**Special Guardianship Order**

**Information Booklet**



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# What is a Special Guardianship Order (SGO)?

Special Guardianship provisions were introduced with the aim of placing a child with a non-parent with a degree of permanence which is greater than a Child Arrangement Order but it is less final than a full Adoption. A key difference between Adoption and Special Guardianship is that with a Special Guardianship Order birth parents who have parental responsibility (PR) technically keep some of this PR, whereas in adoption all PR is legally removed.

***Where there is an SGO, PR is shared between the birth parents and the SGO carers but this sharing is not equal, let’s explain….***

* A Special Guardian has “**overarching”** parental responsibility for the child named in the order –in other words they have the largest share of the PR for the child and are responsible to act as their parent.
* As long as there are no other court orders in force***, a Special Guardian is entitled to exercise PR independently of any other person who has parental responsibility*** (ie birth parents) for the child (apart from any other Special Guardian).

The **limits** on this parental responsibility are that no person may:

* Cause the child to be known by a new surname
* Change the child’s stated religion (until such time as the child may make their own decision)
* Remove the child from the United Kingdom for a period greater than **3** months – without either the written consent of every person with parental responsibility or permission from the Court.

# **Pre Order**

If as a prospective guardian you decide you wish to make a SGO application, the Social Worker responsible for the child will ensure that an assessment of your capacity to care for the child for the whole of their childhood is completed. This may be done with the support of the Connected Person’s Team if they are involved or directly by the child’s Social Worker. If you are not sure how this is going to be managed please ask the child’s Social Worker and they can explain who will undertake this and why.

 The child’s Social Worker will then prepare a Special Guardianship Support Plan and you should see and be asked to comment on ***both of these documents.***

The assessment will include a number of visits to the prospective guardian, this will allow the Social Worker to consider the child’s story and their needs both now and in the future. It will also document the story of the prospective guardian/s and how they can meet those needs. The process will also allow the prospective guardian time to reflect on their application and consider what may be needed to help them in their role as a Special Guardian.

It is essential that the SGO Assessment and Support Plan are checked and understood by all parties as they contain the essential information needed to support both the prospective guardian and the child after the order is made.

The SGO Finance Officer and the Team Manager for the Post Adoption and SGO Support Team will also need to agree the SGO Support Plan.

It is recommended that a prospective guardian seek independent legal advice when applying for a Special Guardianship Order. If the Local Authority is supporting this process then you will be offered assistance with legal costs for an initial consultation and further support as deemed necessary. This funding will need to be agreed and monitored by the child’s Social Worker in order to ensure that best value is achieved.

Once a Special Guardianship Order is granted there will be no statutory social care involvement unless indicated by the Court or for pre-existing needs which are agreed with the Post Adoption and SGO Support Team before the Order is made.

Any further social care support will need to be requested by **YOU** or any professionals supporting you (such as the child’s school) at any time during their childhood. This is done by making a referral to the Post Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Team (see page 11 for further details). Support with any safeguarding or crisis issues should be reported through to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) by calling 0300 126 1000

**Financial Support**

As part of the assessment, you will be informed of what financial support (if any) is available to you. In most circumstances some support will be offered. This is dependent on specific circumstances and the Financial Officer will advise the Social Worker and you should be informed prior to the Order being granted in Court of exactly what the financial support will be.

If the Local Authority is supporting the SGO as part of care proceedings and the child is currently in foster care either with you as a Connected Person foster carer, or with another foster carer, the allowance currently paid as fostering allowance will remain at the same level except for holiday payments and the amount of child benefit that you can claim after the SGO will be deducted from the allowance.

**If there are any issues at any point where you appear to be paid more than you were expecting please contact the Local Authority immediately because this overpayment will be claimed back.**

There will be an annual review of your finances for which you will need to offer evidence, but usually the allowance will remain the same until the child reaches 18 years of age.

# Contact

As part of the assessment process contact with the child’s birth parents will be considered, below are some suggestions that could prove supportive to this.

