

SECTION 20 ACCOMMODATION

Information for Parents, Carers and Families

Newcastle Children's Social Care



WHAT DOES 'SECTION 20' MEAN?

If you sign a section 20 agreement, you are consenting to your child living somewhere else outside of the family home, usually in Local Authority foster care. Section 20 is based on a parent/carer working with the Local Authority*.

As a parent, signing section 20 will mean you are agreeing for the Local Authority to identify a suitable and safe place for your child to live outside of your care.

Under section 20 of the Children Act 1989, the Local Authority has a duty to provide a child with somewhere to live if the child doesn't have a home or a home which is deemed unsafe. This may be because:

- There isn't anyone who has parental responsibility
- The child has been lost or abandoned;
- The person who has been caring for the child can't provide them with a suitable home, whatever the reason for this.
- There is a risk of Significant Harm to the child or young person if they are not accommodated



It is very important that you understand what the section 20 agreement means before you agree to sign it. You have the right to seek legal advice if you wish.

*CSC work with you on behalf of the Local Authority. At times this guide will therefore talk about what the Local Authority will do and this refers to staff in CSC

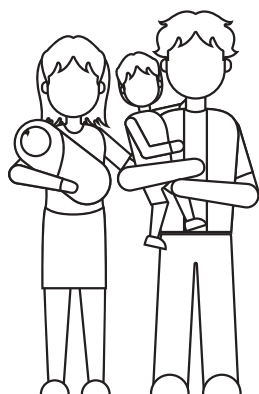


YOUR RIGHTS AS A PARENT

Section 20 accommodation is very different to your child being removed from your care against your will.

Under a Section 20 agreement, the Local Authority do not share parental responsibility for your child. You retain all your legal rights if your child is accommodated under Section 20.

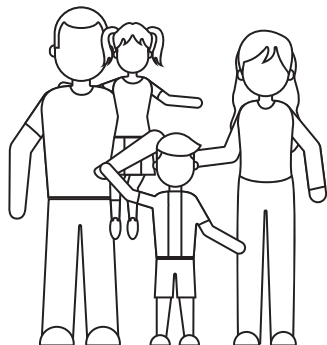
Under section 20(8) any person who has parental responsibility is entitled to withdraw their consent to the section 20 agreement at any time. If a parent or carer wishes to withdraw consent, it is important that you do this as soon as possible. You can withdraw your consent verbally, but it's better to do this in writing.



If the Local Authority does not agree with your decision to remove your child from care, we may take emergency action to safeguard the child by involving the police or applying for an Emergency Protection Order or an Interim Care Order from the court.

This does not affect your right to withdraw your consent to the S.20 agreement.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I DON'T AGREE?



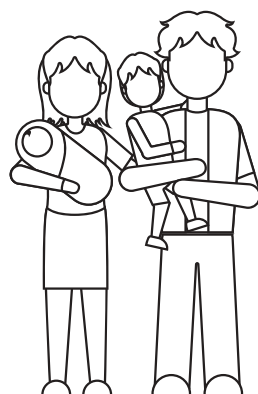
If you don't agree to Section 20 and the Local Authority are concerned that your child will be at risk if they remain at home with you, then we may decide to take the following action:

- Ask the police to take Police Powers of Protection which allows us to accommodate a child for up to 72 hours
- Apply to the Court for an Emergency Protection Order, which lasts for a maximum of 8 days, with a possible extension to a maximum of 15 days
- Apply to the Court for an Interim Care Order.

CAN I WITHDRAW MY CONSENT AND HOW?

Under Section 20(8) of the Children Act 1989, a person with Parental Responsibility can withdraw their consent at any time. You can withdraw your consent verbally, but it's better to do this in writing.

If the Local Authority doesn't feel it is safe to return the child home, then as above, we may seek Police Protection or alternatively make an application to Court and commence Care Proceedings.



WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF ACCOMMODATION THE LOCAL AUTHORITY MAY PROVIDE?

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Family or friends (Kinship Care and Connected Persons)

The Local Authority may place the child with extended family or a family friend. This option is always supported and explored as it allows the child to remain with people they know, often close to their school, wider family and friends.

The social worker will ask you to identify any family members or close family friends who are safe adults that your child knows, who may be able to care for your child. Your child will still be 'Looked After' by the Local Authority and we will still require a section 20 agreement. The social worker will complete assessments of any family members or close family friends you put forward, to make sure that this would be a safe and appropriate option for your child.

Foster care

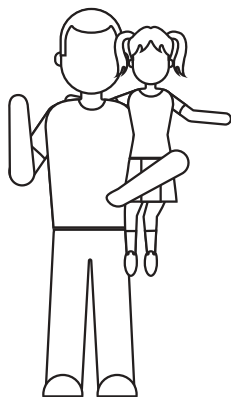
The Local Authority may place a child or young person with a foster carer. They may live alongside the foster carer's own children, or other children who are classed as "looked after".

Residential care

This is commonly where children stay in accommodation with other children. The child or young person will be allocated a key worker who will have regular meetings with them. There is a highly trained and dedicated team to supervise the children throughout the day and night. This option is only used for older children and young people. If your child is 16 or 17 years old your child is able to consent to being accommodated by the Local Authority without your permission. Your child will also be able to leave the accommodation without your consent.

Wherever possible we try to keep children and young people as close to their family, friends, school and local area. Sometimes, due to concerns for safety or risk for the child this is not possible. The social worker will talk to you about where your child will be staying and with whom and this will be reviewed on a regular basis.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM US: ⁰⁶



- We will listen to you and treat you with respect.
- We will provide you with a written copy of the section 20 agreement.
- Family members or close family friends you identify as suitable carers will be fully explored in a timely manner.
- We will, where it is safe and appropriate to do so, prioritise Family Time between you and your child so that you are able to spend quality time together that is meaningful.
- We will make sure you are invited to meetings that relate to your child and their care and we will keep you informed about what is happening.
- We will make sure you are consulted and included in all decisions relating to your child. – Remember, you hold full Parental Responsibility for your child under a Section 20 agreement.
- Where it is safe and appropriate to do so, we will work with you and your family to return your child back to your care.

FURTHER SUPPORT

Whatever the circumstances, your child coming into care can be an emotional, upsetting and/or confusing time. We encourage all parents/carers to seek legal advice and speak to a solicitor so that they are fully informed and have the benefit of independent advice.

While it can be an extremely difficult time, your child's social worker is there to offer advice and support. Section 20 is based on parents and Social Care working together to make sure that the outcomes for a child are the best they can be; and that together, plans are agreed which ensure children are happy, healthy and safe.

The Family Rights Group is a charity providing advice, information and advocacy to parents and families whose children are involved with Children's Services due to welfare needs or concerns. They have comprehensive advice sheets on their website and also a telephone advice line. 0808 801 0366 (Monday to Friday 9.30am to 3pm)

Your Social Worker:

How to contact them:

Useful contact numbers

Initial Response Service (IRS) - 0191 277 2500

Long Term Service - 0191 211 5485

Children in Care & Care Leavers - 0191 278 2700

Children with Disabilities - 0191 277 4700

Children's Safeguarding and Care Standards (IRO Office) - 0191 277 4636

