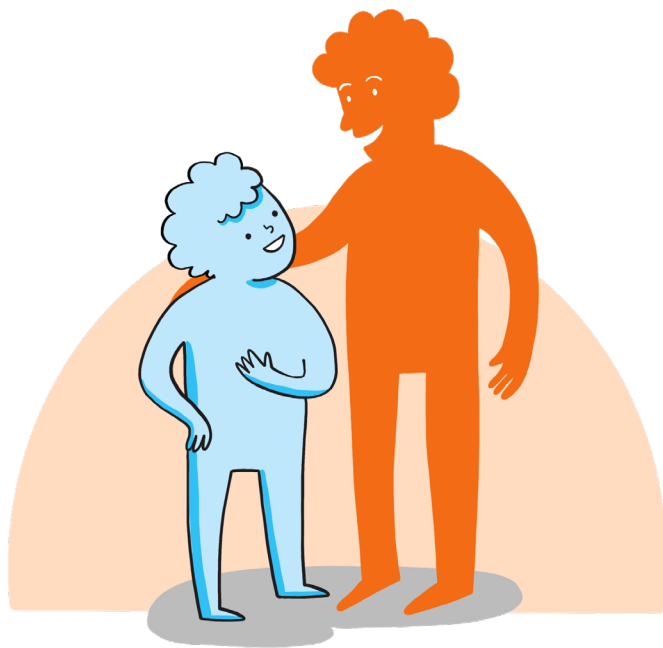


# You Have the Right to Care and Protection!

The Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children  
in Child and Youth Friendly Language



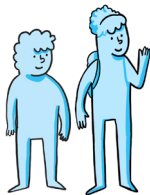
SOS CHILDREN'S  
VILLAGES  
INTERNATIONAL

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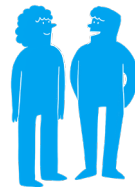
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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



