

SGO

Special Guardianship Order



Support for Parents

A guide for parents whose children are cared for by a Special Guardian.

This leaflet is for parents who have or may have a child permanently cared for under a Special Guardianship Order (SGO). We hope that you find this leaflet helpful and that it answers some of the questions you may have.

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. To become a Special Guardian, the person will need to be assessed by a Social Worker as suitable to care for your child until they reach 18 years of age.

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 and lasts until your child is 18 years of age. Only a court can make a Special Guardianship Order. 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.



Walsall Council

Assessment Arrangements for Special Guardians

A Special Guardianship Assessment will be completed by a Social Worker. The aim is to make sure that the proposed Special Guardian will take good care of your child. The assessment will include:



- How the possible Special Guardian would look after your child to make sure all their needs are met.
- Their expectations of your child. How they think your child should behave and how they might feel about what is happening to them.
- What they know about why your child cannot live with you.
- What harm your child has suffered, by who and what they think this means for your child and you.
- Information about you and your family.
- If workers think that you are a risk to your child and how your child would need to be safe.
- If workers think that any of your family is a risk to your child and how your child would need to be safe.
- Information about themselves, including their background, how they have lived their lives and things that have happened to them, both good and bad.
- Information about their relationship with your child, your child's family members.
- Their own children's thoughts about your child living with them.
- The possible Special Guardian's thoughts about your child having ongoing family time with you.
- There will be an assessment of their ability to support and supervise family time.

Family time

Where children become subject to an SGO, arrangements for family time 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 family time should happen.

The special guardian is responsible for making decisions about family time. 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 family time 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 family time arrangements; ideally someone who has a good relationship with both you and the special guardian. If you are having difficulties arranging family time, you can contact the SGO Support Service and ask for assistance. If family time 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.

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 family time. Your child will be helped knowing that you love them, being reassured that the adults get on and that you are okay.

We would advise that you speak with your GP so that a referral can be made for you to access appropriate support services to help you process and manage your experiences and current situation.



Contact us

Walsall SGO Support Hub

Tel: 01922 652680

Email: ConnectedCarersSGODutyTeam@walsall.gov.uk

Should you require assistance out of hours,
the number to call is **0300 555 2922**.

Useful Links

FamilyLine Family Action

Tel: 0808 802 6666

Text message: 07537 404 282

Email: familyline@family-action.org.uk

Out of hours: Text FAMILYACTION to 85258

We are here to provide a listening ear, answer particular parenting questions or help with guidance around more complex family issues. We can also provide longer-term support through regular sessions with our Befrienders and Counsellors. All support takes place via telephone, text message or email and is free.

Opening times are Monday to Friday, 9am to 9pm

Family Rights Group

Tel: 0808 801 0366

Visit: www.frg.org.uk

Coram Children's Legal Centre

Tel: 0300 3305480

Visit: www.childrenslegalcentre.com