

# Your child could be taken into care

Here's what **you**  
**need** to know



# Your child could be taken into care



Your local authority is very worried that your child is not being looked after properly or is out of control. So they are thinking about whether to ask a court if your child should be taken into care.

In the next few days, you will get a “**letter before proceedings**” from your local authority. You may have already got one. This letter explains why they think your child is not being looked after properly. It also tells you to come to a meeting to talk about the way you look after your child.

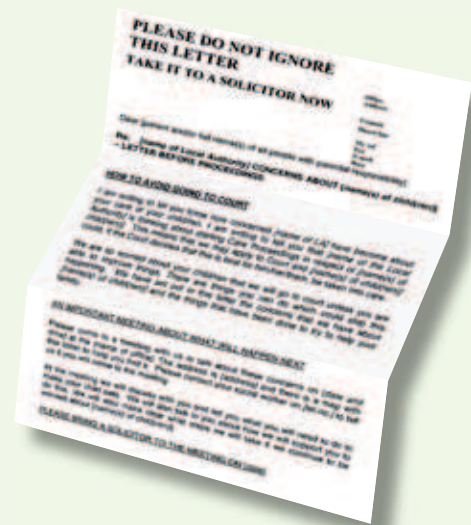
**If you do not follow the instructions in this letter, you may have to go to court and your child could be taken into care.**

## What you need to do

If you want to have a say in how your child is looked after, it's up to you to work with your local authority to deal with their concerns.

You must show them that you understand why they are worried and that you will do something about it.

You should try to get a solicitor **now** to help you. Information on where to find one is in this leaflet.



**You will receive a letter before proceedings**

# Your child could be taken into care

## How this pack can help

The pack tells you:

- about the legal process local authorities have to follow when they think your child is not being looked after properly
- what each stage of the process is
- what you must do at each stage
- what the local authority will do, and
- who can help you.

**Don't forget:** if you ignore the letter before proceedings, your local authority will probably ask a court to take your child into care.

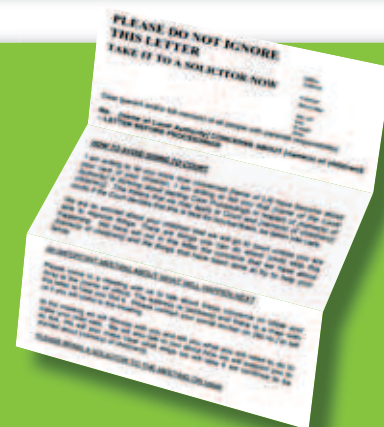
**YOU SHOULD SEE A SOLICITOR NOW**

This information pack is for guidance only and is not a full statement of the law. You should get legal advice about your own situation from a qualified solicitor.

# The process – Overview

## Letter before proceedings

Local authorities send a letter before court proceedings when they are worried about how a child is being looked after. It is often sent after the local authority has drawn up a plan for your child to be kept safe and well cared for but they are still concerned. The letter is a final notice for parents. If you don't follow its instructions, you may have to go to court and your child could be taken into care.



## Pre-proceedings meeting

The letter asks you to come to a pre-proceedings meeting with your local authority to talk about the situation. At the meeting, you will talk about how to change the way you look after your child and how the local authority can support you to do this. If you agree some changes, these will be written down in a formal agreement that you and the local authority have to follow. If you don't agree, your local authority will probably ask the court to take your child into care.



## Keeping to the agreement

You must keep to any agreement you make at the pre-proceedings meeting and the local authority should keep to any agreements they make too. You will probably be asked to go to review meetings to check you are keeping to the agreement.



## Going to court

If you don't keep to the agreement or there are still serious or new concerns, your local authority will apply to a court to start care proceedings. You will have to go to court – possibly several times until the court makes its decision about your child's future.



**If your local authority thinks your child's situation is urgent, they may ask the court to make a decision about your child sooner, without going through all the steps above.**

# The process – Overview

At the end of this process, one of these things will happen.

**Your child stays with you under a new agreement about how you will look after them.** If you keep to the agreement, your child should stay with you. If you don't keep to it, you may have to go back to court and your child could be taken into care.

OR

**Your child moves in with a friend or family member.** This can be for a short time to help you make changes to your life so that you can look after your child better: or it can be permanent.