PARENTS



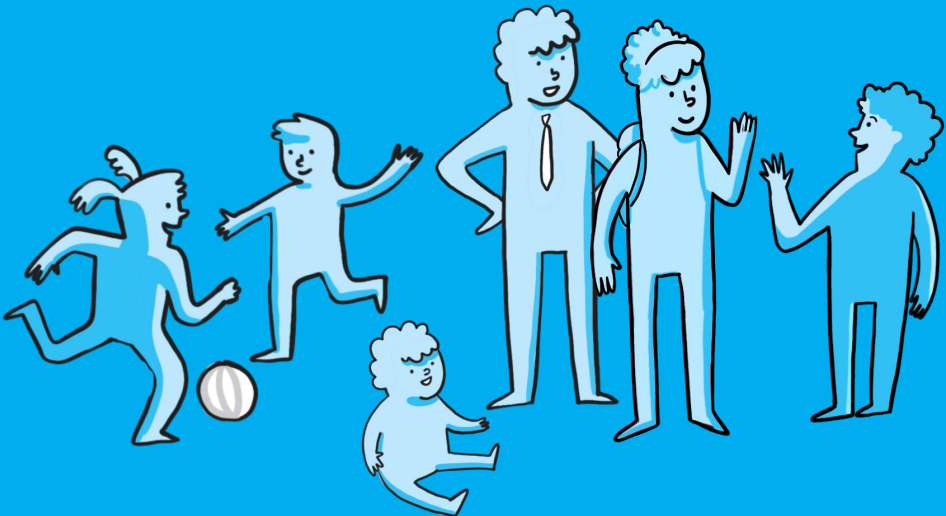
CAREGIVERS



GOVERNMENT WORKERS

CHAPTER 1

# Your right to care and protection

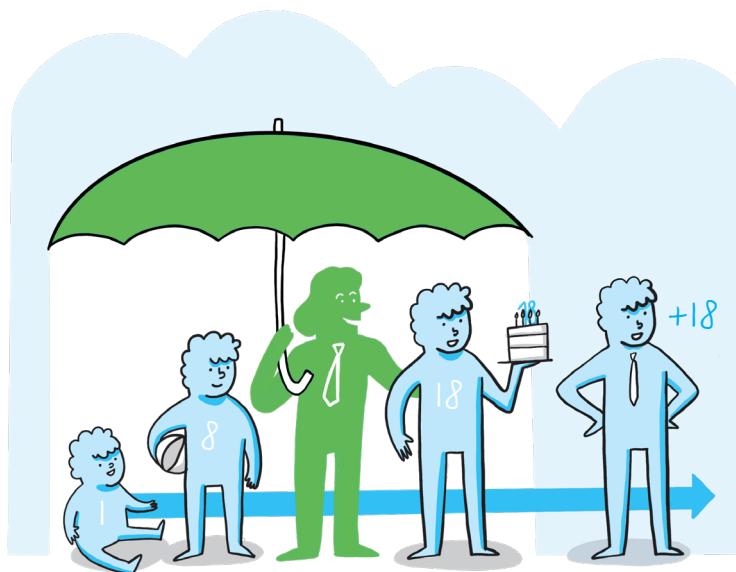


## What is care and protection?

Until you reach the age of majority – 18 years old in most countries – you are considered a **child under the law**, and this gives you special rights, such as the right to care and protection.

This means that the government and adults around you must do all it takes for you to grow up as strong and healthy as you can be.

This is **your right**, which means that you do not need to earn it. You just have this right because the law says so, and everyone must respect that.



## Who is responsible for my care and protection?

When you are a child, there should always be **at least one adult** who is responsible for your care and protection: someone you can trust, who gives you all the support and guidance you need until you become an independent young adult.

**Parents** are usually the ones who are responsible for this. But sometimes, parents are not there to support, for example, because one or both have serious problems and have not treated their children well, or have perhaps died. In such cases, there may be another adult in the family who can take up a parent's responsibility.

It could be an older brother or sister, an aunt or an uncle, your grandparents or **other close relatives and friends**.

If no one in your family can take care of you, there are other adults who can – for example, **people who have experience in child care** and want to help you until you are able to take care of yourself and live on your own.

## What if I lack care and protection?

When parents are not able to ensure care and protection for their children, either for a short or a long period of time, the government must find a way for these children to have at least one other adult who takes care of them. This is called **'alternative care of children'**.

There is a document called the **'Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children'** that describes what to do to help children who cannot live with their parents. It also describes how to help parents solve their problems so that they might be able to take care of their children again.

The **'Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children'** helps **all children** have care and protection no matter who they are, where they live, where they come from, what language they speak, what their religion is, what their abilities are, or what their gender is.



CHAPTER 2

# What if you and your parents face difficulties





## Can my parents receive support to take care of me?

Sometimes parents have serious problems that make it difficult to take care of their children.

For example, there are parents who are seriously ill, or who have problems with alcohol or drugs, or who are poor and nobody helps them.

In cases like these, **you and your parents should receive support** from the government and the community where you live to overcome problems and live well together. Examples of such support are family counselling, training, and specialised health care.



## What if living with my parents is not good for me?

You should grow up in a family environment where you **feel safe, loved and supported**. If this is not the case, the government should give your parents support to properly take care of and protect you.

If this still does not help, it can become really necessary and **in your best interests** that someone else takes care of you instead of your parents and protects you from situations that can have bad effects on you.

Only a government office or a judge can make this decision, after **listening to your opinion** and the opinion of your parents and other close family members or friends.



## CHAPTER 3

# What if you cannot live with your parents



## **I was separated from my parents. Where do I go now?**

If you cannot live with your parents, the government should provide you with alternative care: **a new place** where you can live with someone of trust who can give you care and protection.

There should be different **options** for where you can go, so that it is possible to choose the best one for your particular situation, also taking your views into account.

For example, you can go live with relatives or close friends, or with another family in your community who is willing to take good care of you, or in a place where an adult with experience in child care takes care of you and other children in a similar situation as you.

Anywhere you go, the government must ensure that you will have **the care and protection that you need**, for as much time as you need it.

## **What will my life be like at the new place?**

The new place should **respond to your unique needs** and be as close as possible to where you used to live, so that you can continue your life with **as few changes as possible**

and can stay in contact with your family and friends if this is good for you.

At the new place, you should be safe and have adequate food and housing and other things that are necessary in your life.

People who take care of you there should give you **guidance and support** whenever you need it, provide health care for your body and mind, help you to study or learn about working life, and promote your participation in the life of your community.



