



Support for Family and Friends Carers in East Sussex

Help for family or friends caring for children

Introduction

Sometimes children live with a member of their extended family, such as grandparents or an aunt, or with friends, rather than with their parents. In many cases this is a private arrangement that is set up by parents. However in some of these cases the local authority (East Sussex County Council) will have a duty to ensure that the arrangements work in the best interests of the child. This information sheet describes the support that families and extended family networks can expect from us if they are involved in caring for a child who is not their own. Our **Values and policy statement leaflet** explains our values and policy that underpins our support.

Involving family and friends in assessing and supporting children

Where it seems that a child or young person and their family need some help, the Children's Social Work Service will carry out a Family Assessment. Family and friends may take part in this assessment to look at the child's needs, and

in planning what support and services the child and family may need. Families are encouraged and supported to work in partnership with children's services to be fully involved in the plan to care for children, including ideas as to how they can work together as a family to make arrangements for the care of their children during short term difficulties and in the longer term throughout childhood.

If the social worker is worried about whether it is currently safe for a child to be cared for by their parents the social worker will talk to the family about how the extended family can ensure the safe care of the child whilst they find out more. This may involve family members supervising the care of the child or the child staying with someone else in the family network. In these circumstances Children's Services may support this family arrangement through a small amount of financial support to help with the temporary additional costs of caring for the child.

Family Group Conferences

If the concerns continue and the child needs a child protection plan and the parents need more support to safely care for their child, or there is risk of family breakdown, a Family Group Conference (FGC) will be offered with the aim of identifying family and friends support for parents in order to reduce concerns and starting to identify potential carers should care by parents not be possible in the short or long term. A Family Group Conference will lead to the development of a Family Plan. The Family Group Conference aims to:

- Give family members a central role in making decisions.
- Enable the full participation of parents and wider family members in planning for the safety and wellbeing of the children.
- Ensure that the children have a say in the plans made about them.

Meetings are organised by an Independent FGC Coordinator and the family has time in private to make their plans for their children once they have heard about professional concerns and about resources available to them. For more information about the local FGC Service and links to further information about Family Group Conferences from other organisations please see our ***Family Group Conference leaflet***.

Ongoing assessment and support for family and friends carers

Occasionally, the concerns are so serious, or the parents' difficulties are such, that it is agreed that the child is better off living with a family

member. In such cases there will be a clear agreement about the arrangements made between the parents, the family carers and the social worker and, where the child is old enough, the child/young person. In such cases the family carers may claim Child Benefit and may be able to claim other welfare benefits. In these cases the social work manager may agree to provide financial assistance if this is needed, dependent on the individual family circumstances and the needs of the child.

Very occasionally, the concerns are so serious, or the parents cannot reach an agreement about who the child should live with, that it is agreed that the only way to protect a child - other than for the social worker to apply for them to be taken into care - is for a family member to apply for a legal order, either a Child Arrangement Order or a Special Guardianship, that gives them legal parental responsibility. In such cases, the family carers are assessed for their suitability to look after the child on a permanent basis – our ***What makes a suitable family and friends carer leaflet*** provides more information about this assessment and what makes a suitable family and friends carer. Once approved and caring for a child with an Order carers may receive help, including financial support, as part of a Special Guardianship Support Plan. Financial support may include help with legal fees and regular payment based on fostering allowances. Our ***Financial Support leaflets (SGO and CAO)*** provide the detail of our financial support policy.

Sometimes when social workers apply to the court for a child to be taken into care, the child may live with a family member and the court may make an Interim Care Order during the

court proceedings. The family carers are then assessed and approved as 'kinship foster carers'. To be approved as long term foster carers for the child the carers must meet the same standards as unrelated foster carers and undertake the same mandatory training and they will receive the same fostering allowance and support. It is only in exceptional circumstances that we would expect the need for a Care Order at the end of care proceedings if the plan is for the child to remain with the family member. Usually we will be working with the family to reach agreement about a Child Arrangement Order or Special Guardianship Order because that supports a more normalised family life for the child and enables to family carer to have parental responsibility.

Private fostering

This is a private arrangement where a child aged under 16 (or under 18 if disabled) is cared for by someone who does not have parental

responsibility and who is not a close relative. The child may, for example, be living with a family friend. If the arrangement lasts for 28 days or more it needs to be assessed by the Children's Social Work Service. The carer is not "approved" in the same way as a foster carer is but advice and support is available if necessary. The social worker may assess the child as a "child in need", and provide a plan to provide services / support for the child and family. For more about the local authority's role in relation to private fostering see **Information Leaflet 5**.

Useful contacts

Our **Useful contacts leaflet** provides details of other useful agencies for information, advice and guidance for family and friend carers.