OR

**Your child goes into care.** If you can't agree how you will change the way you look after your child and there's no suitable friend or family member, the court will tell your local authority to find a place for your child to live. This will be either with a foster family or in a children's home. This could be for a long time, possibly many months, until the court decides whether your child can live with you or needs to live with someone else.

OR

**If your child goes into care, the local authority will continue to work with you so that your child can return home, but a time will come when decisions have to be made about the future of your child.** If your child cannot return home to you the other options are that they stay in long term fostering; go to live with a friend or another family member under a residence order or special guardianship order, go to live in a children's home or be adopted. **You can read more about what this means on page 22 and 23.**

# Letter before proceedings – Essentials

## What you need to know

- The letter before proceedings is a formal letter. It asks you to come to a meeting with your local authority to talk about the care of your child because they are worried that your child is not being looked after properly or is out of control.
- The letter explains why your local authority thinks this. If you don't agree with the local authority, the meeting is your opportunity to say why you disagree.
- The local authority has already tried other ways to make sure your child isn't at risk of harm – like through your child's social worker.
- If you don't come to the meeting, your local authority is very likely to go to court about your child. This could mean he or she is taken into care. Remember, you are entitled to free legal help.

## What you need to do

- Read the letter carefully to make sure you understand what the local authority has said it is worried about and what they want you to do to make things better.
- Make an appointment now to see a solicitor. Take the letter with you as this will help the solicitor to understand the situation better. If there are things you don't understand, the solicitor can explain them. The solicitor may go with you to the meeting with the local authority and help you get your views across. You won't have to pay for the solicitor's help if you have parental responsibility. You may also want to take a friend or supporter with you, to help remember what was said and what you need to do.

**If at any stage you do not understand something, you MUST tell your solicitor or the social worker. Make a note of it here.**



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Letter before proceedings – Essentials

Check when the meeting is and make sure you can go. If you really can't make it, then contact your child's social worker straight away to arrange a different date. The phone number to call is on the letter.

You can choose a solicitor from the list which is included with your letter. Otherwise, Community Legal Advice (which offers free and confidential legal help direct to the public) can provide you with contact details for other solicitors. You can contact them on 0845 345 4 345 or visit their website at [www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk](http://www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk).

## Who has parental responsibility?

- The child's mother;
- The child's father if he is or was married to the mother at any time after the child's birth or if he is registered as the child's father on the birth certificate if the registration took place after 1st December 2003, or who have acquired parental responsibility by formal agreement with the mother or by court order;
- Step parents who have acquired parental responsibility by formal agreement with both parents or by court order;
- Anyone else with a residence order or special guardianship order in respect of the child, such as another family member;
- Anyone appointed as the child's guardian after the death of a parent provided the appointment has taken effect.

**If at any stage you do not understand something, you MUST tell your solicitor or the social worker. Make a note of it here.**

---

---

---

---

---

**Don't forget:** If you ignore the letter before proceedings, your local authority will probably ask a court to take your child into care. If you've got any questions about the letter before proceedings that you would like to ask your solicitor, keep a note of them here.

# Letter before proceedings – The details

## **Why has my local authority sent me a letter before proceedings?**

If you get a letter before proceedings, it's because your local authority thinks your child is not being looked after properly or is out of control, and they are considering asking the court if they can take your child into care. The letter explains why they think this.

In every case, the reasons will be different. Sometimes it might be to do with your lifestyle. Sometimes it is because of your child's health or because they are not going to school. Focus on what the letter tells you – not on other things that you think might be problems.

## **What happens if I don't follow the instructions in the letter?**

If you don't go to the meeting that the letter asks you to go to, your local authority will almost certainly apply to the court to start care proceedings.

## **What are care proceedings?**

Care proceedings are a formal process where a local authority asks a court to have your child taken into care.

- this would mean they would live with someone else. This can be for just a few weeks or until the court makes a final decision, which could be many months, and;
- gives the local authority "parental responsibility" for your child – this means that the local authority gets the legal right to make decisions about your child's life, like whether they get medical treatment or where they go to school.

## **If I get a letter before proceedings, does it automatically mean my child will be taken into care?**

No. It gives you a last chance to show your local authority that you are willing to agree to make changes to the way you look after your child. If you don't take this chance, then your local authority will almost certainly start care proceedings.

