

# IS YOUR CHILD CURRENTLY OPEN TO SOCIAL SERVICES? DO YOU WANT HELP?

This is a guide for women who go through child protection and care proceedings.

It is produced by women with lived experience and staff who support women through this process.

We understand that this can be a difficult time and in this leaflet you will find useful information about your rights, including:

THE LEGAL PROCESS .....



CHILD CONTACT .....



ADVOCACY .....



WHERE TO FIND SUPPORT .....



**Fulfilling Lives**

South East Partnership

## THE LEGAL PROCESS

Anyone who has concerns about a child's welfare can make a referral to children's social services. A referral can be made before and after a child is born.



A social worker will contact you to assess the situation and then decide which route to take.



You should expect to have a family group meeting so that the child can stay within the family or someone you know.

The assessment might also conclude the following options:

**SECTION 17:** Children in Need (the child needs extra support for safety, health and development)

**SECTION 47:** Reasonable cause to suspect that a child who lives, or is found in their area is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm

→ If you are pregnant and previous children have been removed, have died or have a care plan, then the unborn child will have a pre-birth assessment. This is an automatic referral process.

The court can also get involved to decide where the child should live and who the child should see.

Further courts appointments might follow but it can also go straight to the final hearing.

**Possible outcomes from the final hearing can be:**

- ADOPTION ORDER AND PLACEMENT ORDER
- RESIDENCE ORDER
- SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDER
- CONTACT ORDER
- SUPERVISION ORDER
- CARE ORDER

## RIGHT TO CONTACT

Contact arrangements need to be recorded in the care plan and placement plan.

A parent needs to apply for a contact order but the outcome and whether contact will be granted depends on the type of court order.

Children's Services understand the importance of your relationship with your child and should support child contact where it's safe and realistic to do so.

They will also take into consideration the parents' wishes for child contact.



# RIGHT TO ADVOCACY

## WHO ARE ADVOCATES?

An advocate is someone who can help you have your voice heard when plans or decisions are being made for your child. They are independent (not part of children's services).

## HOW CAN AN ADVOCATE HELP ME?

An advocate can help you:

- Prepare for meetings with social workers
- Ask the social worker questions
- Speak up and get your point of view across
- Reach agreements with social workers
- Challenge social workers or other professionals if you think they have made a mistake or do not agree with what they say
- Help you remember what was said at the meeting so you can plan what to do next

## HOW CAN I FIND AN ADVOCATE?

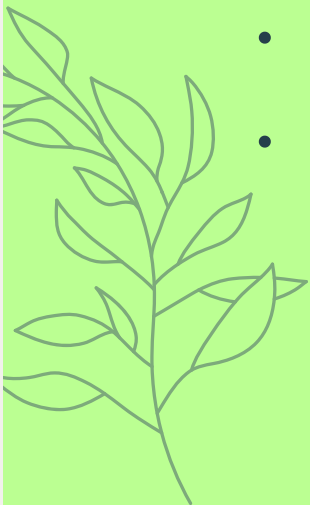
See further information.

If you have made an application for a contact order in the past and this was refused, you will not be able to make another application for a contact order for a further 6 months without the permission of the court.

If you are unhappy with the contact then you're able to make a formal complaint to the social worker and the children services.

For more information please visit the following pages:

- [14-contact-for-children-in-care.pdf \(frg.org.uk\)](#)
- Children and local authority care - Citizens Advice -see [Contact with a Child in Care](#)



## CAN AN ADVOCATE COME WITH ME TO MEETINGS?

Sometimes.

You should be allowed to bring an advocate to a meeting with social workers (such as a child protection conference), but do not have the legal right to.

When talking about plans for your child in the care system, you may be allowed an advocate, but this is not a legal right.

## DO I HAVE A RIGHT TO AN ADVOCATE IF I HAVE A DISABILITY?

Yes, if your disability stops you from fully taking part in meetings on your own.

## WHAT IF SOCIAL SERVICE DON'T WANT ME TO BRING AN ADVOCATE TO A MEETING?

Ask why and explain how an advocate would help you.

If you have explained to a social worker that you want to bring an advocate and the social worker still does not agree, you can make a formal complaint.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

### ADVOCACY SERVICES

Brighton:

The Sussex Advocacy Partnership

Tel: 0300 456 2370

email: pohwer@pohwer.net

SpeakOut (for people with learning disabilities)

Tel: 01273 421921

email: info@bhspeakout.org.uk

East Sussex:

The Advocacy People

Tel: 0330 440 9000

email:

info@theadvocacypeople.org.uk

### EMOTIONAL & THERAPEUTIC SUPPORT

Brighton:

Looking Forward

Tel: 07718 126517

EAST SUSSEX:

The Foundations Project

Phone: 07919298460

Email:

Jacquie.holloway@eastsussex.gov.uk

### NATIONAL PEER SUPPORT: Strengthening Practice

<https://www.strengtheningpractice.co.uk/>

Tel: 01900 822458

### THE LEGAL PROCESS

National information:

Family Rights Group

Tel: 0808 801 0366

[www.frg.org.uk](http://www.frg.org.uk)

Citizen Advice Bureau

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

Family Lives

Tel: 0808 800 2222

[www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk)