

KINSHIP CARE ASSESSMENT

What to expect



KINSHIP CARE ASSESSMENT – WHAT TO EXPECT

When Children's Services are worried about the safety or well-being of a child Social Workers always work with the child's parent(s) or carer(s) to try and make things better and safer to enable the child to remain in their care. A family network meeting should be undertaken to consider the network of support around the child.

Sometimes, however, the worries are so great Social Workers need to make alternative arrangements for a child through to adulthood to ensure that they are safe and have the best opportunities to achieve. When this happens, we know that where possible, it is better for a child to be placed with a family member, or someone they know well, and in fact, the Local Authority have a duty to look for alternative carers within the child's network. Research tells us that many family placements are very successful and enable the child to maintain a better sense of their identity and maintain closer ties with their birth family.

We are making contact with you as you have expressed an interest in becoming an alternative permanent carer of child for whom there are significant current worries.

THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

In order to decide whether you can be recommended as a suitable alternative carer for a child, Children's Services need to undertake an assessment of your current situation and suitability.

The Social Worker(s) will also discuss the various options available to the Court in terms of orders to secure the child in your care. For most children placed with relatives or connected people, there is no need for them to remain as a Looked After Child once it has been decided that there is a safe option to care for them within their network throughout their childhood. This avoids them feeling different to their peers as remaining in the care of the Local Authority means that they would be subjected to Looked After Review Meetings, annual medicals as well as regular visits from a Social Worker throughout their childhood.



WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE ASSESSMENT

1. Children's Services will make contact and arrange a visit to your home. This visit is generally a joint visit by two Social Worker, one being the Social Worker for the child, and the other the assessing Social Worker. They will talk to you about the assessment process and go through the possible recommendations which could be made at the end of the assessment process. We can provide you with a fact sheet explaining the differences between the different types of court order.
2. The first part of the assessment process is called the Initial Viability process, and assuming you are happy to proceed, you will be asked for information about yourself and the other people in your household. The Social Workers will ask for permission to undertake Police checks in respect of everyone aged 16 or over who lives with you. At this stage the assessing Social Worker will be assessing against National Minimum Fostering Standards, as well as consideration for suitability for a private law order such as a Special Guardianship Order or a Child Arrangement Order.
3. At the end of this Initial Viability Stage the assessing Social Worker will make a recommendation as to whether there should be any further assessment. Where Fostering Standards are met, then the assessment will automatically progress for a full Kinship Fostering Assessment, which will be twin tracked with an assessment for the suitability for a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangement Order. Even if at the end of the Initial Viability Assessment the outcome was negative for fostering, the Social Worker may still recommend that there is continued assessment for a private law order.
4. The full assessment is a much more in depth piece of work and will involve the assessing Social Worker visiting you up to 10 times, so you will need to commit to these visits. You will



be asked for much more detailed information about you and your family. References will be taken up, and more checks completed. You will also be asked to undertake a medical. This process can feel quite intrusive, so you need to be prepared for the searching questions which might be asked.

5. If you are assessed beyond the Initial Viability stage for Kinship Fostering, then, upon conclusion of the full assessment, you will automatically be presented to the Fostering Panel who make recommendations regarding the approval of Foster Carers. This will happen regardless of whether the recommendation of the full assessment is negative or positive, but you would be supported through this process by the assessing Social Worker. If a negative recommendation for a fostering arrangement you will be advised to seek your own independent legal advice. A positive recommendation for fostering does not necessarily mean that this will be the recommended plan by the child's Social Worker, if there are other suitable options available which would avoid the child remaining, or becoming, a looked after child.

6. There will be a review meeting towards the end of the assessment when professionals will meet and discuss the likely outcome and recommendations and explore any support you may need in order to safely care for the child. A Support Plan will be formed and implemented at the earliest possible stage, even before the final hearing if the Social Worker is likely to recommend that you care for the child through to adulthood. At this stage you would also be offered legal advice funded by the Local Authority, so you can have independent advice as to what is being recommended. The Social Worker for the child will present their recommendation as to the type of order to the court at the final hearing. This will be formulated on the basis of what would best meet the needs of the child. A positive assessment does not necessarily mean that the child would be placed in your care. You should also be aware that your assessment is likely to be filed with the Court and shared with other parties.

7. There are any number of reasons why an assessment may be negative. These may include

- Concern that you or a member of your household has a criminal record for an offence which could cause concern as to the safety of the children
- You or a member of your household has a physical or mental health condition which could impact on your ability to care for the child.
- The dynamics in the family meant that it would make it difficult for you to care
- Your working or other caring commitments mean that you would not have sufficient time to support the child(ren)
- The child(ren)'s needs are complex and the assessor believes that you would struggle to manage their presenting behaviours

The reasons for a negative assessment would be discussed with you in full by the assessing Social Worker, whether that be at the end of the Initial Viability stage or following a full assessment. You have the right to seek legal advice at any stage of the assessment.



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