

A

Kinship Carer's

Guide to

Peterborough



Contents

Introduction	3
When social workers are involved	4
Court orders	5
Private fostering	6
Benefits and finance	7
Emergency help	9
Schools and childcare	10
Other things to think about	11
Directory of services and useful links	13

Introduction

Am I a kinship carer?

Are you caring for the child of a family member or friend? Then you're a kinship carer. You might never have heard the term 'kinship carer' and you might not know anyone else in the same position as you, but you are not alone! It is estimated that there are about 200,000 kinship carers in the UK caring for around 300,000 children, and many are here in Peterborough.

If you want to meet other kinship carers, come along to the Peterborough Kinship Carers Support Group. We meet every Wednesday 10.30-12.30 in term time at PCVS, 3 Lincoln Court, Lincoln Road, Peterborough, PE1 2RP.

Being a kinship carer can be rewarding, but it can also be tough and, at times, overwhelming. Sometimes you may need some extra support and this guide will provide you with a starting point for where to find it.

When social workers are involved

Finding out that a social worker is worried about a child you care about can be distressing. If children's services are involved with the family, the child will have a social worker. After completing an assessment, they may decide, along with other professionals like teachers or health visitors, that the child needs a Child in Need plan or a Child Protection plan. The social workers and professionals will then work with the family to address the problems.

If the child is on a Child Protection Plan and it is felt that the child cannot safely stay at home, the social worker should first consider if the child can be safely cared for long-term by a family member. If you want to be considered to care for the child, it is important that you let the social worker know as soon as possible so that you can be assessed.

If the situation becomes an emergency, a social worker may suddenly ask you to care for the child with very little notice. You may be able to care for the child whilst being assessed as a foster carer. Alternatively, in an emergency situation, the child may be placed with an unrelated foster carer. However, you can still contact the social worker and ask to be assessed as a carer for the child. This process may take a few months during which time the child may stay with the foster carer.

If the child has been placed with you by Children's Services, they will be a 'Looked After' child. This means that parental responsibility is shared between the Local Authority and the child's birth parents, so you do not have the legal right to make important decisions about the child.

If a social worker has been involved with placing the child with you, but you are not being assessed as a foster carer, it is a good idea to get specialist advice as it has serious implications on the support you and the child are entitled to, including financial support.

What does it mean?

Child in need: a child and their family need extra support from a social worker and other professionals to keep the child safe and healthy and to enable them to develop properly. A child may also be a 'Child in Need' if they have complex needs.

Child protection: a child is at risk of significant harm because they have suffered or are likely to suffer neglect or emotional, physical or sexual abuse. Social workers work with other professionals and the family to keep the child safe, hopefully with the parents, or otherwise by placing the child with a family member, or if this is not possible, an unrelated foster carer.

Care order: a court order the court gives the Local Authority when it is felt that it is not safe for a child to live at home.

Looked after child: a child becomes 'looked after' when they are in the care of the Local Authority, either through a voluntary agreement with the parents or when the court grants a care order.

Where can I get help?

Legal Advice: If the Local Authority is applying for a care order or the child is already under a care order, you may be able to get legal aid. Otherwise you will probably have to pay. Some solicitors will do an initial advice session for a fixed fee. The Law Society website has a facility where you can search for a solicitor: solicitors.lawsociety.org.uk

If you cannot afford legal advice or get legal aid, you can represent yourself. For more information, check out the Family Rights Group – www.frg.org.uk, helpline: 0808 801 0366

Court orders

There are a number of reasons why you may want to apply to the courts for a legal order to formalise the care arrangement such as:

- Children's Services are involved with your family and you would like the child to stay with you long-term and to have parental responsibility so that you can make decisions for the child.
- You have been taking care of the child informally with the consent of the parents but want a legal order to secure the arrangement, enabling you to make decisions for the child and prevent the parents taking the child back.
- You are concerned about a child you care about and want to remove them from the custody of their parents.

Whatever the circumstances, there are two orders which are most commonly applied for.

