

All about being assessed as a

Family & Friends Carer



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 Staffordshire
County Council

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What is a family and friends carer?

When parents have difficulties at home, their child may need to be looked after by someone else. For example: a relative, friend or other person who is connected to the child. These arrangements can be made directly between parents and their relatives or friends or a social worker may be involved. This is sometimes called a kinship care arrangement.

If the social worker is concerned that the child is suffering significant harm and does not believe it is safe for the child to remain in the parents' home, they can go to court for a legal order or agree with parents for the child to become 'looked after' in the care of the local authority.

For all children in care, Staffordshire County Council is committed to placing children with a relative, friend or connected person to the child, before considering placing them with an unrelated foster carer, unless that is not in the child's best interests. This can be a short term arrangement or maybe on a permanent basis; it can also be done in an emergency.

If you are a family member, friend or other connected person and the child is placed with you when they are 'looked after' by Staffordshire County Council, you will be assessed as a Family and Friends foster carer. Family and friends carers are sometimes called 'connected' or kinship carers.

What happens when a child becomes 'looked after'?

It can be a stressful time for a family if a child needs to become looked after. If courts are involved with this, Care Proceedings will be started. The court will look at whether it is safe for the child to return to the care of their parents. This can often be a difficult time as lots of assessments will take place and often, no one can give you a definitive answer about what will happen to the child until all of these assessments are finished and the court can make the final decisions. This will usually take about 6 months, though this can vary.

Viability assessments

If you would like to become a family and friends carer, you can put yourself forward to be assessed or you could be asked by the child's family. If this happens, a viability assessment is undertaken with you by a social worker. The viability assessment aims to get a snap shot of your family situation and identifies if you may be able to meet the requirements and expectations of becoming a foster carer or kinship carer.

The assessment will look at things such as:

- ➡ Your accommodation and if you have room for the child
- ➡ Your parenting skills and experience
- ➡ Your existing relationship with the child and their family
- ➡ How you would be able to keep the child safe and care for them

If this assessment is positive, you may undergo a full family and friends fostering assessment. The viability assessment is usually completed within a few weeks and you would be visited once or twice by the social worker to complete this.

Temporary approval as a family and friends foster carer

In some situations, if it is in the child's best interests, you can be given temporary approval as a family and friends foster carer after a short assessment. This is done to prevent the child/ren from being placed with carers that they do not know and when there is a good option within their own family network where they can be kept safe (this is sometimes referred to as a regulation 24 placement). A social worker will complete an assessment prior to the child/ren being placed with you. If the assessment recommends that you are to become a Temporary Foster Carer a full assessment is then completed. The local authority has 16 weeks to fully assess you as a family and friends foster carer before this temporary approval runs out. The temporary approval means that in this period you have the same entitlement to support and supervision and the same responsibilities as a fully approved carer.

Roles and responsibilities of professionals involved

If you are in the process of being assessed as a family and friends carer, there will be a number of different professionals involved who all have different roles including:

Family & Friends Social Worker - They are responsible for assessing and supporting you through this process.

Childs Social Worker - The child/ren will have a social worker who will work with the child, work alongside parents and make the plans about what should happen with the child/ren in future.

Child's Guardian - If the case is in court, the child/ren could have a guardian, they are independent from the local authority and are there to put forward plans they think will be in the best interests of the child.

What happens during the full family and friend's assessment?

