

Central
Bedfordshire

great
prospects



Family and friends

**Your guide to fostering a
connected person**

A great place to live and work.

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www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/fostering

What is a connected person foster carer?

A connected person foster carer is someone who is looking after a child of a family member, a friend or a person known to them. You may be their grandparent, aunt/uncle, brother/sister or a family member/friend of the family. The fostering team is responsible for assessing and supervising family members, friends and others connected to the children placed with them. The children are classed as looked after children. Although you are caring for a child or children within your family, you have to be assessed as a connected person foster carer. As the child or children in your care are looked after by Central Bedfordshire Council, we have a duty as a Local Authority to check and ensure that they are receiving good care and are safe in your home.


What is the assessment process to become a connected person foster carer?

The assessment is to ensure children live in a safe and caring environment. In an emergency situation where the child needs to be placed quickly, temporary approval may be given


following two assessments (viability and Regulation 24) by the children's social worker and a fostering social worker. You should receive a copy of this assessment. This temporary approval can last up to 16 weeks, during which time a full assessment will be carried out by the fostering team.

This includes gathering in depth information and exploring the carer's ability to parent the child and manage contact with the wider family.

- This will be carried out over several visits by a fostering social worker
- If you are applying jointly you and your partner will be seen together and separately
- All household members will be seen and spoken to as part of the assessment process, depending on age and understanding
- You will be expected to attend preparation training prior to your assessment being presented to fostering panel for approval.
- You will be expected to attend first aid and safeguarding training prior to fostering panel.



The following checks will also be carried out:

- Checks with Local Authorities where you have lived in the last ten years
 - DBS – Disclosure and Barring Checks
 - Full medical from GP
 - Health visitors (if they have been involved)
 - School (including your own children's school)
 - Three personal references (including only one family member)
 - References from any former significant partners
 - Visits to other family members as appropriate
 - Health and safety check of your home
 - Dog assessment (if applicable)
 - Current/previous employer reference
 - Youth offending team checks
 - Embassy checks (if appropriate)
 - Landlord/International Social Services (if appropriate)
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During your assessment you will be visited regularly by your assessing social worker. If a child is placed with you will be visited regularly by the child's social worker and have access to an out of office hours telephone support service. You will also be able to access a comprehensive training package and be signposted to various advice and information. Further information about support following approval as a connected person foster carer can be found later in this booklet.



Fostering Panel

Upon completion of your assessment you will be invited to attend fostering panel with your fostering social worker and the child's social worker. This is where the assessment report will be presented in order to consider if you are suitable as a family and friends foster carer for the specific child/children. The panel will make a recommendation about your approval and the final decision will be taken by the Agency Decision Maker.

