



SGO support for parents

A guide for parents whose children are placed under an SGO



SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP
NORTH LONDON

North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium

The North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium (NLAFC) is a partnership of six north London boroughs; **Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey and Islington**. We work together to provide support and guidance for those affected by SGOs.

This leaflet is for parents who have or may have a child permanently cared for under a SGO. We hope that you find this leaflet helpful and that it answers some of the questions you may have. This information is for those living within any of the consortium boroughs.

What is a Special Guardianship Order (SGO)?

A special guardian is a person the court decides will care for your child permanently. This is done to provide children with long term stability but without the legal break from their birth families. This is an alternative to adoption and to allow children to stay connected to their birth families.

Courts refer to the responsibilities that parents have towards their children as 'parental responsibility'. The person who the court grants a SGO to is given parental responsibility. The special guardian will now make decisions about the day to day care of your child and all the key decisions, for example which school the child should attend, arrangements with health care, ear piercing or if hair can be dyed.

There are restrictions; your written permission and the court's permission would be needed if the special guardian wants to take your child abroad for more than three months, change their surname or become adopted.

Changes to a SGO arrangement can only be made by a court. You would need to ask the Court for permission to bring the Special Guardianship order to an end. The Court will only give permission where it thinks there had been a significant change in your circumstances since the SGO was made and your child's welfare will be the main consideration for the court.

Contact and Mediation

Where children become subject to an SGO, arrangements for contact will usually be agreed during the care proceedings. If you are not clear about the arrangements please speak to your legal advisor. In some circumstances the Court may make a Child Arrangements Order to confirm contact should happen.

The special guardian is responsible for making decisions about contact. They are responsible for keeping your child safe and happy. If your child is becoming very upset and distressed the special guardian may need to make changes to the contact arrangements. It is best for children when all adults involved treat each other respectfully and when arrangements are clear and are kept to.

As your child grows, options for keeping in touch will change; talk to the special guardian about this, so they can decide what is best and what is manageable.

If at any point your relationship with the special guardian becomes strained or breaks down consider if another family member can help with making the contact arrangements; ideally someone who has a good relationship with both you and the special guardian.

The National Association of Child Contact Centres (NACCC) provide

neutral, safe and comfortable venues for contact at low costs. You can also get advice and support from National Family Mediation, who work through disagreements – see details at the end of the leaflet.

If you are having difficulties arranging contact or mediation, you can contact a social worker in the Children and Families Service in your borough and ask for assistance. If contact arrangements have broken down after attempts to sort issues out, or if you disagree with other major decisions regarding your child please seek legal advice.

Your role in supporting your child

You still have a role in your child's life. Supporting your child in their new living arrangement will really help your child settle and get use to the changes. Such things will contribute to your child doing well in school and in their future life as adults. Your child knowing that you are well will also help them not worry.

The special guardian may have been awarded some financial support towards the cost of caring for your child. You can speak to the special guardian about what you'd like to contribute for example festive or birthday cards and presents.

A change in circumstances

If circumstances change and the special guardian can no longer care for your child, the special guardian may have appointed a Testamentary Guardian to take over their care duties. If you do not agree with the arrangement you would need to seek legal advice about returning to court for the court to decide.

Finance

Your benefits will change. You must inform the relevant Benefit Agency that your child is no longer in your care. This is in your interest otherwise you will incur debts. Any claims for child benefit and child tax credit must be claimed by the special guardian. Contact arrangements can be expensive. You can ask the local authority for help with expenses towards contact.

Can I get any help?

You may or may not agree with your child living with a special guardian. Not having your child with you can be traumatic and difficult to get use to. You might feel: angry, hurt, lonely, guilty, sad and depressed. You can get help.

If you get help with your feelings it will help you give your best when you see your child at contact. Your child will be helped knowing that you love them, being reassured that the adults get on and that you are okay.

Support, such as having one to one time with a specialist counsellor for parents in similar situations can help you with this. Support is also available to assist you find the right words to talk to your child or with writing them a letter. Please see the services provided by PAC below.



Consortium Boroughs

If you have any further questions, please contact your local borough.

BARNET

Barnet Children's Service
Nth London Business Park
Oakleigh Road South
London N11 1NP

020 8359 5705
adoption@barnet.gov.uk

CAMDEN

Camden Family Services, Crowndale
Centre, 218 Eversholt Street
London NW1 1BD

020 7974 3082
adoption@camden.gov.uk

ENFIELD

Enfield Children's Services, Triangle
House, 305-313 Green Lanes,
London N13 4YB

020 8379 8490
adoption@enfield.gov.uk

HACKNEY

Hackney Children and Young
People's Services, 1 Hillman Street,
London E8 1DY

020 8356 5379 (9am-5pm)
020 8356 2710 (5pm-9am)
permanencyservice.duty@
hackney.gov.uk

HARINGEY

Haringey Children & Young People's
Service, River Park House, 225 High
Road, London, N22 8HQ

020 8489 2347 & 020 8489 3108
adoption.duty@haringey.gov.uk

ISLINGTON - Family Plus Islington

Family Plus Team
3 Elwood Street
London, N5 1EB

020 7527 1012 Mon, Wed and Fri
from 10am-1pm
familyplus@islington.gov.uk

Useful Links

First Family Action Line

07975 846 249 or

Email: firstfamily@pac-uk.org

Advice Line 020 7284 5879 is open Monday, Tuesday and Friday 10.00am-4.00pm, Wednesday and Thursday 2.00pm-7.30pm (excluding bank holidays).

National Association of Child Contact Centres (NACCC)

Tel: 0845 4500 280 / 0115 948 4557

(Mon to Fri 9am-1pm)

www.naccc.org.uk

National Family Mediation

0300 4000 636

www.nfm.org.uk

PAC-UK

Tel: 020 7284 5879

www.pac-uk.org

PAC provide a service 'First Family Service for Birth Parents and Birth Relatives' for parents where there child is no longer with them or where this may happen.

PAC-UK hosts a range of support groups for Birth Parents. All groups are informal, confidential and free of charge. If you require further information or have questions about any of our support groups please call our confidential Advice Line or email firstfamily@pac-uk.org.

Legal Advice

Coram Children's Legal Centre

Tel: 020 7713 0089

www.childrenslegalcentre.com

Family Rights Group

Tel: 0808 801 0366

www.frg.org.uk

Specialist child welfare solicitor

Tel: 03444 111 444

www.solicitors.com/welfare+london

The Law Society of England Wales

Tel: 020 7242 1222 Monday- Friday 9-5pm

www.lawsociety.org.uk

Need to find out more?

If you would like to have a discussion about any of the topics in this booklet, please speak to your local authority, as listed on page 6.

Alternatively, visit us online for updates:



www.specialguardiansnorthlondon.co.uk