Contact can be positive for children and can contribute to supporting a young person’s sense of identity. Sometimes this may be once or twice a year just so that they have a sense of who their parents are and sometimes it will need to be more often if you are hoping to keep up a relationship with the child and their parent/s.

Contact for families can be a difficult area to manage; meeting the needs of the child as well as the needs of their birth parent. Contact can raise a number of feelings especially when you are related or close to one another. If possible contact should be ***in a predictable pattern for the child:*** it is important to consider the ability of birth parents to commit to the agreed level of contact, so that a child is not left disappointed.

The amount of contact should not be so high the child is unsure as to who is their main carer and the decisions for a child should not be overly influenced by a birth parent. The guardian needs to feel able deliver the parenting care to a child and the child needs to know who is/are their ‘go to’ adult/s (ie. the guardian/s).

**The type or amount of contact for the child may change as the child grows. You will need to be prepared to supervise contact where it is safe to do so, even where this may be inconvenient or emotionally hard work for you because of its benefit to the child.**

Things to consider when planning contact arrangements:

**The child’s views**

* What does the child understand about contact and what do they want?
* Contact should be supportive of the child and can provide an opportunity for the child to explore questions about their identity and their history.

**The quality of contact**

* Is the environment supportive of this?
* Does the child feel safe? This is especially important when contact takes place in a home environment where they may have mixed memories or where they may wish to have a safe place away from more difficult memories.

**Structure**

* When parents or others struggle to engage one-to-one with their child it is a good idea to take some pressure off and look at options to have an activity based contact. For example, this could be in a park, soft play centre or bowling.

It is important that you take control of contact and to ensure that your child knows that they are safe, secure and supported. If there are concerns, it is advisable to keep a record of what these are and what appropriate action has been taken by you to support the contact so that it meets the needs of the child.

It may be an idea to maintain a diary especially around contact; think about how does your child behave? Are there any changes to their behaviour around contact? How does the child react in contact? How do they present after the contact and how long does this last? This will help you to build up a picture of the impact of contact so you can support your child. Equally it will also provide evidence to support changes in contact if necessary**.**

**If there are concerns around the child’s safety in relation to contact then you can contact the Post Adoption and Special Guardianship Team for advice and support. Should there be any safeguarding concerns then you should contact Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) on 0300 126 1000**

Unless there is a specific Court directed Contact Order/Child Arrangement Order then decisions around contact are made by you once the SGO order is in force.There is usually a recommended level of contact within the SGO Support Plan but this is not part of the Court Order unless clearly indicated on the Order.

# Post Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Team

The Post Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Team offer support to Special Guardians, children subject to SGO’s and can also offer support to guardian’s pre order where SGO is the plan.

**Special Guardians are entitled to a needs assessment and a financial assessment** **if requested.**

The child’s **placing Local Authority** remains responsible for assessing the support needs for the child for **three years** after the Order is granted. It then becomes the responsibility of the Local Authority in area that the family is living if this is different.

The Post Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Team can offer a range of support. This includes:

* The support of a qualified and experienced Social worker
* Advice on issues around Special Guardianship
* Access to training
* Contact – advice with contact arrangements and mediation where necessary
* Therapeutic support for children
* Support groups
* Peer support
* Support with educational issues
* Access to parenting support groups
* Referral to other agencies
* Financial support where appropriate ( this will be assessed)
* Advice regarding managing difficult behaviours.