## **Why are local authorities allowed to do this?**

Local authorities have a legal duty to "safeguard, protect and promote the welfare of children" in their area. If a local authority thinks that a child is at risk of harm or neglect, it has to take action.

Your child's social worker will explain why your local authority thinks your child is not being looked after properly or is out of control and what you can do about it. They will suggest things you can do to change the way you look after your child.

If your local authority thinks you are not changing the way you look after your child, it will send a letter before proceedings.

## **What do I have to do next?**

You must go to the meeting your local authority has asked you to attend. The letter tells you when and where it is.

At the meeting, you can have your say about how your child should be looked after and put your side of the story across. Read carefully what your local authority has said in the letter about why they think your child is not being looked after properly, and decide whether or not you agree with them. If you agree, think about what you could do to change. If you don't agree, you will need to say why.



# Letter before proceedings – The details

Before that meeting, you also need to get help from a solicitor and ask them to come to the meeting with you.

## **Why do I need a solicitor?**

You need a solicitor for two reasons:

1. Your solicitor will listen to what you say and help explain your point of view to your local authority.
2. The law about when a child can be taken into care is very complicated. Your solicitor can explain it to you and make sure your local authority is following the law.

At the pre-proceedings meeting, your local authority will have their solicitor with them.

## **How much will a solicitor cost?**

Provided you have parental responsibility you don't have to pay the solicitor for coming to the pre-proceedings meeting. This is because you can get legal aid. To get legal aid, all you need to do is take your letter before proceedings and some ID (driving licence, passport, etc) with you when you meet your solicitor. The solicitor will then apply for legal aid for you.

## **How do I choose a solicitor?**

When you get the letter before proceedings, you will get a list of qualified solicitors you can use. But if you don't want to choose one of them, ask Community Legal Advice for names and contact details of other solicitors. You can call Community Legal Advice on 0845 345 4 345 or visit [www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk](http://www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk)

You can also visit [www.lawsociety.org.uk](http://www.lawsociety.org.uk) (select the 'I need a solicitor' tab on the right) You need a solicitor that specialises in child care law. This is because it is a very complicated subject. So even if you have used a different solicitor in other situations, you should find

someone who knows this area of the law.

## **What information will I need to give my solicitor?**

Your solicitor might also ask you for other information apart from the letter before proceedings and ID – such as documents that your child's social worker has given you, school reports or medical information. If you have the information the solicitor asks for, you should give it to them.

**Remember your solicitor is there to help you, so give them as much information as possible.**

## **I don't agree with what the letter says – what can I do?**

If you disagree with what the letter says, you will have a chance to say why at the meeting. Tell your solicitor what you disagree with. They can help you explain your point.

## **Do I have to tell anyone about this?**

No, but it's often best to talk to your child's other parent or a friend or family member you trust about the fact that you've had this letter. It can be difficult to talk about it, but they can support you and listen to you. They can also help you come up with ideas of how to change the way you look after your children.

**Remember, getting a letter before proceedings does not mean your child will automatically go into care.**

**You need to show to your local authority that you are willing to work with them to take steps to change the way you look after your child.**

# Pre-proceedings meeting – Essentials

## What you need to know

- **The pre-proceedings meeting is NOT just another meeting with children’s services or a social worker.** It’s a really important part of the process the local authority uses to decide whether or not to go to court about your child.
- The aim of the meeting is to discuss what you can do to look after your child better and what help your local authority will give you. If you agree some changes, these will be written down in a formal agreement that you and the local authority have to follow.
- You will have a chance to give your side of the story and say what you think is the best way to look after your child.
- If you can’t agree on how to look after your child better, your local authority will probably ask a court to take your child into care.

**Make a list of anything the local authority has asked you to bring to the meeting so you don’t forget it on the day.**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Pre-proceedings meeting – Essentials

## What you need to do

- Attend the meeting and take anything the local authority has asked you to bring.
- Before the meeting, think about what the local authority wrote in the letter. If you don't agree or have ideas about what you could do to change the way you look after your child, tell your solicitor about them.
- You could also ask for a family group conference which is a meeting of your whole family to help you all to take the lead in making a safe plan for your child.
- Listen to your solicitor and let them speak for you as much as possible.

