

YOUR GUIDE TO THE
SPECIAL
GUARDIANSHIP
PROCESS



achieving
for children

If you are reading this you would have already completed a viability assessment. A fuller assessment will follow on from this to assess you either as a 'special guardian' or a 'connected carer'.

We understand there is a lot of information to cover during a sometimes incredibly difficult and emotional time in your life. We have tried to keep this guide as simple as possible so you can understand the role of a special guardian.

This leaflet has been designed to help explain the special guardianship process, what it entails, and what is required from you.

WHAT IS A SPECIAL GUARDIAN?

A special guardian is someone who has received a special guardianship order that means they can provide legal security for children who cannot be cared for in the long term by their birth parents. They are usually someone with a close relationship to the child, such as a family member, former foster carer or a family friend. Special guardianship is a formal court order which places a child with someone permanently and gives this person parental responsibility. While the birth parents retain parental responsibility, the special guardian has overriding parental responsibility.

You will need to get the consent of everyone who has parental responsibility for the child before you make some important decisions, for example:

- changing the child's surname
- taking the child abroad for more than three months
- the child having surgery for reasons other than improving health, such as circumcision, sterilisation or cosmetic surgery

After a special guardianship order is granted, the child will no longer be classified as 'looked after'. The local authority will end statutory involvement, if the special guardian no longer wants any professional support. This means they will no longer have social worker visits, children looked after reviews, health reviews or personal education plan reviews.

A special guardianship order is effective until the child's 18th birthday.

WHY APPLY FOR A SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDER?

- This enables the child to remain within their birth family and thus promotes their family life.
- The child's birth parents retain shared parental responsibility, the child still has a legal link to their parents.
- It gives the special guardian day-to-day responsibility.

THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS: WHAT TO EXPECT

All information relating to you is gathered into a detailed assessment. The categories that the social worker will cover with you during the assessment process follow.

The special guardianship applicant will be required to:

- meet with the assessing social worker on a regular basis. There will be between five and 10 visits throughout the assessment process as there is an approximate 12 week timescale for the assessment to be completed
- complete any homework given by the assessing social worker
- report and share this with the assessing social worker
- share the information with the assessor as outlined below

WE WILL COLLECT THE FOLLOWING RANGE OF INFORMATION ABOUT YOU

- Your full name, address and date of birth.
- Details of your health, supported by a medical report.
- Details of any other adults that live with you.
- Details of any children in your family (whether or not they live with you) and any other children in the home.
- Details of your home and accommodation.
- Local authority checks for any previous involvement from children's services or previous applications to foster or adopt.
- Minimum two personal references, one family reference, employer checks, and an education reference from your child's current school placement.
- An enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check for you and each member of your household aged 18 or over and any other significant adults in the family. Even if you hold an up to date DBS check, we still require our own copy.
- Details of any current or previous marriage, civil partnership or similar relationship.

WE WILL ALSO NEED FURTHER INFORMATION

- Why you want to become a special guardian and your motivation to care for the child.
- What your understanding is about why the child is no longer in their parents' care.
- A description of your personality, past and present employment, education, standard of living, leisure activity and interests.
- Your identity, religious beliefs and capacity to care for a child with different religious beliefs.
- Your relationships and support network, including wider family and significant others.

- Any household members will also need to be individually interviewed. Discussions around your support network is important as you must be able to identify someone to care for the child as part of a contingency plan if you can no longer care for the child.
- Your family history, previous relationships (former partner checks include an interview and their views of your capability to become a special guardian).
- Your parenting capacity, including your experience of caring for children, and ability to meet the needs of the child.
- Home and safety assessment and the suitability of the accommodation offered.
- A dog and pet assessment.
- Further support, including a financial assessment to see if you are entitled to any financial support and any relevant training and preparation support that may be required.

Towards the end of the assessment process, the social worker will give you a copy of the assessment and you will have the opportunity to comment and record your views.

You will be offered independent legal advice by our team in regards to your special guardianship assessment and support plan.

STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?

We appreciate there is a huge amount of information and it is a lot to get your head around. Our team would be happy to speak with you should you have any further questions relating to the special guardianship assessment process.

FURTHER USEFUL LINKS

The services below provide other helpful information about special guardianship and connected or kinship carers.

Kinship Care: www.kinship.org.uk

Family Rights Group: www.frg.org.uk

PAC: www.pac-uk.org

Citizens Advice: www.citizensadvice.org.uk

EMAIL AND TELEPHONE

Email: specialguardianshipteam.duty@achievingforchildren.org.uk

Phone: 020 8547 4620