

[Home](#) > [Residents](#) > [Health and social care](#) > [Children and families](#) > [Children's social care](#) > [Kinship care](#)

Kinship care

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Caring for someone else's child

Kinship care arrangements describe children who are cared for by members of their extended family, friends or people who are connected to them. You may also hear reference to 'connected care' or 'family and friends care'.

Children may be unable to live with their birth parents for a variety of reasons including parental alcohol or drug abuse, neglect or domestic violence, or a parent may have died.

A kinship care arrangement might be temporary or permanent. The local authority may be involved in making the arrangement, or the family network make the arrangements for care of a child themselves.

Informal arrangements within the family

A close family member provides the care to a child whilst the parent continues to retain parental responsibility.

The local authority may not be aware or need to be aware of these arrangements.

Private fostering

Someone who is not the child's parent or close relative looks after them for 28 days or more.

Arrangements are agreed by the parent and they retain overall parental responsibility.

The local authority needs to be notified and the carer undergoes an assessment, including some essential checks.

[More information on private fostering](#)

Child arrangement order

This used to be called a residence order.

This is a legal order given by the family court and lasts until a child is 18 years old. Carers share parental responsibility with the parent but can make day to day decisions.

More significant decisions must involve a child's parents.

Special guardianship order

This is a legal order given by the family court and lasts until a child is 18 years old.

Whilst special guardians share parental responsibility with a child's parents, they can make nearly all decisions about their care without needing to involve the parents.

Testamentary guardianship

A testamentary guardian has been named in writing, such as within a Will, to care for a child after a parent or special guardian's death if there is no-one else with parental responsibility able to care for the child.

Kinship foster carers

These are carers who have been assessed and approved to be the foster carer to a specific child by a local authority.

They might be extended family members, friends or someone with an established connection with a child. A child living with a kinship foster carer might be subject to an interim care order or full care order during or following public care proceedings.

[More information on fostering in Blackpool](#)

Adoption

Rarely, extended family members adopt a child from within their family network, however it is usually not the first option considered. When a child is adopted, the legal link between them and their birth parents is broken and family arrangements are permanently changed. An adoptive parent gains full parental responsibility for a child.

[More information about Kinship Care arrangements](#)

Special guardianship orders

A special guardianship order (SGO) is a legal order made by the family court. An SGO can be made in private family proceedings, or within public care proceedings which have been initiated by a local authority.

An SGO can name a single carer or a couple who become the child's special guardians. They are awarded parental responsibility for the child until they are 18. A special guardianship order is intended to provide legal permanence and stability for a child for the long term.

An SGO can only be ended by applying to the family court to end the order. An SGO remains in place even if a child moves home.

Applying for a special guardianship order

A person can apply to the court for an SGO if:

- They already have a child arrangements order or a residence order for the child
- They are the child's grandparent, aunt, uncle, brother or sister (including by half blood, marriage or civil partnership) or step-parent, and the child has lived with you for at least 1 year
- They are a guardian of the child who was appointed by the parent or special guardian to look after the child following their death
- The child is in the care of local authority children's services, and they consent to the application
- They are a local authority foster carer who has had the child placed with you for at least a year, or
- The child has been living with you for at least 3 years out of the last 5

A person can also apply to the court for an SGO if:

- Children's services, if the child is in their care, or
- everyone else who holds parental responsibility including anyone who already holds a residence or child arrangements order.

Applicants for an SGO must be over 18.

[More information about how to apply for an SGO](#)

SGOs are made following a full assessment of an extended family member, friend or connected person. During care proceedings, whilst assessments are completed to consider whether birth parent(s) can safely care for the child, at the same time assessments are often undertaken to consider whether a child can remain within their family and friends network if they cannot remain with a birth parent. These detailed assessments consider whether a child should remain with this family or friend within a fostering arrangement, or whether a special guardianship order can be made.

The same detailed assessment is completed within the private proceedings route. The assessments will cover areas such as the carer's experiences of being parented, their experiences of education and employment, past and present relationships, finances and health. They also consider the child's needs and experiences and how able the carer is to meet them in the longer term. Various statutory checks are undertaken to ensure a carer's suitability such as with the police, DBS service, local authorities where a carer has lived and

with children's schools.

All this detail is captured within an assessment called a 'Form K kinship assessment'.

Making decisions about a child

Special guardians can make day to day decisions and more important decisions about a child's life. They share parental responsibility with the child's parent(s), but special guardians have the overriding parental responsibility.

There are certain decisions special guardians would need the parent(s) consent for – such as changing a child's surname or religion, taking them abroad for more than 3 months or placing them for adoption. If special guardians were unable to get consent from the birth parents they would ask the court to decide.

Support available to special guardians

SGO support plan

When a child is made subject to a special guardianship order either via public or private legal proceedings, a SGO support plan will have been devised.

Special guardians should have the opportunity to review this support plan before an order is made and seek legal advice to support their understanding of the support plan.

For those children subject to public care proceedings where the local authority is involved in recommending the plan of SGO, Blackpool Council will fund a session of legal advice to support prospective special guardians review the proposed SGO support plan.

The SGO support plan will consider the child's needs in the following areas and how the special guardian(s) will meet these needs:

- Who the special guardians are and their relationship to / connection with the child
- Their identity
- Their development
- Their education
- Their physical and mental health
- Their emotional and behavioural wellbeing
- Their relationships with their family and friends
- How the child will continue family time with their birth parents and any other relatives who are important to them

The support plan should also detail any financial support which the local authority will be providing to support the special guardians in caring for the child.