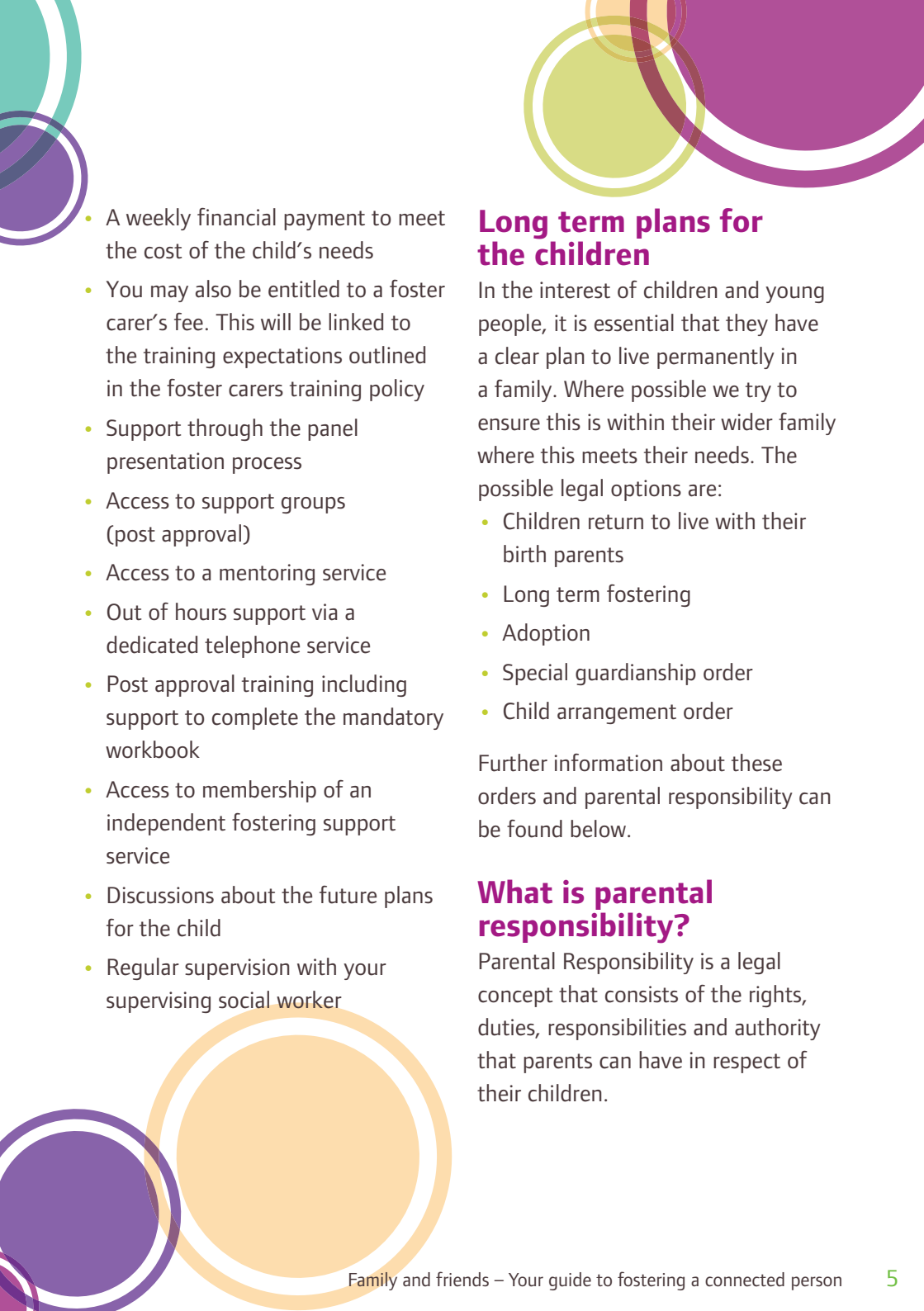
In the interest of children and young people, it is essential that children have a clear plan for them to live permanently in a family.

What will be expected from me as a connected person foster carer?

- Full co-operation with the assessment process
- To work openly and honestly with the social work teams
- Flexibility and availability for social worker visits
- Working with us as part of a wider team to achieve the right outcomes for the children in line with the plans for their care
- To attend meetings about the child
- To attend support groups and undertake our core training (the training policy will be discussed with you during your assessment and post approval)
- To complete a training and development workbook within 18 months of approval, as required by legislation, to demonstrate the skills you have developed as a foster carer.

What support will I receive?

- Help to understand the process of assessment and approval
- Provision of reading material and sign posting you to sources of information

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- A weekly financial payment to meet the cost of the child's needs
 - You may also be entitled to a foster carer's fee. This will be linked to the training expectations outlined in the foster carers training policy
 - Support through the panel presentation process
 - Access to support groups (post approval)
 - Access to a mentoring service
 - Out of hours support via a dedicated telephone service
 - Post approval training including support to complete the mandatory workbook
 - Access to membership of an independent fostering support service
 - Discussions about the future plans for the child
 - Regular supervision with your supervising social worker

Long term plans for the children

In the interest of children and young people, it is essential that they have a clear plan to live permanently in a family. Where possible we try to ensure this is within their wider family where this meets their needs. The possible legal options are:

- Children return to live with their birth parents
- Long term fostering
- Adoption
- Special guardianship order
- Child arrangement order

Further information about these orders and parental responsibility can be found below.

What is parental responsibility?

Parental Responsibility is a legal concept that consists of the rights, duties, responsibilities and authority that parents can have in respect of their children.

Adoption

What is adoption?

Adoption is a legal procedure where all the parental responsibility is transferred to the adopters and the birth parents no longer have any legal rights over the child. Therefore an adopted child ceases all legal ties with their birth parents and becomes a full member of the adoptive family. Once an Adoption Order has been granted it can't be reversed except in extremely rare circumstances.

Who can apply to adopt?

Almost anyone can apply to adopt. However, every agency has requirements that prospective adopters must satisfy. Applicants must be able to show that they can provide a loving, secure home that will meet the needs of a particular child. To progress through the adoption process you must:


- Be domiciled in the United Kingdom
- Be able to prove you do not have any serious convictions or any convictions involving children
- Be at least 21 years old
- Be able to meet the needs of a child who would otherwise remain in the care of the Local Authority

- Understand that approval as prospective adopters does not guarantee the placement of a child.

What support will I receive?