What does it mean?

Parental responsibility: this allows an adult to make decisions for a child. If you are not the parent of the child and are caring for them, you would need parental responsibility to enable you to make decisions and give permission for things like medical treatment or school trips. To get parental responsibility, you will need to apply to a court to award you a Child Arrangement Order or Special Guardianship Order.

Child Arrangement Order (CAO)

The CAO replaced Residency Orders and Contact Orders. It decides who a child lives with, who they should spend time with, and who can make decisions about their welfare. If you are a kinship carer, you can apply for a CAO to make sure the parent cannot take the child from your care or to enable you to make decisions for the child. If you don't have care of the child but want to, you could also ask the court for the child to come to live with you.

You can apply for Child Arrangement Order Support from the Local Authority, however it is discretionary, so they don't have to pay it and it will be reviewed regularly. The child's parents can apply to the court in the future to ask to end the CAO or to change it, but the Judge would have to be sure it was in the child's best interests.

Special Guardianship Order (SGO)

An SGO is a fairly new order and is intended to provide permanence to a child when it is felt that they will not be able to return to the care of their parents. It lasts until the child is 18 and although the parent could apply for it to be ended, they would have to ask the court for permission to do this and they would have to prove that there had been a significant change in circumstances and it is unusual for this to happen.

If social workers are involved with the child, they may encourage you to apply for an SGO. It is a big decision and a long-term commitment, so it is important for you to get legal advice first.

If you are considering applying for a court order, it would be a good idea for you to get legal advice. You are likely to have to pay for legal advice but legal aid is available in some circumstances when social workers are involved with the child. If you are unable to afford legal advice, it is possible to represent yourself.

Private fostering

Private fostering is a type of kinship care arrangement where a child under the age of 16 (or under 18 if they are disabled) is cared for by someone known to them with the agreement of the parents, but they are not a close family member. Close family members are defined as grandparents, aunts and uncles, siblings and step-parents. If you have a different relationship to the child e.g. cousin, godparent or family friend, you are a private foster carer.

Although private foster carers are often in similar situations and deal with similar issues as other kinship carers, there are certain legal requirements which apply only to private foster carers. For example if you are a private foster carer, you must tell Children's Services that the child is living with you. This is a legal requirement if the child will be staying with you for longer than 28 days. You should tell them at least 6 weeks before the child comes to live with you, but if you take the child in an emergency situation, just call them as soon as possible.

Once you have let Children's Services know about the arrangement, they will come to visit you to make sure the placement is appropriate for the child. They will then visit you and the child every 6 weeks to make sure everything is OK. This isn't something you should worry about. As long as the child is well looked after and you and the child's parents are happy with the arrangement, social workers will try to support you to make it work.

The term 'private fostering' can be a little misleading as unlike professional foster carers, you are not entitled to payments from the Local Authority and the child is not a 'Looked After Child'.

Who do I tell?

If you are planning on privately fostering a child, or already are, you need to contact the Local Authority. If you are in Peterborough, you can contact the Private Fostering team on 01733 317427

Benefits and finances

Bringing up a child is expensive, so if you decide to bring up a child as a kinship carer, it is important that you understand what you are entitled to so that you don't miss out on much needed money. What you can get will depend on what type of arrangement you have.

Fostering a 'Looked after child': If you are assessed to foster the child you are caring for, you will be entitled to an allowance paid by the Local Authority. You will not be entitled to any benefits for the child, but depending on your financial circumstances, you may be able to apply for help for your own living costs through the Job Centre or for help with the cost of your rent and Council Tax through your local council.

Informal Arrangement/Private Fostering: Anyone who has the day-to-day care of a child is entitled to claim benefits for them. You can claim Child Benefit and Child Tax Credits, depending on your financial situation. Some kinship carers find they have to reduce their hours or give up work when they start caring for a child. If you aren't working or are on a low income, you may be entitled to other benefits such as Income Support and Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

If you do not have parental responsibility for the child, you may find that you have to provide proof that the child is living with you such as letter from a professional e.g. teacher, social worker. If the child's parent is also trying to claim the benefits, there can be a delay whilst they investigate who should be receiving the money.