**How to make a referral**

* Call the Duty Line on 01604 367301 (open Monday /Wednesday/Friday) from 10am-4pm
* Email postadoption@childrenfirstnorthamptonshire.co.uk
* Submit an online referral by visiting <https://www3.northamptonshire.gov.uk/councilservices/children-families-education/adoption-fostering/adoption/Pages/support-for-adoptive-parents.aspx>

# Therapeutic Parenting

Most mainstream parenting uses ideas of consequences and behavioural approaches to manage behaviour (for example, reward charts, penalties, time out). When children have experienced early trauma (which may include abuse, chronic neglect, exposure to domestic violence and separation, medical intervention etc.) they can struggle to respond to these approaches and need carers who can use ‘**Therapeutic parenting’.**

Many of you will have been on or may consider accessing the ‘**Managing Behaviour with Attachment in Mind’** course. This course is offered through both Northamptonshire County Council Post Adoption and SGO Support Team. The course is based on the principles of **PACE** (Playfulness Acceptance Curiosity Empathy)

PACE is part of the DDP (Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy) model developed by Clinical Psychologist Dr Dan Hughes. PACE is a successful approach to working with children who have experienced trauma and is widely used in helping children with attachment and trauma related difficulties. The PACE model is family based and focuses on the facilitation of the children’s ability to establish a secure attachment with their carer/s.

Parenting with PACE provides appropriate boundaries, together with warmth and nurture. The connection that PACE creates means that this parenting is received as fully unconditional.

The parenting that comes naturally to us can carry with it expectations and sometimes we may express our unconditional love as conditional. PACE represents a different way of parenting, one where unconditional love is expressed through playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy. This approach doesn’t change what we want as parents or what we expect from our children, but it suggests a different way of conveying this; by stopping to be curious, accepting the inner life of the child and understanding how this influences the more externally revealed behaviour we get a deeper level of empathy for our children. When we strive for connection we develop more emotionally resonant relationships where it is also natural to be playful. Trust and security is increased when we connect emotionally with the children. (DDP network 2014).

Being **playful** can be achieved by keeping the tone light and upbeat, smiling, ruffling a child’s hair when walking past, playing hide ’&’seek when they get in from school, or giving a quick hug for no specific reason. Appreciation is better than praise yet praise can be positive when it is kept specific, short, low key or done with pizzazz – a pretend fanfare, whistle, or victory dance when they get their spellings right or remember to pick up their toys.

Examples of ‘playful’ activities can include:

* Bean Bag Game: Place a beanbag or small beany baby toy on your child’s head, give a signal (“when my eye blinks”) or a magic word (“when I say the word ‘bubbles’”) to cue the child to drop the beanbag into your hands (child tilts his head toward you so you can catch the bean bag in your hands). Take turns.
* Cotton Ball Hockey: Lie on the floor on your stomach (or sit with a pillow between you holding the pillow up to eye level). Blow cotton balls back and forth trying to get the cotton ball past the child’s nose and past your nose. You can increase the complexity by saying how many blows can be used to get the cotton ball across the pillow, or by both trying to blow at the same time to keep the cotton ball in the middle. You can increase the structure of this game by using magic or cue words to signal when to start or stop. Remember to keep control of the game and don’t allow the child to control it…keep it structured, but successful, fun and positive.
* Balloon Between Two Bodies: Hold a balloon between you and the child (such as between foreheads, stomachs, shoulders, elbows) and move across the mat without dropping or popping the balloon. See if you can do this without using hands, but use this opportunity to touch your child in a fun and playful way (i.e.: wrap your arms around each other to hold on to the balloon between your stomachs).
* Hand Clapping Games: Older children enjoy these games very much. They can be simple (Patty Cake) or complex (elaborate rhythmic clapping patterns) and can have a variety of chants, for example, Miss Mary Mack or the Sailor Went to Sea.
* Cotton Ball: Touch: Have the child close his eyes. Touch your child gently with a cotton ball have the child open his eyes and indicate where he was touched.

The next principle in the PACE model of parenting is that of **‘acceptance’**.Acceptingthe child for who they are, not what they achieve is important for hurt children. This does not mean that their behaviour has to be accepted! Remain calm and say something like, ‘I can see you are upset about this. That doesn’t mean you are allowed to hurt people.