**The aim of the meeting is to make a formal agreement of things you will do to look after your child better and things that your local authority must do to help you. Make a note of the things you have to do here.**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



# Pre-proceedings meeting – The details

## How is it different from other meetings?

It's different because if you don't agree any changes to how your child is looked after, the local authority is very likely to ask a court for permission to take your child into care.

## Who will be there?

At the meeting, there will be several people from the local authority:

- Your child's social worker
- The manager of your local authority's children's services
- A local authority solicitor
- Your solicitor should be there with you

**You should not take your child to the meeting. Ask someone you trust to look after your child while you are at the meeting. If you cannot find anyone to look after your child, tell your local authority as soon as possible. They may be able to find someone to help.**

# Pre-proceedings meeting – The details

## What do I have to do in the meeting?

In the meeting, you will:

- have to answer questions about the way you look after your child
- be asked if you agree with the suggestions your local authority make about how to change the way you look after your child. You may prefer your solicitor to answer some of the questions for you. They can also say how you want to change the way you look after your child and any other ideas you think will help.

**Try to keep calm and follow what is being said. It might be difficult but if you stick to the facts, you will help the meeting to focus on your child.**

## How can I prepare for the meeting?

Your local authority will normally send you and your solicitor an agenda for the meeting. This will say what the local authority wants to talk about. You can use this and the letter before proceedings to help be ready. Read carefully what your local authority has said in the letter about why they think your child is not being looked after properly or is out of control.

Check where the meeting is and what time you need to be there. Work out how you will get there in plenty of time, and who will look after your child during the meeting.



# Keeping to the agreement – Essentials

## What you need to know

- At the pre-proceedings meeting, you agreed what you would do to change the way you looked after your child. This was written down in a formal agreement.
- If you don't keep to the agreement, your local authority will almost certainly ask the court if they can remove your child from your care.
- You will have to go to meetings with your local authority to show that you are keeping to the agreement.

## What you need to do

- Stick to your part of the agreement. That includes making sure you go to appointments arranged by your child's social worker or other people like doctors, schools or support groups.
- Keep records of what you've done as your part of the agreement. It will help you when you go to meetings with your local authority about the agreement.
- If you find it difficult to keep to any bits of the agreement, tell your child's social worker as soon as possible. They may be able to change it or offer you extra help.





## Further frequently asked questions:

### What is the agreement?

The agreement is a document that says what you have agreed with the local authority needs to be done to look after your child and make sure that your child is protected. It is a formal record of what you agreed with your local authority at the pre-proceedings meeting.

### What can it include?

An agreement can include all sorts of things. Some of these are things the parents must do. For example:

- make sure their child goes to school every day
- take their child to a friend or family member when the parent goes to work or college
- meet a health visitor every week to check on the child's health
- see a drug and alcohol adviser.

It might also include things that the child's social worker must do, for example:

- ask a health visitor to visit the child or ask a drug and alcohol adviser to visit the parents.

Make sure you understand exactly what you have to do as part of the agreement. Don't agree to anything you can't do.

### What happens if I don't keep to the agreement?

If you don't keep to the agreement, the local authority will almost certainly ask a court for permission to take your child into care.

### How will my local authority check I'm keeping to it?

You will have to go to regular meetings with your local authority. At the meetings, you will be asked about what you've done to keep to the agreement. The local authority will also ask people you had to meet, like health visitors, to tell them if you have met them, and what they think about your child's situation.

### How do I prove I'm keeping to it?

You should keep notes about when you have done things that are part of the agreement. Use the table on the previous page to help.



## Further frequently asked questions:

### **My circumstances have changed and I can't do something that was on the agreement. What can I do instead?**

If you have a good reason why you can't do something that was on the agreement, you should tell your child's social worker as soon as possible. They might be able to get the agreement changed, or think of something else you could do instead to help your child.

You should also tell your solicitor.

