

It is really important you think through these points carefully and together with the people close to you.

It is usually better for children to know where they will be living as quickly as possible. Social Workers will therefore often have to complete assessments as quickly as possible.

Because of this, it is really important that you work openly and honestly with the Social Worker and keep any appointments which have been arranged.

If you do not have contact details for the Social Worker dealing with your assessment, or do not have a Social Worker as yet, you can contact Harrow Council Children's Services by calling:

020 8901 2690 – option 4

Or

Emailing:

duty&assess@harrow.gov.uk

For further information about caring for someone else's child, the family rights group can be found at:

www.frg.org.uk

Are You Thinking of Caring for a Child You Know Long Term?



Information for Family and Friends Considering Special Guardianship

This information is being provided to you to help you think about the possibility of looking after a child that you know long term. This will usually be because they cannot, or may not be able to live with their parents.

It explains the assessment that you will go through with the Social Worker if you decide you would like to be considered as a Special Guardian.

Because this decision is about the child's permanent care, the final decision will be made by the Court.

Undertaking the Assessment

Deciding where a child will grow up, and with whom is a very important decision. Because of this, you will be asked to undertake an in-depth assessment with a Social Worker. This information will give you some idea what to expect.

During the assessment the Social Worker will ask you these questions below, so it is really helpful if you have thought about them before you agree that you (and your family) should be considered as a Carer:

- **Are you willing and able to look after the child in the long term? This will usually be until the child is 18, or beyond, and is able to leave home and live independently.**
- **Do you understand why the child is not living with their parents? Do you accept this means that they cannot continue to care for the child?**
- **Because the parents cannot continue to care for the child, you will become the parental figure, and exercise parental responsibility for the children. This may bring up some or all of the following issues:-**
 - a) You will have to make all the major decisions for the child as they grow. Do you feel comfortable with that responsibility?
 - b) You may make decisions that the parents do not agree with. Could you cope with any disagreements with them?
 - c) You may have to act to protect the child by, for example, restricting contact with the parents or supervising contact. Do you feel comfortable with that responsibility?
 - d) The caring responsibility for the child will change your relationship with the parents. You may not be able to remain close to them, or you may have to become distant from them, to effectively care for the child and protect their welfare. Are you prepared to do this if necessary for the best interests of the child?

Helpful Terminology

“Looked After Child” Refers to a child who is in the care of the Local Authority, usually these children are placed with Foster Carers. Often in some cases this will mean that the Local Authority shares Parental Responsibility for the child and can make decisions for them.

“Special Guardian” Special Guardian’s are adults, other than a child’s parents who care permanently for a child. They have Parental Responsibility and can make decisions for the child. Usually they are people who already have a connection to the child, for example, a relative or family friend.

“Family and Friends Foster Carer” Someone known to a child who has been assessed to look after them in the role of a Foster Carer. They do not have Parental Responsibility for the child and the child remains a “Looked After Child” to the Local Authority.

“Child’s Guardian” This refers to the adult who will represent the child in Court independently to the Local Authority. They will have a background in Social Work. If you are being considered as a Permanent Carer for a child it is likely that they will want to speak to you, and/or visit you if the placement is a realistic possibility.

“Preliminary Assessment” A Social Worker may complete a short assessment with you first in order to identify any significant issues which would mean it is not viable for a child to live with you long term.

- Children's needs change over time. Will you be able to understand these needs? Will you be able to adapt to them? What do you think you will be able to bring to the child to meet their needs as they grow?
- What do you believe the child will need to know about their past and being separated from their parents – this may make them feel different from other children. What do you think you need to be aware of in relation to these issues? How will you discuss this with the child?
- If you have children how will you explain to them why the child is coming to live with you. How will you manage your children's needs as well as the child's needs
- There may be problems in the future. The child may have special needs or physical or emotional health needs as a result of what happened to them before they became looked after. Do you understand this? What does the rest of the family think? What do other children in the family think?
- You will need to work as part of a team with Social Workers, Teachers and Health Workers. It is important that you ask for help when it's needed.

Why family and friends might not be able to look after the child

Social Workers believe that a child should usually live with someone they know. But there may be reasons why this is not best for the child.

The key areas we will cover in this important assessment are:

Health – Are you in reasonably good health?

- If you have significant physical or mental health problems we will need to consider very carefully whether this might stop you from looking after the child properly. It is really important for children who cannot live with their parents to have security and not to have to move again wherever possible.

Age

- If you are too old to look after the child until the child is 18, or older. If there is a greater risk that you will die before the child reaches 18 years of age.

Drug or alcohol problems – Do you use either problematically?

- If you are using drugs or alcohol in ways which would stop you looking after the child properly all the time or remind them of experiences when they were with their parents.

Criminal record of the Carer or other adults in the household

- If a Criminal Court has ordered that you or someone living with you should not live with a child. For example, they may be on the Sex Offenders Register.
- If you or someone living with you has been convicted of a crime which means they should not look after or live with the child because the nature of the offence e.g. Actual or Grievous Bodily Harm.

Housing – Do you have suitable accommodation?

- It is unlikely that you would be rehoused soon if you take on caring for a child, so you will need to think carefully about possible issues with your current home such as: overcrowding, lack of secure housing or risk of eviction, or if the state of your home would be unsuitable for a child.

Work or lifestyle – Do you have the time?

- If you have a very demanding work life or other commitments which you wouldn't be willing to consider amending to look after a child.

Family circumstances

- Is your family able to make the commitment to care permanently for another child?
- If you are looking after other people and it would be too hard for you to look after these people as well as the child.

How you did as parent/s

- If you had difficulties looking after your own children properly and have not been able to make sufficient changes since then.

Protecting the child

- If you wouldn't be able to stop the parents having harmful contact with the child.
- If you do not believe the Social Workers concerns about the parents- you do not believe that they did not look after the child well enough or that the child has been harmed.
- If you are of the opinion that the parents will get better, and will be able to look after the child again in the future and make the commitment to the child based on this.
- If you cannot or will not make sure that the parents keep to any restrictions on contact.

Working together –

- If you would not be willing to take on the advice of Social Workers, Teachers or Health Workers in relation to the child's needs.

Money

- If you do not have enough money to look after the child properly.

Risk of any of the above

- Even if these risks do not exist now, if there is a real possibility that they will arise in the future and this may mean that the child's stability will be put at risk again.

How family and friends may be eligible to look after the child

- Will you do what is best for the child even if this is not best for the parents?
- Your relationship with the child and their parents will change. For example, you will be looking after the child full time instead of part time as a **relative or friend**. Looking after a child who has suffered significant harm can require different kinds of parenting to your own children (if you have them). Do you accept this and that you may need different support from when you are caring for your own children?
- The children may have been hurt by their experience of the care they had and their life experiences before they come to you. Could you give some thought to any possible difficulties they may have as they grow up in your care? Will you be able to protect the child from future harm, from the parents or anyone else, or access support services? Can you support the child even if they are challenging in their behaviour?
- Will you have enough support when the going gets tough?
- Will you have enough time for everyone in your family? Does your home have enough space?
- Please think about your financial and practical circumstances. Will you have sufficient resources to look after the child as they grow up? The Local Authority will talk to you about the range of support we can offer. Please note that vehicles, any extensions and loft conversions are not supported by the Local Authority.
- What will the impact be on any of your own children, if you have any. How will they adjust to having other children in the home with needs that will compete for your attention?