Adoption support is provided by Central Bedfordshire Council or commissioned by other organisations. To access adoption support services adopters must be assessed to determine whether there is a need for a particular service. Support may include:





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- Financial support
 - Support groups for adoptive parents and adopted children
 - Support for contact arrangements between adopted children and their birth relatives, or with other people with whom they share significant relationships
 - Therapeutic services
 - Services to ensure the success of the adoptive placement or adoption
 - Counselling, advice and information.

How do I apply to adopt?

Firstly you will need to discuss your wish to adopt with your social worker and child's social worker. If it is agreed that adoption is in the best interests of the child you will start a two stage process:

- Meet with a member of the adoption team who will explain further the adoption process
- Complete a registration of interest form. This will formally inform the adoption team that you are interested in pursuing your application and to also give them consent to carry out any necessary checks such as references, social services, education, employment, health, personal references and DBS
- Within five working days the Team Manager will decide whether to accept an application from you and will follow this up with a letter.

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- Stage one – pre assessment.
This begins when the adoption team have accepted your formal registration of interest and should take no more than 2 months to complete. It is during this stage that you will be exploring your interest in adoption to enable you to be sure that it is the right decision for you and the child.
 - Formal interview. Towards the end of stage one, you will be invited to meet with a social worker from the team for a formal interview. It is an opportunity for the team to assess your understanding of adoption, your commitment to the process and also a chance for you to ask any questions or discuss any concerns you may have. Following your formal interview the Team Manager will write to you and confirm whether you are able to progress to stage two or not, with clear reasons.
 - Stage two – the assessment.
This part of the stage should be completed within four months, unless there are exceptional circumstances which meant that a decision about your suitability to adopt cannot be made within that time. You will be allocated a social worker who will carry out your assessment to consider whether you are suitable to adopt by assessing your parenting capacity, identifying your strengths and vulnerabilities, in the light of your own history and life experiences. During stage two you will be required to attend preparation training.
 - Adoption panel. Your social worker will present your report to the adoption panel and they will make recommendations as to your approval. The recommendation will be passed to the Agency Decision Maker who will decide whether or not you should be approved as an adoptive parent.
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Special Guardianship Orders (SGO)

What is Special Guardianship?

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 introduced SGO's as a permanence option for children who are not able to live with their parents and have to be cared for by someone else. Some children benefit from SGO's, for example, those who are in long term foster care, children who are being cared for long term by family and friends carers and young people who are unaccompanied and seeking asylum who need a permanent home.

An SGO aims to:

- Give security for the child or young persons placement until they reach 18 years
- Give the special guardian elevated parental responsibility above the child's birth parents and the right to make decisions about the child's upbringing and day to day decisions for the child in their care. This would cover areas such as the child's school, consent for school trips
- Help maintain links with the child's birth family (where appropriate)

- Allow the carers to become the child's Special Guardian.

Where possible we would encourage an SGO carer to have open communication with the child or young person's birth parents and family to keep them informed of any decisions you make. Even though you have parental responsibility for the child or young person you will need to request permission from the courts or the birth parents to:

- take the child or young person out of the country for longer than three months
- change the child's surname
- agree for the child to be adopted.



Who can apply for an SGO?

You can apply for an SGO if:

- You are aged over 18 years
- You are not the child's or young persons parent/s
- You are a foster carer for your Local Authority and the child has lived with you for at least one year before the date of application
- A child or young person has lived with you for three of the last five years (the child must not have lived elsewhere for more than three months before your application)
- You are the child or young person's guardian
- You have leave of the court to apply
- A child or young person is in the care of the Local Authority and you have consent from them to make an application
- You have a Child Arrangement Order for a child or young person in your care

- You are the child or young persons relative where they have lived with you for at least one year before the date of your application
- You have the parents or person with parental responsibility's consent.

It is recommended that you seek independent legal advice before applying for an SGO.

What support will I receive?

If the child or young person was looked after by the Local Authority prior to your application you may

If the child or young person was looked after by the Local Authority prior to your application you may be eligible for financial and other support



be eligible for financial and other support, this is means tested and a financial assessment will be completed annually. If the child was not looked after by the Local Authority there is no entitlement to the financial and support assessment (you are able to make a request for this). The types of support that you may be entitled to are:

- Support groups
- Training
- Signposting service.

How do I apply for an SGO?

To apply for an SGO, you will need to give the Local Authority three months notice that you wish to apply to the court. The following actions will then take place:

- The Local Authority will look into your suitability to be the child or young person's special guardian
- An application will be made to the court
- The Local Authority will submit a report regarding your suitability. The court will not be able to grant an SGO without this information. The report includes information such as a recommendation for contact arrangements, information about the child, their family and the prospective guardian, information from the medical advisor and references and checks e.g. DBS
- The court will then consider the application and reports and make a decision.