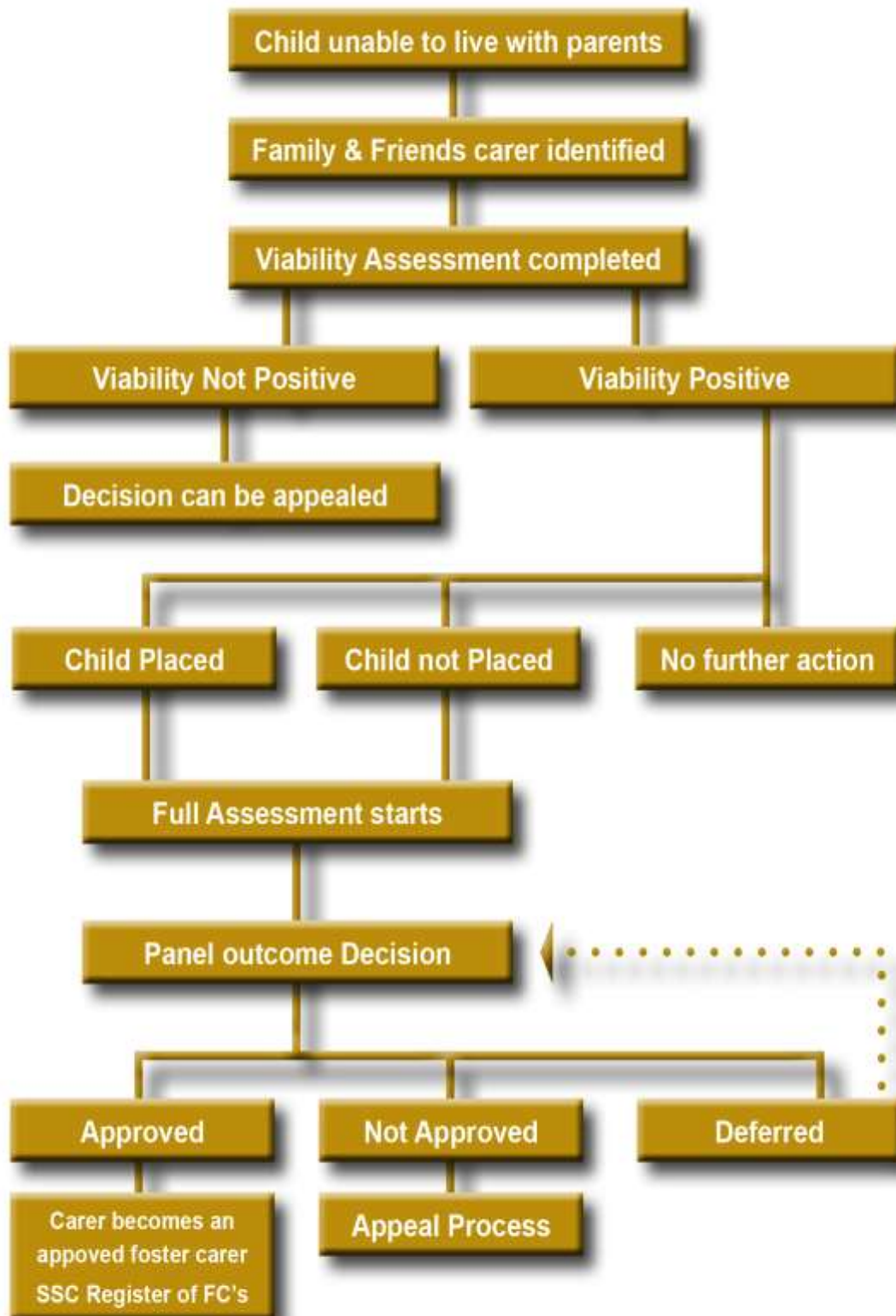
The assessment involves a social worker from the Family and Friends Team talking with you and gaining information to establish if a placement with you is in the child's best interests. The social worker will also undertake checks and references from a number of people. Family support workers will visit you to do health and safety checks of your house and pet assessments (if you have any). Checks will include:

- ⇒ personal references from 3 or more people who know you;
- ⇒ a check with the local authority where you live and have previously lived;
- ⇒ a medical examination by your GP;
- ⇒ Disclosure and Barring Service DBS checks (previously known as CRB checks) on all adults in the household; and other references depending on your specific situation i.e. employment, school or ex partners who have parented with you.

The assessment is not just a process for the social worker to gather information about you, but is also to help you to think through the practicalities and impact that having a child/ren can have on you and your family. Additionally, if there are issues identified during your assessment, support can be offered or suggestions made to help you with this. The full assessment will take approximately 8 weeks, though the number of visits needed vary from person to person, approximately 6-10 visits.

The social worker who does the assessment will write a report which you will be asked to contribute to. You can contribute by completing sections of the assessment yourself. The social worker will make a recommendation about if you should become an approved foster carer. This report is then sent to the fostering panel. You will be able to read and comment on this before the assessment goes to panel.

The Assessment Process



You can withdraw from the assessment at any point, If a full assessment has been started, you will be asked to sign written confirmation of this withdrawal.

What if I want to stop the assessment?

An assessment will help you to think about and understand the different issues which could affect you, your family and the child/ren if you become a family and friends foster carer. Some people decide that becoming a family and friends carer is not the best option for their family. If this is the case, you can withdraw from the assessment at any point. If a full assessment has been started, you will be asked to sign written confirmation of this withdrawal.

Fostering panel and the approval process

When the full family and friends assessment is complete, this will be taken to fostering panel. A fostering panel is made up of people who have different experience in working with children such as: a nurse, teacher, foster carer, social worker. There will also be people who are independent of Staffordshire County Council on the fostering panel.

Fostering Panel can make any of the following recommendations:

- ➡ To approve the foster carer.
- ➡ Defer and ask the social worker to return to the panel at a later date with additional information.
- ➡ Not to approve the foster carer.

The final decision about approval rests with the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who will consider the panel's recommendation. Prior to making a decision the ADM will consider the available information alongside the recommendation of the Fostering Panel. The ADM may wish to obtain information not previously available. The ADM will make their decision within 10 days of receiving the minutes of the Fostering Panel.