### **My child's social worker was supposed to do something as part of the agreement, but they haven't done it. What should I do?**

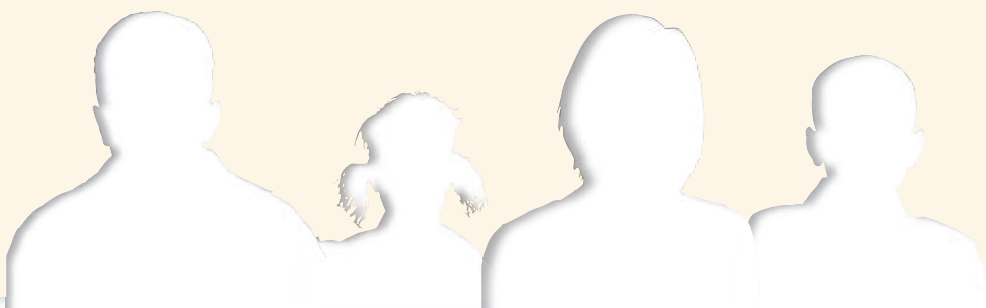
If your child's social worker hasn't done something they are supposed to do, you should call them and ask them why. If you think they are not helping you, you can ask to speak to the manager of children's services at your local authority.

You should also make a note of it and tell your solicitor.

### **What else can I do to help show the local authority I can look after my child well?**

One good way of showing the local authority you are looking after your child well is to do other things that aren't part of the agreement. For example, you could let your child join an after-school club that they are interested in.

Your child's social worker might be able to suggest organisations that can help you. You could also ask family and friends to help you with child care if you feel you need a break. Don't be afraid to ask for more help if you need it.



# Going to court – Essentials

## What you need to know

Going to court is a formal process, but cases about taking children into care are not like criminal trials. Most of the people there will be directly involved in your case. Judges or magistrates make decisions on what will be best for your child.

The only other people who might sometimes be there are reporters from the media. The media are allowed to attend most family court hearings now but there are limits on what they can report, for example, they may not always be able to publish details of what happened in court and what was said in evidence – especially in cases about children. Reporters are not allowed to publish any personal information that could reveal your identity.

**If you want to know more about this, ask your solicitor or a member of court staff for the leaflet EX711 “Can the media attend my court case?”**

You will be able to have your say through a solicitor or barrister.

- Your child will be asked for their views before the court hearing by a children’s guardian – an independent person who will then tell the court what your child’s views and feelings are.
- You may have to go to court several times, so that the judge or magistrates can get all the facts about your case. The judge or magistrates might ask you and /or your child to come to other appointments (known as assessments) with people like child psychologists or adult psychiatrists to discuss your child’s care or needs. They will also ask for a written report. Your solicitor would receive a copy and discuss it with you.
- The decision about what happens to your child will be made by the judge or magistrates – not by your local authority.

## What you need to do

- Make sure you go to court. As soon as you are told when you have to go to court, make a note of it.

Date of court hearing:

---

Time of hearing:

---

Court address and bus/train details:

---

---

Date of court hearing:

---

Time of hearing:

---

Court address and bus/train details:

---

---

# Going to court – Essentials

- Think about how you will get there, what you will need to bring. You should not take your child to court. Someone else will need to look after your child and it may be a long day.
- If you cannot find anyone to look after your child, tell your local authority as soon as possible. They may be able to find someone to help.

## **On the day, make sure you get to court in plenty of time.**

- If the judge or magistrates ask for assessments to be made, you must help the people making the assessment to get the information they ask for.
- Keep any appointments with your child's social worker or other people (like health visitors or drug and alcohol workers) during the court process. Also, if your child lives at home, you are responsible for making sure they are able to meet the children's guardian, who will represent your child in court.

**The court process can take several months before a decision is made. During that time, you may have to meet different people or arrange for your child to do so. Use this space to keep a note of who you've met and why – so you can refer to it with your solicitor or in court.**

---

---

---

---

---

## Further Frequently asked questions:

### Why do I have to go court?

If you don't agree with the local authority's view on how you should change the way you look after your child, or don't keep to an agreement you have made with them, or your local authority continues to have concerns about the way you look after your child, your local authority will almost certainly apply to the court about your child. They will ask the court for permission to take your child into care or to get legal rights to make decisions about your child's life and what they do.

If your local authority thinks your child is in serious danger of being harmed, they can apply to court at any time without making an agreement.

### How do I know when to go?

Your solicitor will tell you. The local authority may also send you a letter. You may not get much warning, but you must still attend.

### What happens at court?

At court, the judge or magistrates will ask your local authority to explain why they think your child should be taken into care. You will also be asked what you think. In general, you should let your solicitor answer the questions, because they know how to put your points across in the right way. But sometimes the judge or magistrate will speak to you.