What does it mean?

Informal Arrangement: when you are caring for a child through agreement with their parents and without the involvement of the courts or the Local Authority

Child Arrangement Order: The Local Authority are able to provide financial support for those who are caring for children under a CAO, but these payments are discretionary which means that it is up to the Local Authority whether they pay them and you have no legal right to the payments. You are more likely to get help from the Local Authority if they are already involved with the child.

You are also entitled to the same benefits as any parent/carer, such as Child Benefit and Child Tax Credits. If the child's parent is still claiming, you may need to provide a copy of the court order.

Special Guardianship Order: Support packages are more common with an SGO than a CAO. When you apply for an SGO, the Local Authority will complete an assessment to decide whether the SGO is the right thing for the child and also to assess what support you will need. If you are awarded financial support, this may only last a few years, or be reviewed regularly so make sure you are clear about any limitations to your support package before the SGO is finalised.

You are also entitled to the same benefits as any parent/carer, such as Child Benefit and Child Tax Credits. If the child's parent is still claiming, you may need to provide a copy of the court order.

Other financial support for you: You may find that when you take on the care of a child, you have to stop working or reduce the hours you work. Along with any benefits or payments for the child, you may be entitled to financial support too – please see the box below for where to get advice. This will depend on your personal circumstances.

Financial Support if the child has a disability: If the child you are caring for has a disability or serious health problem, you may be able to get extra financial support through Disability Living Allowance. Whether the child gets this and at what rate will depend on the impact their disability/illness has on them and what they can do for themselves compared to other children their age. Depending on their entitlement to DLA and your income, you may be eligible for Carer's Allowance.

Where can I get help?

Benefits can be complicated and you may find that you need specialist help to tell you what you can apply for and to help you with the forms.

Citizen's Advice Bureau: 16-17 St Mark's Street, Peterborough, PE1 2TU, call 0344 4994 120

Self-help: www.citapeterborough.org.uk

Disability Peterborough: Help with disability related benefits such as DLA, call 01733 265551

To apply for Child Benefit, call 0300 200 3100

To apply for Child Tax Credits, call 0345 300 3900

To discuss other benefits, contact Job Centre Plus on 0800 055 6688

For help with your rent or council tax, contact Peterborough City Council by calling 01733 452241, or visit customer services at Bayard Place

Emergency help

Unfortunately, sometimes children arrive at a kinship carer's home with very little in terms of possessions such as clothes and toys. You may also be lacking the basics you need for the child to settle in, such as a bed and the funds to buy the things a child needs.

If you find yourself in financial difficulty and urgently needing the basics for your child, there are agencies who can help. If a social worker has been involved in placing the child with you, you should speak to them about helping you financially with settling the child in.

Peterborough City Council has a facility called the Peterborough Community Assistance Scheme (PCAS) which is able to provide basics such as beds and clothing vouchers to families in urgent need. Speak to a professional involved with your family (e.g. teacher, social worker, health visitor) to see if you are eligible and if they can refer you.

If you are having a really difficult time, you may be struggling to find enough money to feed your family. If this is the case, you can get help from the Peterborough Food-banks, who can provide your family with three days' emergency food. Ask a professional involved with your family to give you a voucher.

If your financial difficulties are being caused by benefits delays or sanctions, you may be able to get an emergency payment. Ask Jobcentre Plus to see if you are eligible.

Who can help?

If you do not have a professional who can support you to access emergency help, visit the Citizen's Advice Bureau at 16-17 St Mark's Street, Peterborough, PE1 2TU, or call 03444994120 and they will be able to help you.

School and childcare

School-aged children

It is important that if you have the care of a school-aged child, you ensure they are in school as soon as possible. Contacting the local council would be the first step. You could also contact the school you would like your child to attend and arrange a visit.

Many schools now also provide before and after school clubs, and some holiday clubs, which may be helpful if you work. You will have to pay for these.