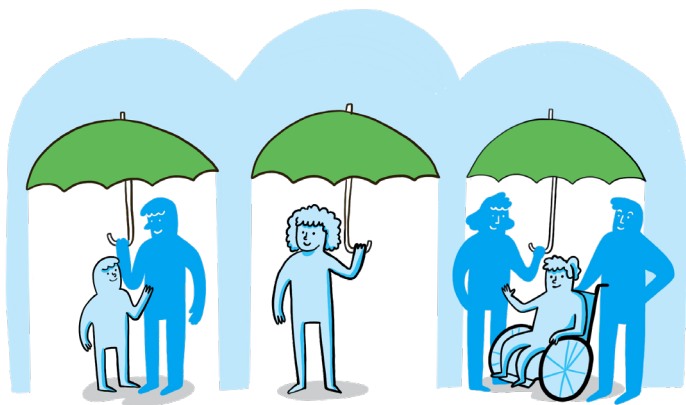
## Do I have the same rights as other children if I do not live with my parents?

Yes. Every child in the world has **the same rights** under the law, and they are called '**rights of the child**'.

Some examples of these rights are: safe food and water, housing, education, health care, protection from violence, playing and free time activities with friends, speaking your opinions and being listened to, and practicing your religion, language and culture.

Nobody should deny you these rights because you do not live with your parents. A full list of these rights is in a document called the 'Convention on the Rights of the Child'.

You can ask an adult you trust for more information about this – for example, the person who takes care of you, a relative or a teacher.



## Can I participate in decisions about my life?

Yes. You have the **right to be informed and give your opinion** on all decisions about your life, and for your opinion to be heard and considered seriously.

For example, you should be part of decisions about which school to attend, your health care, whether you can live with your family or you think this is not good for you, whether you should stay where you live now and what the plans for your future are.

You should also be able to give your opinion about how you are treated in the place where you live, and how this can be improved for you and for other children who live in a similar situation.



## Will my personal needs and views be considered?

Yes, your personal needs and views should be at the centre of any decision about your life.

This is why you should have an **individual care plan**. This plan describes your needs, how your needs will be met, but also what your views and wishes for your life in the near future are.

The person who takes care of you must support your participation in the writing of this plan, in checking if the plan works well for you and in regularly updating it (preferably every three months).





## What should I expect from the person who takes care of me?

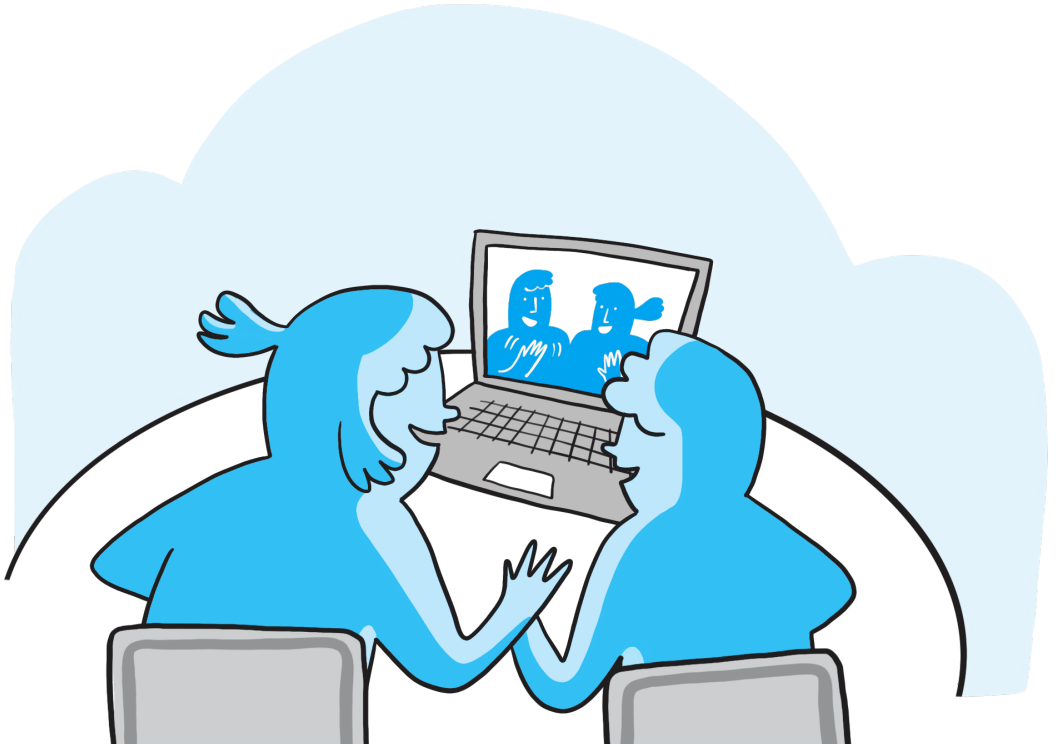
The person who takes care of you when you cannot live with your parents is someone of trust that the government has made responsible for your care and protection. This person is usually called 'caregiver'.