Because cases about taking children into care are very important, you will normally go to court more than once. After you go for the first time, the judge or magistrate will want to get more information. They may ask for some assessments to be made to help them decide.

### Who decides what happens to my child?

The judge or magistrates decide what happens – not your local authority.

### What decisions can they make?

They can decide that:

- your child will stay with you
- your child will move to live with a friend or family member
- your child will go into care
- you have a right to argue against this in court

**You can read more about these types of decisions on page 5.**

### Who will be at court?

- A judge or magistrates
- You and your solicitor
- Your local authority's solicitor
- Your child's social worker
- A children's guardian – this is explained in the next section
- Your child's solicitor.

In general, your child should not go to court with you, but sometimes the judge may want to see your child.

## Further Frequently asked questions:

### What is a children's guardian and why must my child meet one?

A children's guardian is appointed by the court to work out what the best thing would be for your child. They do not work for your local authority.

Their job involves meeting your child, meeting you and other members of your family. They may also meet your child's teacher, social worker and doctor. By talking to all these people, they try to work out:

- what your child thinks about the way they are looked after
- where your child would like to live.

They then write a report for the court setting out your child's views and saying what they think would be best for your child. Their view may not be the same as what your child says they want.

### Why does my child need their own solicitor?

To make sure your child's views are heard by the judge or magistrates, your child should have their own solicitor. Normally, the children's guardian will appoint a solicitor for your child and give the solicitor their report. The solicitor will then use this report to explain your child's views.

If your child is old enough, they will be allowed to speak to their solicitor directly.

### What assessments will a court ask for and why?

A court can ask for lots of different assessments of you and your child. For example:

- the court can ask for assessments of your child's health or development

- If you agree they can ask for your child to visit a child psychologist or education expert.
- If you agree, they can also ask for you to be assessed by health or mental health experts.
- They can ask for your family members to be assessed to see if any of them would be able to look after your child.

The court does this to try and find out all the facts about you and your child to help make the right decision.

If the court asks you to go to an assessment, or allow your child to be assessed, you must do it. If you don't, the court will want to know why and may have to make a decision about your child without this information.

### How long does it take?

It normally takes about nine to twelve months for a court to decide what will happen to your child.

### What happens to my child until the court makes a decision?

Until the court makes a final decision, it will decide if your child will either:

- stay with you
- stay with a member of your family, or
- be taken into care

This depends on whether the court thinks your child is in danger of being harmed if they stay with you in the short term. If your child is taken into care, you will normally be allowed to see them. The local authority must agree with you when you can see your child. If your child stays with you, you are responsible for making sure your child goes to all the appointments arranged for them.

# Words and phrases you may hear

## Abuse

The law says there are four types of child abuse: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. If a child is being abused in any of these ways, the local authority will take action and will think about taking the child into care.

## Adoption

A child becomes adopted when a court makes an adoption order. The order can be made even if the child's parents do not agree. The adoption order removes parental responsibility from the child's parents and passes it to the adopters. They become the child's parents and are responsible for all aspects of the child's care and for making all the key decisions about them. The birth parents are no longer the child's parents and cannot have him or her back.

## Assessment

A court can order assessments to take place as part of making its decision about how a child should be looked after. These assessments involve professionals such as doctors, psychologists or counsellors meeting a child or the child's parents and finding out information to report back to the court.

## Care

Care normally refers to what happens when a court decides that the child should not live with their parents. The child goes into care and lives in either a foster home or a children's home. It can be for a short while or for some years.

## Court order

A court order is something a judge or magistrates can make. It can be about all sorts of subjects from where a child should live to who is allowed to have contact with a child in care.

Examples include: a care order or a supervision order. If someone does not follow a court order, they can be taken back to court.

## Harm

If a child has suffered significant harm (ill-treatment), or is thought to be at risk of significant harm, the local authority will get involved in the child's life to try to protect them. This can be the start of care proceedings.

## Letter before proceedings

A letter before proceedings is a formal letter. It invites you to come to a meeting with your local authority because they are worried about your child.

## Long-term fostering

This is when a looked-after child stays with a foster carer until they reach adulthood.

## Neglect

Neglect is when a child does not get the care they need. That includes food, warmth, safety, education and general attention.