Who do I contact?

To apply for a school place in Peterborough, you can contact the admissions team at the city council on 01733 864007

Pre-school children

Children are entitled to 15 hours of free early education or childcare per week in term time from the term after they turn three until they start primary school. Families are also entitled to this from the term after the child turns two if:

- The family is claiming certain benefits
- The child is 'looked after' or is under a SGO or CAO having previously been in care
- The child receives Disability Living Allowance
- The child has an Education, Health and Care plan (EHC)

You can usually pay for additional hours if you need them.

Who do I contact?

For advice on funded nursery places or how to find childcare contact the Peterborough Family Information Service on 01733 747474

Younger children

If the child you are caring for is under two, there is no entitlement to any free childcare. If you are working this may be difficult. If the Local Authority is involved with the child, it may be worth seeing if they can assist financially. There are many nurseries and childminders who are all registered and inspected by Ofsted.

Help with costs

Outside of school hours and free nursery hours, you may need to pay for additional childcare, particularly if you work. If you are on a low income and claim tax credits, you should contact HMRC and tell them about your situation. You may be entitled to extra payments to help with the cost of childcare. Some employers also offer childcare vouchers, but these may affect your tax credits so always check.

Post-16

Children in the UK are now required to stay in education or training until they are 18. This does not have to be school or college; it could be an apprenticeship or studying part-time whilst working. Financial support will depend on which option they choose so it is a good idea to get advice – see page 13 for a list of organisations.

Other things to think about

Hopefully so far you have found some useful practical advice to get you through the first difficult few months. If your kinship arrangement becomes a long-term one, there are other things you may want to think about. We will cover them briefly here, mainly so that you are aware of them and may look into them further in the future.

Contact

It is likely that you will have to deal with the issue of managing contact between the child and their parents/other family. If relations are good, this may not cause too much difficulty, but often family relationships are strained, opinions differ and the child may have behavioural responses to contact which can be difficult to cope with and understand.

It may be that contact has been decided by Children's Services through a Child Protection Plan or Care Plan, or ordered by the court. Sometimes this can be easier, because you cannot be blamed if the child or parent feels that the contact allowed is not enough. However, it does mean that if you have issues with the contact, you cannot make the decision to change arrangements. In this circumstance, you would need to go back to court or discuss your concerns with the social worker.

If you have a more informal arrangement, you are likely to need to make arrangements with the parents yourself. Try to remember that any arrangements should be in the best interests of the child.

Attachment and emotional development

From the moment they are born, babies begin to develop emotionally. The first aspect of their emotional development is the need to develop an attachment with their carers (usually parents). This develops through the carer responding appropriately to the baby's needs, for example feeding when needed, giving cuddles, making the child feel safe and secure. If instead the child is neglected, shouted at and not shown love or affection, this can lead to problems in the attachment between carer and child. This can cause a child to feel anxious and unloved. As a child continues to grow, their emotional development continues to be affected by the way that their needs are met by their carers and other adults in their lives. If a child experiences abuse or neglect, this can affect the child's emotional development. It can result in the child lacking confidence, being stressed, unhappy and angry and the child may behave badly or react to situations in a way that seems disproportionate.

Who can help?

If you have concerns about your child's emotional development or mental health, you could talk to their social worker, GP or school who may be able to arrange support.

Young Minds have a helpline for parents concerned about their child's mental wellbeing: 0808 8025 544.

There are a number of books which you may find helpful. Suggestions are listed at the back of this booklet. The Mind-Ed website has a training module on attachment which you may find useful <http://minded.e-lfh.org.uk/families>

The reason for raising this issue is that many children in the care of kinship carers will have experienced abuse or neglect, and as a result, may have problems with their emotional development. You may find that the child you are caring for behaves like a much younger child at times and that they seem to be trying to push you away. Some carers find that children behave well at school but are very difficult at home, which can be even more frustrating. But these issues can be addressed. By you providing them with a loving, supportive home with encouragement and boundaries, the child can develop confidence and trust. It can be a tough road, so you may need some support. Talk to people working with your child, like teachers, health visitors or social workers about any concerns you have. The sooner your family gets the help you need, the better chance the child has to move forward.