The caregiver should provide you with adequate food and housing, promote your education and good health, facilitate your contact with your family and friends, and protect you from any form of violence or bad things that can happen to you.

There should be a positive and supportive relationship with this person, so that you can speak freely, ask for advice and share things that you want nobody else to know.

There should be respect for your needs related to your feelings, your gender, your religious beliefs and spiritual life, and your life story.





## Can I live with my brothers and sisters?

When you and your siblings are in care outside of your family, you should **stay together**. The government and social services should do everything they can to avoid that you and your siblings are separated, unless staying together is not good for you.

## Can I keep in contact with my family?

Whenever possible and not harmful for you, you should receive **support to keep in contact with your family**.

Keeping in contact can help you and your family improve your relationship and perhaps become able to live together again one day.

You should participate in the decision about whether and how often you are in contact with your family.

If you are not in direct contact with your family members, you should receive information about them from the adults who care for you.

## Until when do I receive support?

You should have someone who takes good care of you for **as long as you need it** – until you can live again with your parents, or until you are ready to live independently as a young adult.

A government office or a judge should **evaluate your situation** from time to time, and decide if the care that you are receiving is good for you or it is necessary to make some changes. They should ask your opinion about this and take it into account as they decide.

## Can I go live with my parents again?

You should be able to return to your family as soon as your parents or other members of your family are able to take care of you. This is why a government office or a judge should regularly evaluate your situation and the situation of your parents, also asking your opinion, in order to decide if you can live together again.

If you and your parents are ready to live together again, there needs to be a **clear plan** about when and how you can reunite. You should be informed about the plan and participate in all the decisions about it.

Once you live with your parents again, you and your parents should still receive support to make sure that you can live well together.



## What if others treat me badly or hurt me?

You have the right to live in a safe environment. **Nobody should mistreat or hurt you**, be it physically, by touching you inappropriately or by using words that make you suffer. If this happens, you should **tell an adult you trust**, for example, the person who takes care of you, a relative or a teacher, and ask for help.



In nearly every country there are several **things you can do to ask for help** if someone treats you badly or hurts you.

The main ones are: call the child helpline in your country; call the police or go to the nearest police station; contact the ombudsperson for children in your country (this is a public authority responsible to protect and promote the rights of children and young people).

If there is an organisation that is supporting you, your family or your community, you can ask a staff member you trust for help (usually this person is a 'child safeguarding officer' or 'child protection officer').

## Can I have my privacy?

Your privacy is when you can **limit who has access** to your body, place, things and information that you want to protect.

You should have your privacy both when you live with your family and when you do not.

Even when you do not live with your family, you should have a **private space** where you can go if you need to be alone, including for your personal hygiene and body care.

And you should have a place where you can keep things that matter to you safe, like a secure storage for personal objects.



## Am I allowed to know my life story?

Yes. Your life story is part of **your identity**, that is, who you are and what makes you different from all other people. You should have documents with your name, surname, date of birth, and all basic information that is important for you to be able to receive the support you need.

You should also be informed about your roots, your family, your current situation and your life plan.

**Your caregiver can help** you protect and develop your life story. For example, together you can keep a **'life story book'** with photos and other memories to record the different moments of your life.

## I was told that one day I can go live on my own. How does it work?

When you reach the **age of majority** – 18 years old in most countries – you are no longer considered a child under the law and you can go live on your own, if you are ready.

To be ready, you must receive **the right preparation to become independent** and able to face all the responsibilities of a young adult.

