everyone and it can be kept confidential.

Care plans and meetings - cont'd

Who gets a copy of your care plan?

You will get a copy of your care plan and you can ask if you need help to understand it. In about 12 months' time, the care plan will be looked at again (reviewed) to see how things are going and what changes are needed.

What can you do if you don't agree with a care plan decision?

You can talk to your case worker or to the Advocate for Children in Care about what you disagree with. They will help you if you want to try to get the plan changed or if you want it to be looked at again by a group of people outside DCP called the Case Review Panel. This panel can ask DCP to make changes to the care plan.



Placement changes

What happens if you have to move from your placement?

There are lots of reasons why you may need to move from a placement – like changes in your own needs, or things that happen in your carer's family. You should let your case worker know if things are uncomfortable in your placement for any reason. Your case worker and carer will talk to you and your family about what is the best option for you if this is happening. If you can't or don't want to speak to your case worker, then you can speak to the team leader, district director or the Advocate for Children in Care. You can also talk to someone in the Crisis Care Unit at any time of the day or night.

Leaving care

From around the time you turn 15 years old, your case worker should start talking to you about what you're going to do when you leave care at 18 years old. The process of moving out of care is called 'transitioning from care' and it's important that DCP helps you to plan what you want to do and what supports you will need.

You will have to think about things like:

- » where you're going to live
- » whether you want to study at TAFE or university, do an apprenticeship or get a job
- » how you'll earn money
- » what supports you'll need
- » what help you can get to set up your own home.

You can ask about transitioning from care when you feel the time is right for you to start planning your future as an adult.

for

Your rights

What is the Charter of Rights?

You have rights while you're in care. These have been put together in a list called the Charter of Rights. It's for all children and young people in care. You should have your own copy and have it explained to you by your case worker. If you don't have one, ask for it. A copy of the Charter is on page 31 of this guide.

It's a good idea to read through the Charter regularly to remind yourself of your rights and ask any questions about it.

All your rights are important, but other children and young people in care have said one thing that's really important to them is the **right to privacy**.

You have the right to keep in touch with friends and family whenever possible and can ask to have private conversations without anyone listening to what you're saying.

You have the right to keep your personal belongings in a safe place, and not have other people going into your room without your permission. You also have the right not to have your personal information discussed with people who don't need to know. If you need more information or feel your rights aren't being respected, speak to your carer, case worker or the Advocate for Children in Care about this.

Talking to someone

What do you do if you're unhappy, sad or upset?

Being in care isn't always easy. Even with lots of people trying to help, sometimes things can still go wrong. The kinds of things that may go wrong may include:

- » not seeing enough of your family or friends
- » not getting heard or not being involved in decisions
- » disagreeing with decisions or not being told why they have been made
- » being mistreated or bullied
- » feeling unsafe or worried.

It's important to know that you always have someone to talk things through with.

You can choose from any of these people:

- » parents, family or friends
- » case worker
- » carer or residential care officer
- » teacher or school counsellor
- » psychologist
- » Advocate for Children in Care
- » CREATE Foundation
- » any other adult that you trust, like your family resource officer or mentor.

You'll find someone who will listen to you and support you. If you feel you don't get heard the first time, talk to someone else because you have the right to have your say.

Talking to someone - cont'd

Can you contact your case worker at any time?

You can phone your case worker at their district office between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday. They may not always be able to take your call straight away, so leave a message for them to call you back. If it's something urgent and it can't wait, you can ask to speak with the team leader or district director.

If it's after 5pm on weekdays or during weekends or public holidays and you need help with something urgent, then you can call Crisis Care. Their contact details are on page 29 of this guide.


Who and what is the Advocate for Children in Care?

This person is there especially to help children and young people like you who may be having trouble getting heard, getting information or having a say in decisions that affect their lives.

The Advocate can help with problems you can't sort out with your case worker or district office, and can help you get decisions reviewed or make a complaint.

The Advocate will:

- » listen to you, and help you say what you want and help get adults to listen
- » give information and advice about what you are entitled to, and how you should be treated
- » support you if you want to have a decision reviewed or complain about things that you think are wrong
- » speak to people in authority about what you think works or doesn't work in your life.



Contact details for the Advocate for Children in Care are on page 29 of this guide.

It's OK to complain to DCP

Making a complaint is a formal way of telling DCP that you don't agree with something they've done or haven't done. By making a complaint, you can get the decision looked at again and it might be changed. The Advocate for Children in Care can give you more information and support to do this, or you can call the Complaints Management Unit. Look at page 29 for contact details.

Mental health

If you're feeling really down or depressed, it could be helpful to talk to someone who is specially trained in mental health for young people. This might be a counsellor, psychologist or social worker. Your case worker can put you in touch with the right people, or you can ring **Youth Mental Health Services** on **1300 362 569**.

What if you need legal advice?

If you want to get confidential legal advice about anything, you can contact the **Youth Legal Service** on **(08) 9202 1688**. They will be able to give you independent guidance about what you're entitled to.

Contacts

District office

Office number:

Case worker:

Team leader:

District director:

Health

Dentist:

Doctor:

Psychologist:

Put other important numbers in the space below:

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Advocate for Children in Care

Department for Child Protection
189 Royal Street, EAST PERTH, WA 6004
Tel: (08) 9222 2518 or 0429 086 508
Free call (not from mobiles): 1800 460 696
Email: advocate.for.children.in.care@dcp.wa.gov

Complaints Management Unit

Department for Child Protection
189 Royal Street, EAST PERTH, WA 6004
Tel: (08) 9222 2594
Freecall (not from mobiles): 1800 013 311

Crisis Care Unit

Tel: (08) 9223 1111
Free call (not from mobiles): 1800 199 008

Kids Helpline

Free call: 1800 551 800 (free from Optus mobiles only)
Website: www.kidshelp.com.au

Ambulance, Fire and Police Emergency Only: 000

Police: 131 444

Health Direct advice line (24hr): 1800 022 222

Poisons Information Centre (24hr): 13 11 26

CREATE Foundation WA

Tel: (08) 9470 6155
Free call: 1800 655 105
Website: www.create.org.au



Feedback and acknowledgements

What do you think of this guide?

We would love to have your feedback on this guide. Has it been helpful for you? Do we need to do it differently or include some other stuff? Please let us know by contacting the Advocate for Children in Care or by completing the feedback form at the back of this guide.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the parents, carers, members of create'v VOYCE, children and young people who participated in the making of this guide by providing their insights and valuable feedback. Every one of you participated because you hoped it would make a difference to children and families in the future.

Additionally, thank you to the many colleagues in the Department for Child Protection who contributed with your consideration and feedback.

Thank you to the statutory and other services in Western Australia and in other jurisdictions, interstate and overseas, who shared their thoughts and research with us.

Charter of Rights for young people in care

1. I have the right to assistance that promotes my education, care, health and mental wellbeing needs.
2. I have the right to participate in activities such as hobbies, sport, music, dance and art (and I will do my best to develop my interests).
3. I have the right to be kept informed about my care plan, and for my views about the plan to be considered.
4. I have the right to be respected (and to treat others the same too).
5. I have the right to raise an issue or concern with my case worker, foster carer and/or Advocate for Children in Care.
6. I have the right to privacy and to have my own things.
7. I have the right to be heard (and to listen to other people's views and opinions).
8. I have the right to get help and support to go to court regarding my care.
9. I have the right to have contact with my family and friends whenever possible.
10. I have the right to be encouraged and supported in my religion and culture.
11. I have the right to proper planning before leaving care.
12. I have the right to be safe.



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