Online safety

Depending on the age of the child you are caring for, you may have already thought about the issues that the internet brings when bringing up a child. It is a difficult balance to strike between allowing a child to do what their friends are doing and the benefits the internet and technology can bring and protecting them from the dangers.

There are many safety measures which you can put in place and there are plenty of useful websites. The most important thing to do is to keep talking to your child and understanding their online life in the same way as their real life.

Drugs and alcohol

For many kinship carers, drugs and alcohol have had a role to play in the child's parents no longer being able to look after them. So you might have particular worries about drugs and alcohol when it comes to the child you are looking after. It is important that you educate yourself so that you can have open and honest conversations with your child.

Who can help?

There are many useful websites you can look at and for your child to use. Here are some:

www.net-aware.org.uk

www.nspcc.org.uk/shareaware

www.knowthenet.org.uk

www.thinkyouknow.org.uk

Who can help?

Talk to Frank have a helpline 0300 123 6600 and a website with plenty of useful information and advice

www.talktofrank.com

Directory of services

Services in Peterborough

Family Information Service is a service run by Peterborough City Council providing information and advice to families. Call 01733 864446 or email fis@peterborough.gov.uk. There is an extensive directory of local services at www.fis.peterborough.gov.uk.

Carers Trust provides various services to support carers, including projects supporting young carers and siblings of children with additional needs. Contact carers@carerstrustpeterborough.org or 01733 645234.

SASP is a service run by Women's Aid which provides emotional support for children who have been sexually abused or witnessed domestic violence. Contact 01733 311564.

3Ts is a service run by Drinksense which provides emotional support to children whose parents use drugs or alcohol. Contact 01733 555532.

Little Miracles is a small charity supporting children with additional needs and their families. Has a great play centre and runs plenty of activities. Visit Little Miracles at: The Spinney, Hartwell Way, Peterborough. Contact 01733 262226.

Aspire is a drug and alcohol treatment service, which also supports families affected by a loved one's drug or alcohol issue. Contact 01733 895624.

Froglife runs environmental projects engaging vulnerable children and young people. For more information see www.froglife.org or contact rebecca.neal@froglife.org or 01733 602102.

Helpful websites and helplines

Kinship Carers

www.grandparentsplus.org.uk / 0300 0337 015

www.frg.org.uk / 0808 8010 366

www.kinshipcarers.co.uk

Managing contact

www.splittingup-putkidsfirst.org.uk

Online safety

www.net-aware.org.uk

www.nspcc.org.uk/shareaware

www.knowthenet.org.uk

www.thinkyounow.org.uk

Drugs awareness

www.talktofrank.com

www.drugscience.org.uk

Attachment and emotional issues

<http://minded.e-lfh.org.uk/families>

Parenting

www.familylives.org.uk / 0808 800 2222

Useful books

Suggested books for carers

Attachment, Trauma and Resilience by Kate and Brian Cairns

Parenting a child with emotional and behavioural difficulties by Dan Hughes

Ten top tips for managing contact by Henrietta Bond

Blame my brain: the amazing teenage brain revealed by Nicolas Morgan

A guide to attachment by John Timpson (available from Timpson.co.uk/timpson-books)

Suggested books for children

A Safe Place for Rufus by Jill Seeney

Dennis lives with Grandma and Grandpa by Paul Sambrooks

Morris and the Bundle of Worries by Jill Seeney

My brother Booh has ADHD by Susan Yarney

Oli and the Pink Bicycle by Catherine Jackson

Sam's Trouble with Words by Lorna Miles

Spark Learns to Fly by Judith Foxon

Where is Poppy's Panda? by David Pitcher

Why Can't I be Good? by Hedi Argent

For many of these and other books relevant to kinship carers, check out the bookshop at www.corambaaf.org.uk