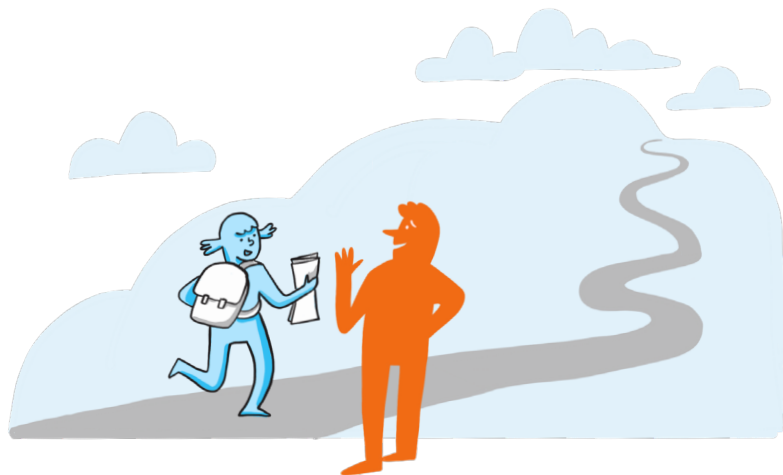


The people who look after you when you live outside of your family should help you with this. With them, you should **create a plan** to develop the knowledge and skills you need to become the young adult you want to be and participate in society as you grow older.

You should have this plan long before you reach the age of majority, with preparatory steps that respect your age, abilities and needs.

The plan should ensure that you receive the necessary education and training to become ready for a job, you can access health care and other services, and you have enough financial support to start living on your own.

If you have a disability, you should receive the necessary support to become as independent as possible and **participate in the life of your community** like all other young people.



## CHAPTER 4

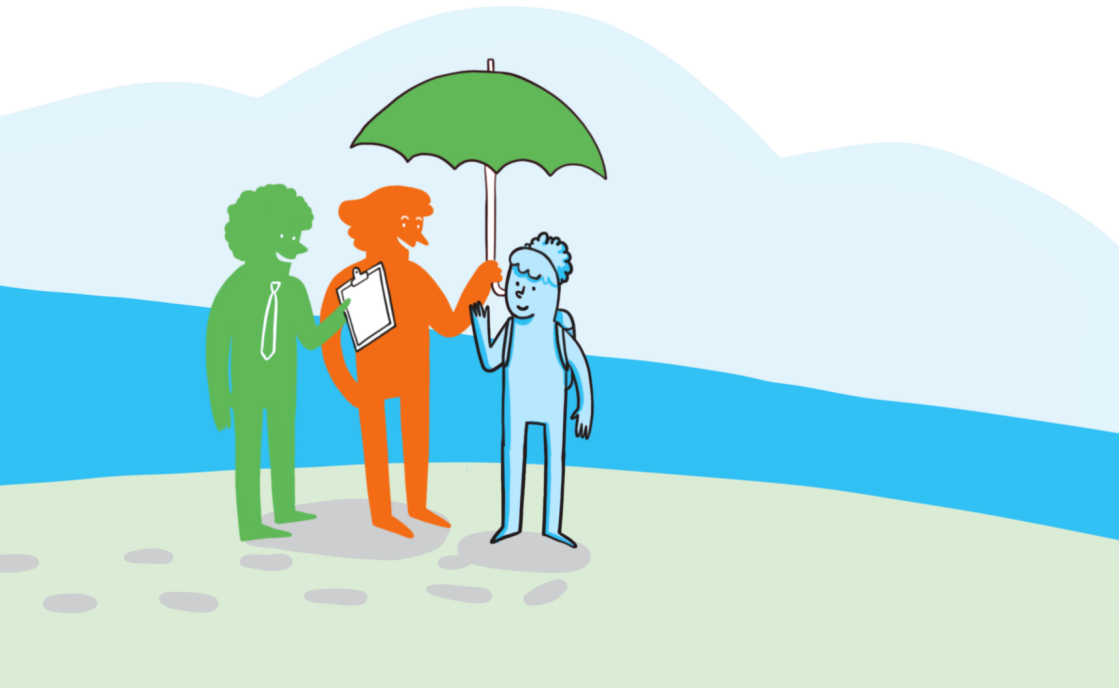
# What if you are alone outside your home country



## I am alone outside my home country. Who takes care of me?

If you are in a country that is not the country where you usually live and there is no parent or family member to take care of you, the government of that country must ensure that someone else takes care of you.

