



Caring About Health:

Improving the health of
looked after children in Scotland

An A-Z health resource pack for staff and carers

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Health Resource Pack

Introduction

This resource pack has been published by NHS Health Scotland. The main aim of the pack is to support those caring for looked after children in residential and foster care settings throughout Scotland. Presented in A–Z format, the pack provides easy access to health information, sources of help and advice, and relevant websites. It also advocates a wider, more holistic approach to health. The pack includes medically related information on subjects such as diabetes, epilepsy and immunisation, as well as health promotion information on topics such as healthy eating, substance misuse and mental health.

Acknowledgments

The pack was originally produced as a local resource by the Residential Care Health Project (RCHP). Funded by the Scottish Government, the project sought to improve the health status of looked after children in Lothian, working in partnership with social work departments in East Lothian, West Lothian, Midlothian and Edinburgh.

The original RCHP pack was written jointly by Beth Cumming of Beth Cumming Associates and Pat Reid of Reid Training Associates. Following national consultation commissioned by NHS Health Scotland, it was clear from the relevant health and social care networks that this pack should be developed into a national resource. A large number of local, regional and national organisations kindly contributed to updating, reviewing and revising the text, for which NHS Health Scotland is very grateful. Thanks goes to Rocket Science for undertaking the original consultation, coordinating the update process and writing additional text. Thanks also to Margaret Reid Research and Planning for facilitating the pre-test focus groups in Perth & Kinross, Highland, and North Lanarkshire, and to those staff who were able to attend. Thanks also to the Scottish Healthy Care Network and the LAAC Scottish Nurse Forum for their support in developing and updating the pack.

The resource pack is intended to support and strengthen communications and dialogue between relevant health and social care staff and carers working with looked after children, to enhance the basic knowledge of staff and carers in relation to specific health issues and to signpost further health-related information and resources. The information is not intended as a substitute for health care or medical input, but rather is intended to enhance and support the health care process for looked after children.

Defining health

Health can mean different things to different people and views of health are often linked to social and cultural experiences. Some may view health as the absence of illness or disease, others may link health to fitness, how they feel, or with images of beauty, youth and vitality as portrayed in popular youth culture and the media. The concept of 'illness' can often be relatively easy to diagnose and measure; however, 'health' can be more difficult to define.

The World Health Organization defined health as a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. This definition is often criticised for making the assumption that there is one state of health to which everyone should aspire. However, it is widely seen as the first step in the move away from the idea that a state of health exists only when a person is not ill or sick.

The 'social model' of health on the other hand, adopts a more holistic approach and recognises the broad social and economic determinants of health which influence the health status of individuals and communities.

Staff and carers are well placed to not only 'prevent' ill health, but also to 'promote' positive health and wellbeing for children and young people and to contribute to their health improvement.

Staff and carers, working closely with local health care professionals, can play an active role in ensuring looked after children have access to appropriate and relevant health care services. In addition, staff and carers can work with local health service staff, such as community nurses and health promotion staff, to address lifestyle health behaviours (e.g. low levels of physical activity, poor nutrition and smoking). This can be undertaken by identifying health issues affecting children and young people in their care and liaising with health care staff to ensure appropriate settings-based group work or individual one-to-one health promotion takes place.

In addition, staff and carers can play a key role in addressing the life circumstances of looked after children that impact on health. Life circumstances can include stressful living environments, isolation, family breakdown, poverty and poor adult role models. Influencing the physical and social environment in which children and young people live their lives can help towards creating a healthy living environment wherein the healthy choice becomes the easier choice. This enables social care staff and carers to address the broader determinants of health and adopt a wider, more holistic approach towards health improvement in looked after children.

These principles feature strongly in the health promoting care concept, which encourages staff and carers to provide a healthier living environment for looked after children to support healthier lifestyles and improve health outcomes.

Looked after and accommodated children's (LAAC) nurses

LAAC nurses have a clear role and responsibility to maintain and improve the health and wellbeing of looked after and accommodated children in their care. Working as members of multi-disciplinary teams they also have an outstanding opportunity to take a leading role in developing new and innovative services for children and young people looked after away from home.

Most health board and local authority areas across Scotland have one or more LAAC nurses. The precise function of these nurses may differ slightly – they are generally involved in activity related to:

- comprehensive health assessments, including immunisations
- mental health assessments
- health promotion and guidance
- support and training of staff and carers, including foster carers
- supporting young people as they move on to independence.

In 2008, NHS Education Scotland developed a 'capability framework' that details the level of knowledge and skills the nurses need to undertake the role. This is available on:

http://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/Child_health/currentwork/documents/LACFrameworkFINALlores.pdf

Contact details of the local LAAC nurse(s) are available through local social work departments.

Philosophy of the pack

Adopting a more holistic view of health was a key learning point from the Lothian RCHP and a main aim of the original pack. This sought to take into account not only information about the medical needs of looked after children and young people, but also to look at the wider health promotion issues related to children and young people's social, emotional and developmental needs.

Using the pack

The pack is designed as a working document and has been produced in loose leaf ring-binder format to facilitate this purpose. In addition to information on a wide range of topics, it contains points to ponder, training ideas, useful contacts, and national websites and resources.

Lined note paper has also been included on pages 274–278. This is to encourage staff and carers to liaise closely with local health care professionals to identify local health-related services and useful contacts in your area. Please photocopy the paper as required. The information about local services should then be included within the relevant sections of the folder and updated regularly. NHS Health Scotland would welcome comments on the pack to inform improvements and future updates. This will help ensure the pack remains responsive to the information needs of staff and carers.



Points to ponder

- What factors might affect the health of the children and young people in your care?
- What does being healthy mean to you, to others you work with and to the children and young people in your care?
- How might the way you view 'being healthy' affect the way you work with children and young people in your care?
- What might 'being healthy' mean to someone who has a learning difficulty, physical disability, or is living with a chronic illness?
- Has your view of health changed since you were a child?
- How might a child's concept of health differ from an adult's?
- To what extent does a person's social and cultural situation/background influence their beliefs about health?



Useful contacts

If you are interested in finding out more about young people and health promotion in general, you can access the **NHS Health Scotland Library**. This is a free national information resource, open to the public, health professionals and anyone involved in health education work in Scotland.
Tel: 0845 912 5442
Website: www.healthscotland.com/library

The **Scottish Healthy Care Network** is active in raising the profile of health as it relates to looked after children and young people in, and leaving, care.
Website: www.shcn.org.uk

Action for Sick Children provides support to parents and carers regarding the healthcare of children and young people. The website includes a free resource pack, *Children and Young People's Healthcare Rights*.
Tel: 0131 553 6553
Website: www.ascscotland.org.uk