The third principle is to ‘be curious’; wondering aloud why the child is behaving in a certain way - can be helpful. ‘I wonder why you are shouting so much today’, ‘isn’t it amazing that you just remembered that (particular event) today,’ can help a child reflect on their actions and is usually more effective in raising awareness than asking directly what’s wrong. A child who has ‘switched off’ their feelings may not know what is bothering them, they may say something trivial, or withhold the information through lack of trust. Being curious, or making an educated guess (not assuming you know for sure), ‘I’m thinking you might be worried about the spelling gala on Friday’ can be an excellent way to open a discussion, in which you can listen attentively and not interrupt.

**Empathy**, the fourth principle**, is** the most important quality we can have when working with hurt children. To understand the child’s needs we must put ourselves into the child’s shoes. It is important not only to feel empathy but to convey it to the child, ‘I can see that this is hard for you’, ‘your knee is really red, and I bet it hurts.’ Empathy allows the child to feel their feelings, not suppress them. It encourages the release of grief and rage which, if buried, can continue to cause emotional and behavioural problems. Adults should empathise with the child before putting disciplinary measures in place and while employing those measures (e.g. Consequences). The adult must be genuinely empathic, not flippant or sarcastic.

# Post-Adoption and SGO Counselling Service

The Post Adoption and SGO Counselling Service is a free, independent and confidential service that gives you the opportunity to discuss your feelings in a setting where you can feel safe, secure and talk freely.

Who is the counselling service for?

• Birth parents over the age of 13 where the decision has been made for permanence (for their unborn / child)

• Family members over the age of 13 affected by the adoption process

• Foster carers

• Adoptive parents

• Special guardians

• Adopted adults over the age of 18

Is the service confidential?

The counselling is always confidential unless:

• You agree with your counsellor that information can be shared

• Concerns arise about the safety or welfare of a child

• There are safeguarding issues that arise in terms of yourself and/or a child

Get in touch

If you are interested in the Post Adoption and SGO Counselling Service please get in touch: parentcounselling@northamptonshire.gov.uk

# Special Guardianship Support Groups

 The Post Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Team run a support group aimed at providing Special Guardians with both professional and peer support in addition to helping families’ access information and training opportunities. We hold the groups approx. 6 times a year throughout the county.

**The group welcomes all SGO carers and those going through the SGO process. We are also happy for children to attend if necessary**.

The groups are supported by the Post Adoption and SGO Support team and the Looked after Children’s Mental Health Team. We also arrange for guest speakers to cover topics of relevance for families. We hope to offer group training to families alongside the support groups. There is also an information bulletin that goes out every two months to SGO carers, provided that your email address is on the mailing list for this. We always welcome contributions to our newsletter from families.

The aim of the group is to be both supportive and collaborative; it is essential that families are actively involved in the group and the newsletter to allow us to respond to their needs in the most appropriate way.

Feedback from Special guardians whom have attended the group indicates that they feel:

* **Less isolated**
* **Understood**
* **Listened to**
* **Supported**

# Training

There is a wide range of training, both online and group training, available through Northamptonshire County Council which may sometimes be accessible by those holding a Special Guardianship Order. Some of this is delivered by the Post Adoption and SGO Support Team and is available to you at any time.

Should you feel you would benefit from accessing some of the training available please contact the Post Adoption and SGO Support Team to discuss options about how to access this.

**.**

# **Education and Pupil Premium Funding**

Looked-After children (LAC) and Previously Looked after Children (PLAC) are one of the groups of pupils that attract Pupil Premium Plus funding from schools. This is additional funding provided to help improve the attainment of these children and close the attainment gap between them and their peers.

**Previously looked after children are entitled to £2,300 of Pupil Premium funding per year, however this money is directly given to, and overseen, by the school.**

There is no requirement to monitor or supervise how schools use pupil premium funding for previously looked after children, but the Virtual School can provide advice and guidance for schools, parents and carers regarding the education of this group of children.

The difference between pre order Pupil Premium and post order Pupil Premium is that post order the money does not have to be spent specifically just on the child but the child **must** benefit from the funding  i.e. the school can use it for provision of activities and workers that other children may be benefiting too. You are entitled to be told how the funding is being used evidencing that your child is benefiting from it.