Child Arrangement Order

What is a Child Arrangement Order?

A Child Arrangement Order can be made by a court under the Children Act 1989. This specifies who the child lives with and gives the carer shared parental responsibility. The order may be full or shared between two parties who do not live together. In this case the court will specify the period of time that the child will spend with each party. A Child Arrangement Order will not affect the child's legal relationship with their parents nor will it take away their parental responsibility. The day to day decisions will be made by those with the Child Arrangement Order without having to get anyone else's agreement, unless the court has directed otherwise. However, no one who has a Child Arrangement Order may take the child abroad for more than a month or change the child's surname unless everyone with parental responsibility agrees in writing or the court gives permission. If the court does give permission, the child's name may be changed by Deed Poll.

Who can apply for a Child Arrangement Order?

Anyone acting in the best interests of the child can apply for a Child Arrangement Order including the child's parents, grandparents, extended family, foster carers or someone with whom the child has been living with for more than three years. This is usually done with the agreement of the person (or people) with parental responsibility.

How long will the order last?

A Child Arrangement Order can be made for a specified period but ends when the child reaches 18 years. Birth parents can ask for the order to be revoked at any point. The order can address contact issues, where the child should live and what type of contact a child should have with other people named in the order.



Local Authority duties

When a Child Arrangement Order is made the Local Authority is under no duty to monitor the placement. In some serious cases the Local Authority may, at their discretion, pay an allowance to help care for the child and may help with the costs of applying for the order, depending on individual financial circumstances.


If an ongoing financial support is paid, a financial assessment must be undertaken annually, or if there are changes in circumstances. Changes in circumstances must be notified to the Local Authority.

**Anyone acting
in the best
interests of
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apply for a Child
Arrangement
Order**



How do I apply for an order?

To apply for a Child Arrangement Order, you will need to complete a form that is available from your local Magistrates Court, the County Court or the High Court. The fee to be paid depends on your financial circumstances. Unless the child is already involved with the Local Authority there is no duty to notify them of the application or placement.



Who can I contact for further information and support?

If you would like further advice you can contact the Fostering Team by:

Telephone: 0300 300 8181

Email:

fostering@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

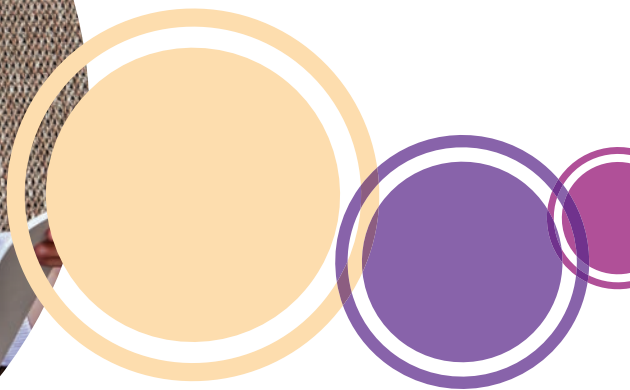
Further support is available through the Family Information Service; they provide free and impartial information and advice on:

- Ofsted registered childcare and early education
- Out of school clubs and holiday care
- Family support services
- Activities for children and young people
- Out of school clubs and holiday play schemes in the local area
- How to get help towards the cost of childcare, which includes Nursery Education Funding, Working Tax Credits and Child Tax Credits
- The Family Information Directory, which has details of many organisations and a wide range of services.

Telephone: 0300 300 8585

Website: www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/childcare

Email: fyis@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk





Useful contacts

Central Bedfordshire Corporate Parenting Service

Telephone: 0300 300 8181

Website: www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/fostering

Out of hours service

Telephone: 0773 336 8583

Monday to Thursday 5:20pm – 11pm

Friday 4:20pm – 11pm

Weekends and Bank Holidays

8:45am – 11pm

Customer Relations (Comment, Compliment and Complaint)

Telephone: 0300 300 6077

Telephone: 0300 300 4995

Customer Services:

Telephone: 0300 300 8000

Grandparents Plus

Telephone: 0300 033 7015

Website: www.grandparentsplus.org.uk

Email: info@grandparentsplus.org.uk

Family Rights Group

Telephone: 0808 801 0366

Website: www.frg.org.uk

Natural Parents Network

Telephone: 08454 565031

Website: www.n-p-n.co.uk

Email: administrator@n-p-n.co.uk

Fostering Network

Telephone: 020 7401 9582

Website: www.fostering.net

Fosterline

Telephone: 0800 040 7675

Website: www.fosterline.info

Coram BAAF

Telephone: 020 7520 0300

Website: www.corambaaf.org.uk



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is available
through
the Family
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Central Bedfordshire in contact

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