What happens once I have been approved?

Once you have been approved, you will be sent a letter confirming this information. You will be allocated a supervising social worker, sometimes this will be the same person who assessed you, they will meet with you regularly to make sure that you have support and that the child/ren are making good progress.

If the child/ren is not already in your care, there could be meetings and plans made to move the child. Depending on your specific circumstances, the time that this takes can vary. This may involve you gradually having more contact with the child/ren and overnight stays before the placement is started. You will be given up to date information about the child and discuss the child's routines and needs in a placement planning meeting.

You will also receive a foster carers handbook which will tell you all about Staffordshire County Council's policies for foster carers. This is a really useful guide and contains a lot of information about being a foster carer and caring for a looked after child. You will also be given a foster carers diary and a lockable box to store confidential information.

What will be expected of me as a family & friends approved carer?

As an approved family and friends foster carer you will be expected to:

- ⇒ Attend meetings to discuss the arrangements and plans for the child/ren you care for. This includes the Looked After Child Reviews and meetings to discuss the child/ren's education.
- ⇒ Ensure the child/ren attend regular health checkups. This may include visits to the dentist, optician, child's GP, as well as specialist health and medical appointments as requested.
- ⇒ Inform the child's Social Worker about the child's progress and anything important that happens to the child.
- ⇒ Inform the Social Worker if anything changes in your home or circumstances such as people moving in or out of your home, your health or involvement with police or other agencies.
- ⇒ To successfully complete the Department for Education Training, Support and Development (TSD) standards for family and friends carers (for more information refer to the next section on support and training).

What support and training can I expect?

Following your approval, the Family and Friends Team will continue to provide support, information, advice and guidance.

If you have any support needs these will be discussed on a regular basis with your supervising social worker.

Family and Friends Support Groups

These groups meet on a monthly basis and are held County wide. The groups provide family and friends carers with the opportunity to meet with other carers, share stories of good practice, support one another and have the opportunity to meet with and listen to invited guest speakers. If you live outside of the Staffordshire area, we will try and identify a local group in your area for you to attend. You can speak to your fostering social worker to get details of your nearest group.

Training

Information about training courses offered can be found in the training catalogue. Family and friends foster carers will also be able to access further training offered by Staffordshire Safeguarding Childrens Board and the People's Directorate. More information about these courses can be obtained from the Training and Recruitment Team or through discussions with your social worker.

If you live outside of the Staffordshire area we will try and identify local relevant training courses for you to attend.

Training and TSD Standards

Family and friends foster carers are required to successfully complete the Department for Education Training, Support and Development (TSD) standards within 18 months of their approval date.

These are covered in 6 Standards and you will be required to evidence your ability to know, understand and be able to do the tasks required in your role as a family and friends carer.

The Standards include the following topics:

Standard 1 Understanding your role as a family and friends carer.

Standard 2 Knowing how to provide a safe environment and healthy care.

Standard 3 Knowing how to communicate effectively.

Standard 4 Understanding the development of children and young people.

Standard 5 Keeping children and young people safe from harm.

Standard 6 Developing your self.

Foster Carers Handbook

As an approved family and friends carers you will be provided with a comprehensive fostering handbook. The handbook contains a range of information and guidance which will help and support you to achieve good outcomes for the children and young people in your care

Will I receive any financial support?

As a Family and Friends Carer you will receive a weekly allowance for the child/ren in your care. The amount of the allowance depends on the child's age. Family and Friends Carers who receive a fostering allowance are not entitled to claim child benefit or child tax credits for the child/ren in their care.

The fostering allowance will start from the date the child/ren is placed with you and is paid in arrears.

In exceptional circumstances extra financial support may be available to meet any additional needs of the child and these can be discussed in further detail with your Social Worker, e.g. support with school uniform if the child needs to change school.

Payment For Skills

When you have completed your Department for Education Training, Support and Development (TSD) standards you will be able to progress through the 'Payment for Skills' scheme which rewards carers for acquiring and maintaining their skills and knowledge. For more information see the Foster Carers Handbook.

Legal terminology

Looked After Child (LAC)

A term which refers to all children who are cared for by the local Authority, including children in voluntary accommodation, and those children subject to care orders and emergency protection orders

Care Order (CO)

An order made by court where it is believed that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer harm. Unless the Order is later discharged the Local Authority will maintain parental responsibility until the child is 18 years old.

Special Guardianship Order (SGO)

An Order made by a court that gives another person other than the child's parent full parental responsibility for a child.

Child Arrangement Order

This is a court order which confirms that the child will live with you and gives you the right to make decisions about their care. It replaces residence orders and contact orders under s.8 Childrens Act 1989.

Regulation 24 Placement (Reg 24)

This provides the temporary approval of a family and friend's carer until a full assessment has been completed.