For more information, please contact the Virtual School at:**virtualschool@childrenfirstnorthamptonshire.co.uk**

# Resources and Further Information

**Websites and Social Media**

<https://www.facebook.com/growtherapy/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/therapeuticparents/>

[Www.naotp.org.uk](http://www.naotp.org.uk/)

National association of therapeutic parents: [www.grandparentsplus.org.uk](http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk)

Northampton kinship group: awfuljackets@yahoo.co.uk /awfuljumpers@yahoo.co.uk

**Web links**

* Let’s learn Together - <https://www.adoptionuk.org/northern-ireland/letslearn-together>
* ‘Understanding Why’ booklet produced by the National Children’s Bureau <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/ncb_understanding_why1__2_.pdf>
* Special Guardianship: what it is and what it means: [www.corambaaf.org.uk](http://www.corambaaf.org.uk)

**Reports**

Investigating Special Guardianship: experiences, challenges and outcomes, Research report, November 2014, DOE.

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/377448/DFE-RR372_Investigating_special_guardianship.pd> ).

https://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/state-of-the-nation-2018-survey-report

**Therapeutic Books for Children**

* Durant, A. (2004). Always and Forever.
* Haggard, M. E. (2003). Drawing Together to Learn about Feelings.
* Haggard, M. E. (2007). Adopted and Wondering. Drawing Out Feelings
* Sunderland, M. (2000). The Frog Who Longed for the Moon to Smile.
* Sunderland, M. (2001). A Nifflenoo called Nevermind.
* Sunderland, M. (2003). Willy and the Wobbly House.
* Sunderland, M. (2003). The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back.
* Sunderland, M. (2003). How Hattie Hated Kindness.
* Sunderland, M. (2003). Ruby and the Rubbish Bin.
* Whitehouse, E. and Pudney, W. (1998). A Volcano in my Tummy: Helping Children to Handle Anger: A Resource Book for Parents, Caregivers and Teachers.

**Recommended Reading for Carers/Guardians**

* Elliott, A. (2013). Why can’t my child behave? Empathic parenting strategies that work for adoptive and foster families.
* Hughes, D. A. (2006). Building the bonds of attachment: Awakening love in deeply troubled children.
* Hughes D. A. (2009). Attachment focused parenting – effective strategies to care for children.
* Sunderland, M. (2007). What every parents need to know.
* Golding, Kim. Using stories to build bridges with traumatised children
* Sunderland, M. The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back
* Ironside, Virginia. The Huge Bag of Worries
* Naish, Sarah. The A-Z of therapeutic parenting: strategies and solutions

**Benefits**

[www.tax.service.gov.uk/tax-credits-calculator](http://www.tax.service.gov.uk/tax-credits-calculator)

[www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/financial-support/help-with-benefits/disability-living-allowance](http://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/financial-support/help-with-benefits/disability-living-allowance)

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk/benefits](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/benefits)

[www.turn2us.org.uk](http://www.turn2us.org.uk)

**Education**

* <https://www.pac-uk.org/our-services/education/education-resources/>
All about school: for adoptive parents and Special Guardians explains educational processes and school system, for those who may not have recent experience of the education system.
* <https://www.adoptionuk.org/lets-learn-together-ni>
A good Practice Guide for Schools. Understanding and meeting the needs of Children who are Looked after, Fostered, Adopted or otherwise Permanently placed
* Ryan, M. Understanding Why. Understanding attachment and how this can affect education. [www.ncb.org.uk/books](http://www.ncb.org.uk/books)
* Calmer Classrooms

<https://sites.createcdn.net/sitefiles/21/4/7/214711/Useful_information_about_schools.pdf>

* SEN Code of Practice. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398815/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf>
* Grandparents Plus Champions – the vital role of grandparents and the wider family in children’s lives. <https://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/education>
* The Designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children guidance. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683561/The_designated_teacher_for_looked-after_and_previously_looked-after_children.pdf>