You should have **the same protection and support** as any other child in the country, and people should respect your opinion, culture, religion, language, and social and ethnic background.



## Can I get in touch with my family?

The person who takes care of you and the government must **help you get in contact** with your parents or family members in your home country, and see if it is possible and good for you to live with them.

## Can I get international protection?

If you had to leave your country because of fear for your life due to danger, like war or violence, you can **ask for international protection** (also called 'asylum'). To obtain international protection, you need to show several documents, and it takes time.

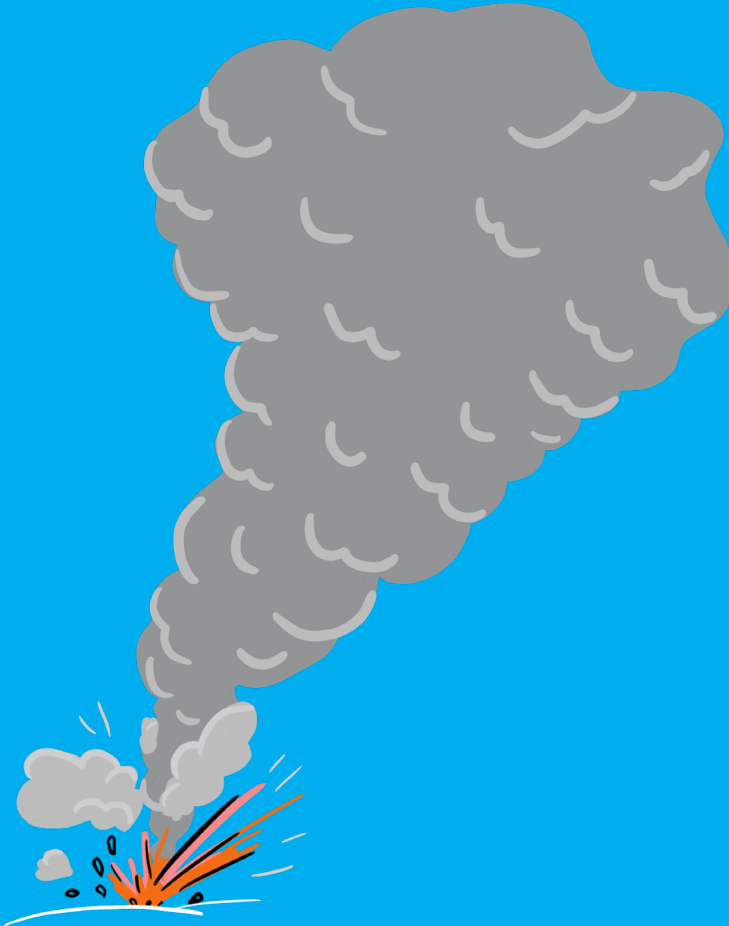
The person who takes care of you and the government should help you with this. You should **not be returned** to your country if there are risks for your life and safety there, or if there is no adult there who will take care of you.

## Can I be detained?

You should **not be detained** just because you have migrated to another country, if you have committed no crime. Also, you should not be detained if adults have forced you to do something against the law.

## CHAPTER 5

# What if there is an emergency in your country



## What is an emergency?

An emergency in your country is, for example, a war, a flood, an earthquake or similar disasters.

## What if my family needs help to care for me during the emergency?

If there is an emergency in your country, **you and your family should receive support**, like food and medical assistance, but also support to access basic services for your life, like going to school or receiving support from a professional to deal with your feelings.

You should **not be separated from your family** and sent to another country because of the emergency, unless this is necessary for you to receive special medical assistance or stay safe. In this case, you should be accompanied by an adult you trust and there should be a clear plan for your return.

## Who helps me if my family is not there?

If you find yourself alone in an emergency situation, the adults who come and help you in the emergency should first get to know who you are and **register your identity** (what your name is, where you are from, etc.).

This will help them understand what you need, but also who and where your family members are, and could possibly help reunite you with them.

You can be sent to live with **someone of trust** who can take care of you for a short time, until your parents or family members are found, or until a new family is found based on your needs.



**Special thanks to the over 500 children  
and young people who contributed to this booklet.**

The original legal text of the Guidelines  
for the Alternative Care of Children is available  
on the Digital Library of the United Nations.

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