Parental Responsibility (PR)

The rights, power and duties by law a parent has in relation to their child. PR permits the right to make all the important decisions in relation to how a child is raised, change of name, what school they attend, if they can be taken abroad and the receipt of any medical treatment.

Private Orders

As a family and friends carer, you may want to consider getting a private order for the child/ren. This is an application to the court to obtain parental responsibility for the child/ren. If you are an approved family and friends carer and want to have legal responsibility for the child/ren. There are two main options for this;

A Child Arrangement Order – this is a court order which confirms that the child will live with you and gives you the right to make decisions about their care. It replaces residence orders and contact orders under s.8 Childrens Act 1989.

A Special Guardianship Order – you would have the majority of parental responsibility and have more freedom to make decisions for the child/ren.

If you would like a like to apply for a private order, you may wish to see a solicitor for legal advice (most solicitors will give you a 30 minute free consultation). It is important that you feel confident about managing the needs of the child/ren and that you are happy with any support plans made. Your social worker and the child's social worker will give you more information about your options.

Frequently asked questions

If I'm approved as a family and friends foster carer, will other looked after children be placed with me?

No, as a family and friends carer you are assessed for the specific child/ren that you are connected to you. If you would like to be a mainstream foster carer, you would need to be fully trained and assessed by the fostering team to ensure that you are able to care for other child/ren.

I've had convictions in the past, would I be able to be a family and friends foster carer?

If you have convictions, your social worker will want to discuss the circumstances around these convictions with you. There are a number of family and friends foster carers who have had convictions in the past. All convictions are considered on an individual basis.

I have a disability/medical/health condition, would this stop me from being a family and friends foster carer?

The social worker would want to discuss what impact your disability/medical condition has upon you and how you would be able to look after the child/ren with this. They would consider the age of the child/ren, the type of care that they would need and how your health condition could affect you in the future.

Is there an age limit on being a family and friends foster carer?

No, however, the social worker would consider your health and also the age and needs of the child i.e. if you have difficulties with mobility which is likely to get worse, a long term placement for a baby would likely not be appropriate.

I smoke will this affect my application to become a family and friends foster carer?

The local authority's policy is the foster carers who smoke cannot be approved to take a child under the age of five, however, this will need to be carefully considered within your assessment and you will need to provide evidence that you are motivated to reduce/quit. The social worker will consider the health needs of any child placed and the possible impact of this. You will be provided with information as to where you can access help and be supported to reduce or to give up smoking. If you are approved the issue will then be raised in future visits from social workers.

Exceptions may only be made where it is in the child's best interests.

Useful links

The Grandparents' Association

www.grandparents-association.org.uk

Helpline: 0845 4349585

Grandparents Plus

www.grandparentsplus.org.uk

020 8981 8001

info@grandparentsplus.org.uk

Parentline Plus

www.parentlineplus.org.uk

Department for Education

www.education.gov.uk

The Family Rights Group

www.frg.org.uk

0808 801 0366

advice@frg.org.uk

Staffordshire Fostering Service

www.staffordshire.gov.uk/fostering

Staffordshire County Council

www.staffordshire.gov.uk

Fostering Network

www.fostering.net

020 7620 6400

info@fostering.net

Every Child Matters

www.education.gov.uk

Contacting the Family & Friends Team

Family & Friends Team

2 Staffordshire Place, Tipping Street, Stafford, ST16 2DH
Tel: 01785 895017 or 01785 895235

Family & Friends Duty Number

01785 895949

Your useful contact details

Comments, compliments & complaints

Your views about Children's Services

Staffordshire County Council welcomes feedback from you. It's your feedback that helps us to improve the way we do things.

Comments - we welcome your suggestions and ideas about our service.

Complaints - we want to provide a good quality service and if you feel that things have gone wrong we need to know, so that we can try to put them right.

Compliments - tell us when you think we have done something well, because this also helps us to deliver a better service. You can give us your feedback using the following methods

Email - cil.complaints.team@staffordshire.gov.uk

Telephone - If you would like to speak to someone about your complaint, you can contact us on these numbers Monday to Thursday 8.30am - 5.00pm and Friday 8.30am - 4.30pm
01785 278601 or 0300 111 3000

Children's free phone number - 0800 0837014.

Text - You can use our text service by texting 'STAFFS COMP', plus your comment to 60003 (standard text messaging charges will apply)

If you have any immediate concerns about a child or young person, you can report these directly to the First Response Team.

Monday – Friday (8.00am-8.00pm) 0800 1313 126

Out of hours 0845 6042886

Family & Friends Team

Staffordshire Place 2, Tipping Street,
Stafford, ST16 2DH.

Tel: 01785 895017 or 01785 895235

Family & Friends Duty Number

Tel: 01785 895949

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