## Parental responsibility

Parental responsibility is the legal right to make decisions about your child's life. A child's mother gets parental responsibility when their child is born. If the child's father is married to the mother they will have parental responsibility or if they are named on the child's birth certificate and the child was born after 1st December 2003 they will have parental responsibility too (see page 7 for more information). Sometimes a local authority will ask a court to give them parental responsibility for a child who they may or may not then take into care.

## Pre-proceedings meeting

A pre-proceedings meeting is a key part of the process the local authority uses to decide whether or not to go to court about your child. The aim is to agree how you will change the way you look after your child.

## Residence order

This is a legal document from a court which says who a child should live with. That person will have parental responsibility for the child. It will usually last until the child is 16.

## Special guardianship

A family member, family friend or the child's foster carer can ask the court to become the child's Special Guardian. A Special Guardian has parental responsibility for the child. They become responsible for everything to do with the child's care and for taking decisions to do with their upbringing. However, they cannot consent to the child's adoption, give them a new name or remove them from the UK for longer than 3 months. A Special Guardianship Order lasts until the child turns 18.

# Who's who?

## Child's guardian

A children's guardian is an independent person appointed by the court to work out what the best thing would be for your child. They do not work for your local authority. Their job involves meeting your child, meeting you and other members of your family. They may also meet your child's teacher, social worker and doctor. They then write a report for the court saying what they think would be best for your child.

## Children's services

The part of your local authority that deals with all the local authority's services for children. It used to be known as "social services."

## Judge

A judge is the person who makes decisions in a county or crown court.

## Magistrate

Magistrates make decisions in magistrates' and family proceedings courts. Normally there are three magistrates who work as a "bench". This means they make decisions together.

## Family Group Conference

A Family Group Conference is a meeting that brings together friends and extended family in a situation where there is a problem in a family, usually involving a child. An independent person called a coordinator brings the family and friends together.

## Guardian ad litem

Legal matters can be difficult to understand. If the court does not think that you can make decisions about your court case, the court may decide that you need a "guardian ad litem" who can tell your solicitor what to do. A guardian must ask you about what you want but must make decisions in your best interests. A guardian ad litem can only make decisions about what is happening in your court case. When there is nobody else able and willing, the official solicitor can act as guardian if asked by the court to do so.

## Solicitor/barrister

A solicitor or barrister is someone qualified in the law who helps people put their side of the story in court and in other situations where they need help. Solicitors and barristers are sometimes called lawyers.



# Where can I get further help?

## Legal aid

Legal aid helps people to get free legal advice when they cannot afford to pay for it themselves. Where a parent has received a letter before court proceedings from a local authority they are entitled to free legal advice.

There are lots of organisations that can help parents who are going through care proceedings. Here are some of them:

## Community Legal Advice

Free, confidential and independent legal advice online. You can also find a legal adviser in your area.

- Telephone: 0845 345 4 345 (calls charged at local rate)
- Website: [www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk](http://www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk)

## Family Justice Council

You might find it helpful to go through the Family Justice Council's booklet "The Court and your child: When social workers get involved" with your solicitor. Your solicitor can get a copy for you from the internet: [www.family-justice-council.org.uk](http://www.family-justice-council.org.uk) on the publications page.

## Family Rights Group

A charity that advises parents and other family members whose children are involved with or require social care services.

- Confidential advice line: freephone 0808 801 0366 ( Lines open 10am-3:30pm Monday to Friday)
- Website: [www.frg.org.uk](http://www.frg.org.uk)

## Parentline Plus

A national charity that works for, and with, parents.

- Telephone helpline: 0808 800 2222 (calls are free from BT landlines and most mobile networks. Lines open 24/7)
- Website: [www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk)

## Refugee Council

Provides help and support for asylum seekers and refugees who are involved in care proceedings over the phone or through its offices across the country.

- Telephone: 020 7346 6700 (calls charged at national rate)
- Website: [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk)

## Samaritans

Confidential emotional support on any issue. Available 24 hours a day.

- Telephone: 08457 90 90 90 (calls charged at local rate.)
- Website: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

## Women's Aid

Support for women and children affected by domestic violence. 24 hour telephone helpline available and contact details of 500 local support services.

- Telephone: 0808 2000 247 (calls free from a BT landline)
- Website: [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)

## Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

Free face-to-face information and advice on legal, money and other problems. Find your local CAB at [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk) or in the phone book. Or go to [www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk) for reliable information.