Responsibility to support special guardianship arrangements

Responsibility to offer support to families where there is an SGO arrangement lies with the local authority who was responsible for making the order for 3 years.

After 3 years, the responsibility passes to the local authority where the special guardians live with the child.

Responsibility to provide financial support to the SGO arrangement remains with the local authority responsible for the SGO until the child turns 18. This local authority must review each SGO families' financial needs on an annual basis.

A family where there is an SGO is also eligible to [access early help support](#), child in need support or safeguarding support from the local authority in which they reside.

SGO carers are encouraged to seek out advice and support at the earliest opportunity so that difficulties don't escalate.

Financial support

Blackpool are currently reviewing their SGO finance policy and details will be added to this website once available.

The new policy will apply to new SGOs. Special guardians whose financial support was agreed prior to this policy view may have different agreements in place.

Children placed by other local authorities will be being supported via the arrangements of the responsible local authority.

If Blackpool are the responsible authority for financial support, we will write out to you on an annual basis to review your financial circumstances.

Access to specialist advice and support

Many children who are the subject of special guardianship orders have experienced difficulties such as bereavement, abuse, neglect or instability. Their experiences may have impacted on their emotional wellbeing, social development or the way in which they are able to make and keep relationships.

Often they have to make sense of difficult experiences and understand decisions made about their care. They can struggle with their sense of identity. Children in SGO arrangements and their special guardians are often navigating changed relationships with birth parents or other members of the family. Arrangements for family time can be particularly difficult for SGO families.

Special guardians can find it challenging at times to care for children who have had these experiences and need some additional advice and support.

Currently, children who were in local authority care immediately before the special guardianship order was made are eligible to access specialist assessment and therapeutic support from the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF).

The government review the budget and availability to this yearly. The amount which can currently be accessed per child over a year is £3000.

Children who were not in local authority care prior to the SGO being made are unfortunately not eligible to access specialist support from the ASGSF however support can still be accessed from universal services such as early help, CAMHS and emotional wellbeing services in the local area.

Access to specialist support from the ASGSF is via an assessment by the local authority. This could be via early help or children's social care.

Support available to special guardians in Blackpool

Preparation sessions

We run regular SGO preparation courses to support special guardians undergoing assessment to understand the process and some of the possible challenges children, and you as their carers, may face. Your assessing social worker will discuss available dates with you.

Monthly peer support groups

Regardless of which local authority was responsible for the special guardianship order, any special guardians living in or near Blackpool are very welcome to attend our monthly peer support groups which are facilitated by experienced social workers.

Our peer support groups are a chance to listen to and contribute to themed discussions around common difficulties such as education, managing family time and supporting a child to understand their history. They are also a valuable source of peer advice and support.

Access to therapeutic support via the adoption and special guardianship support fund

We make full use of access to the ASGSF and regularly link in with our colleagues in early help and children's social care to make sure we are identifying specialist support is accessed as early as possible. Our early help workers are based in the family hubs and are easily accessible.

We periodically run therapeutic training courses using funding from the ASGSF.

Drop in sessions

We also hold monthly drop in advice sessions – four bookable slots per month.

Events for carers/SGO families

Blackpool host events at Christmas, in the summer and during Kinship Week to celebrate our SGO families and offer chance for special guardians and children supported to SGO arrangements to meet each other.

Helping families access the right support at the right time

We can signpost you to appropriate local services in respect of your child and your family's support needs, or support you to make contact with the local authority who remains responsible for your SGO support needs within the first three years.

We can support you in accessing the most appropriate service, advocate on your behalf and help other professionals – such as education and health professionals - to understand your family's complex support needs.

Any family – whether a family by birth, adoption, fostering or SGO - can access our family hubs in Blackpool for advice and support at any time. SGO families do not need to be accessing any formal support through children's social care to access support from our hubs.

We can seek advice from our [Virtual School in relation to difficulties within education](#).

We understand the challenges SGO families face.

For more details about any of the above, please contact:

- **01253 478201** – Blackpool Council SGO advice line – voicemail facility to request a call back from an experienced SGO practitioner. Please don't leave messages requiring an urgent/safeguarding response.
- **01253 477299** – Blackpool Council request for support hub – for urgent requests/a safeguarding response
- SGOsupportservices@blackpool.gov.uk – Please send **non urgent queries only** to this email address - please direct urgent queries to the request for support hub

Useful advice and support

Kinship

[Kinship care charity in England and Wales](#). Access to peer support, advice and training, as well as information about kinship care policy development.

Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund

[Access to specialist assessment and therapeutic support](#) in relation to trauma and attachment needs for children in care immediately prior to a special guardianship order or child arrangements order being made.

CAMHS – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service

- [Blackpool - Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service \(CAMHS\)](#)
- [Fylde and Wyre - Children and Young People's Mental Health Services \(CYPMH\)](#)

Citizens Advice

Charity that provides advice and information about benefits, housing, debt, and employment.

- [Citizens Advice – national](#)
- [Citizens Advice Blackpool – Blackpool](#)

Others Blackpool-based sources of support for children and families

- [THE DEN | Empowerment Charity](#) – emotional and practical support to children who have experienced domestic abuse
- [YoutherapY : Blackpool Teaching Hospitals](#) – counselling and therapeutic support for 11 to 25 year olds

Additional information

[↑ Back to top](#)

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