



## **Norfolk Children's Services**

What you need to know if you are caring for somebody else's child



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There are lots of reasons why children may not be living with their parents. These could include:

- Parental ill health
- Parents' working arrangements,
- Change in family circumstances including family breakdown,
- Concerns about the parents' ability to care appropriately for the child.

The action you need to take and the amount of support you could receive will depend on the circumstances that have led to the child living with you.

Sometimes Norfolk County Council needs to check arrangements made within families. This is because of the outcome of the enquiry following the death of Victoria Climbié in 2000 who was privately fostered by a great aunt. This is not intended to interfere with arrangements, which for the most part will be perfectly appropriate, but to ensure they are lawful and to determine whether the family has the right support.

## Family arrangement

If a parent/carer has asked you to look after their child, and you are a **close relative** as defined by the Children Act 1989 (A relative under the Children Act 1989 is defined as a 'grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt [whether full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership] or step-parent), or you have parental responsibility or a legal order to care for a child then this is considered to be a **family arrangement** and you do NOT need to notify anyone.

In these circumstances, the parents keep their parental responsibility and need to ensure that their child has everything they need, so they should contribute towards the child's upkeep and any items they need, such as school uniform. You should clarify any arrangements with the parents/persons with parental responsibility, who remain legally responsible for their child and should be making decisions and only delegating responsibilities to you when they can do so legally.

In some cases, there might be an agreed family arrangement in place, but Children's Services are already involved offering support and/or advice to the family. In these circumstances, you should be included in any planning that is happening.

Let Children's Services know if you are struggling as help can be provided. It is often that these arrangements happen as a result of an incident or emergency where Norfolk County Council can provide guidance, support or make referrals that can help families cope.

In Norfolk, where a family arrangement is in place, we have decided to ensure we have got it right in terms of status and support by appointing an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to check the arrangement and ensure you are fully informed of your rights and the support you can access.

## Private fostering

If you are caring for somebody else's child and:

- He/she is aged **under** 16 years (or under 18 years if he/she has a disability)
- You are not a close relative (as defined previously) and
- The child is living with you for 28 days or more

This is called a **private fostering** arrangement and, under the Children Act 1989, it is a legal requirement that you let Children's Services know about this as soon as possible - the law says this should be at least six weeks before the arrangement begins. Children's Services have a legal duty to assess the arrangement under the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.

You can let us know and/or check whether the arrangement does fall under private fostering by calling **0344 800 8020**. Don't worry if you didn't tell us earlier – the most important thing is you let us know if you think this affects you.

In a private fostering arrangement, parents keep their parental responsibility. Any financial support you need to care for the child needs to be arranged between you and the child's parents. In these circumstances, you can claim child benefit and child tax credits for the child if they are living with you instead of their parents.

A parent with parental responsibility can end a family arrangement or private fostering at any point.

To be clear, private fostering can be offered by someone in the extended family, eg a cousin or a great aunt, but **cannot** be a **close relative** as defined in the Children Act 1989 (see previous legal definition).



## Kinship/Connected person foster carer

If there are worries about a child's safety or welfare when they are in the care of their parents, Children's Services and/or the parent might have asked you to look after their child to help to keep them safe. In some situations, Norfolk or another council's Children's Services will approach a friend or family member directly to ask them to care for the child. Unless there is a court order, this may be by agreement with a parent, or it may be at the request of the police following their involvement with the child and/or parents. In these circumstances, the child is known as a '**Looked After Child**' and, if you care for the child, you need to be approved as a carer by the local authority responsible for safeguarding the child. As you already have a relationship with the child, you would be called a **kinship** or **connected person foster carer**.

Children's Services has a duty to make sure that any Looked After Child is being cared for safely and their needs are met. We will offer practical and financial support and both you and the child will be allocated a social worker who is responsible for ensuring the child is safe and their needs are met, including their overall wellbeing.

If this relates to you, you may initially be given **temporary approval** as a kinship/connected person foster carer for a number of weeks, to enable Children's Services to complete a full fostering assessment and/or look at the long-term planning for the child if he/she is unable to return to their parent's care.

Parents keep their parental responsibility even when a child is Looked After or is subject to a court order, and will still be involved in decision-making and planning for their child, but Children's Services may seek to share parental responsibility with a parent and/or may have to intervene if they think a child is not safe. In order to do this, they will need to have oversight of what is happening for the child.

## Key questions

Answering these questions could help you and others determine which of the previous descriptions best fit with your current situation:

- Is the child living with a close relative or not (see the previous legal definition)?
- Who requested the arrangement?
- Are there any worries about the child's safety or wellbeing that might require intervention or support?
- Would any risks to a child's safety increase if the child returned to their parent's care or would you worry they are unsafe?
- What might Children's Services' response be if the parent ends the arrangement? Would they seek to be involved or would they want to leave it to the family?

If you are unsure which, if any, of the previous descriptions applies to your situation, please contact us on **0344 800 8020**.

## Useful links

### **Citizen's Advice**

Offers free, confidential, and impartial advice to anyone in the county. They are a local charity providing high-quality, accredited advice on a broad range of issues

| [www.ncab.org.uk](http://www.ncab.org.uk)  
| 0800 144 8848  
| (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

### **Kinship**

The leading kinship care charity in England and Wales. They support all kinship carers – the grandparents and siblings, the aunts, uncles, and family friends who step up to raise children when their parents can't.

| [kinship.org.uk](http://kinship.org.uk)  
| 0300 123 7015  
| (Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 2pm)

### **Norfolk Community Law Service**

A registered charity dedicated to providing access to justice and equality in Norfolk. Services targeted at individuals and groups, particularly those who cannot afford access to justice and representation.

| [www.ncls.co.uk](http://www.ncls.co.uk)  
| 01603 496623, press option 5  
| (9.30am to 4pm, Monday to Friday)

### **Family Action**

An independent organisation that Children's Services subscribes to on behalf of Norfolk kinship carers. They work with children, parents, carers and the wider family network to ensure the family is able to realise its full potential.

| [www.family-action.org.uk](http://www.family-action.org.uk)  
| 0808 802 6666  
| or text message: 07537 404282  
| (Monday to Friday, 9am to 9pm)

### **Norfolk Children's Services**

| [www.norfolk.gov.uk](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk)  
| 0344 800 8020 - general enquiries  
| 01603 224131 - kinship carers advice line  
| (Monday to Friday, 9am to 12pm)

### **Buttle UK**

Buttle offer support to kinship carers through grant programmes for children and young people.

| [buttleuk.org](http://buttleuk.org)  
| [info@buttleuk.org](mailto:info@buttleuk.org)  
| 020 7828 7311

### **Coram Children's Legal Centre**

Provides free independent legal advice and factsheets to children, parents, carers and professionals.

| [www.childrenslegalcentre.com](http://www.childrenslegalcentre.com)  
| [info@coramclc.org.uk](mailto:info@coramclc.org.uk)  
| 0300 330 5480 - Child Law Advice  
| Line (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm) or  
| [childlawadvice.org.uk](http://childlawadvice.org.uk)

### **Family Rights Group (FRG)**

Provides advice to parents and other family members whose children are involved with or require children's social care services because of welfare needs or concerns.

| [frg.org.uk](http://frg.org.uk)  
| [advice@frg.org.uk](mailto:advice@frg.org.uk)  
| 0808 801 0366 - advice line  
| (Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 3pm)



**Norfolk** County Council