



Family Group Conference

Procedures



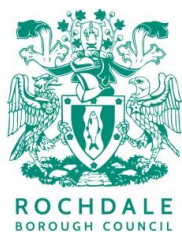
Family Group Conference Guidance & Procedures

Summary

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| Related Legislation / Applicable Section of Legislation | Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010 – section 2. Public Law Outline 2014 Children and Young Person’s Act 2008 sect.8 Children’s Act 1989 Adoption and Children’s Act 2002 Care Matters – Time for change DfES 2007 – p.34 Care Matters- Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care. DfES 2006 – p. 28 |
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Family Group Conference Procedures

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to explain to staff when a referral for a Family Group Conference (FGC) should be considered, and the process that follows once a referral is made. The guidance is relevant to Social Workers, Practice Managers and any other staff working with children or young people who may be at risk of being accommodated by the Local Authority.

Family Group Conferences recognise that every family is different, with its own culture, personalities, personal dynamics and history; and therefore unique ways of problem solving and providing support. Family Group Conferences put families at the forefront of decision making for their children.

In order to provide a quality service we aim to:

- Provide an inclusive and flexible service which values all individuals and the contribution they make to the FGC.
- Ensure children and their families are at the forefront in the planning of their own FGC.
- Seek and record the views of children, parents & carers/ extended family members/referrers and other professionals on their experience of an FGC.
- Use feedback from FGC members to make improvements to the service.
- Have a clear policy in place for complaints.
- Set up a database and outcomes monitoring tool in order to analyse the effectiveness and efficiency of the service.
- Ensure that the FGC Co-ordinator/Manager remains independent.
- Have a Safeguarding policy in place.
- Offer advocacy or support to children or vulnerable adults at the meeting.
- Ensure that parents are aware of the information to be presented to the FGC before it takes place.
- Provide help and support to families, including travel costs & provision of childcare where appropriate, to enable them to attend their FGC.

2. The Concept of Family Group Conferences

The concept of Family Group Conferences was developed to provide a more effective way of working with families in order to provide better outcomes for children and young people. It originated from New Zealand and took its principles from the cultural values and beliefs of the indigenous Maori people.

The belief is that better outcomes result from a process whereby the family are empowered to make decisions and accept responsibility for the children and young people within their family. This concept is based on the key principles of partnership, empowerment and participation. The process provides a forum whereby family are given information by all participants involved, including concerns that are held, and options that are available to them. The family are then empowered by being given private time to consider the information and devise a plan to address the concerns. The plan is presented back to the wider group of participants and they agree/disagree with it. A plan can only be disagreed with if the wider group believe it places the child or young person at risk. However further assessment may be required and/or approval granted from the Court for cases in Care Proceedings before the plan can be formally agreed.

The rationale is that, because the family devises the plan and accepts responsibility for their part in it, they are more likely to carry out their commitment than if they had no say in the plan's development.

3. Definition of Family In Respect of Family Group Conferences

The term "family" is interpreted widely and includes family, friends, and significant other people.

4. Referral Routes for Family Group Conferences

The Social Worker must give consideration to a Family Group Conference as a routine piece of any casework plan where it is likely that a placement may need to be considered.

A FGC should be considered when the Local Authority makes a decision to initiate the PLO process.

A request for an urgent FGC will be considered to prevent a child becoming Looked After on any new cases coming to the attention of the MASS.

5. The Family Group Conference Process

Prior to the Family Group Conference

5.1 Stage One - The Referral

When making the referral the family should have been consulted and agreed to the referral being made. However referrals can be made when the family have disagreed and the Family Group Conference Co-ordinator can assist the Social Worker in attempting to engage the family.

The referral form must be completed fully, with any blanks explained, and must be accompanied by a list of participants already known to the Social Worker. When compiling the list of participants the following should be noted:

- All persons with Parental Responsibility should know about the involvement of Children's Services and have had the Family Group Conference referral discussed with them.
- It is not acceptable to say that there are no family on a referral unless all efforts have been made to locate family and this can be evidenced.
- The definition of family is non-specific and varied; for example blood relatives, step relatives, relatives by marriage, family friends.
- Family members, children and young people will be fully involved in decisions about who should attend the Family Group Conference and while genuine objections need to be dealt with, it is often the person the family have reservations about who holds the family knowledge and is likely to challenge negative behaviours within the family.
- Where possible, key persons (including the young person) need to be identified by the Social Worker so that the facilitator can engage them in breaking down the barriers with the family.
- In consultation with family members, consideration should be given to inviting professionals not already involved with the family, who may benefit from being involved in the planning stage of the Family Group Conference.
- When a referral is being made in respect of a cared for child, the decision to refer must have been discussed and agreed through a care planning meeting which has agreed that rehabilitation is appropriate for the child and ratified through a cared for review, with Independent Review Officer, oversight.
- Where the purpose of the FGC is rehabilitation to a parent, it is anticipated that an assessment will have been undertaken which supports the proposed change of care plan.

5.2 Stage Two – In house Meeting

A meeting is held with the referring Social Worker, their Practice Manager and the Family Group Conference Coordinator/Manager within 24 hours of the referral being received.

The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the referral, agree the Local Authority non-negotiable stance, and make a tentative date for the Family Group Conference. The “Report for FGC” (Appendix A) will also be discussed, focussing on the concerns of the local authority in relation to the child/children. The completed report will include concerns (statements of fact are listed as concerns), and will also include the Local Authority’s non-negotiable stance (to be decided by the Social Worker and Practice Manager at the meeting).

N.B. If the Practice Manager cannot attend, then the LA non-negotiable stance should be sent through via email, so that the report can be completed in their absence.

5.3 Stage Three – Family Finding

Once the referral has been made, the Family Group Conference Coordinator/Manager gathers and collates information and contacts all proposed participants.

The FGC Coordinator/Manager will make contact with the child/children to obtain their wishes and feelings and explain the FGC process. Children and young people attending the FGC will be offered the chance to visit the venue before the FGC and discuss any concerns. An advocate will be sought for children if needed. Children and young people will be involved in planning suitable refreshments for their family.

The FGC Coordinator/Manager will contact all family members regardless of their location, to prepare them for the FGC, and share the FGC report which will include the concerns and non-negotiable stance of the Local Authority. The availability of family members will be discussed alongside other considerations for attendance such as mobility or childcare issues.

An appropriate date and time is discussed with the family and once agreed with the referrer a suitable venue will be booked.

At the Conference

5.4 Stage One - Information Sharing

All information is shared with the family. As each person presents information, the family are able to discuss and debate the information with those presenting it.

This is often the critical stage as the family are given the factual information. It can result in the realisation that the situation is not how they have viewed it, or how members of the family have portrayed it.

This part of the conference is usually conducted in a straightforward approach with direct answers given to any questions that arise from the family. It is critical that the family are given the exact situation including the possible scenarios/consequences should there be no changes made. It is imperative because of the nature of the discussions that participants (especially professionals) have a clear understanding of the facts and are able to outline their stance and field any questions. The conference will be less successful if the information is confused or unclear, therefore preparation is vital.

At times the content of the information shared can be cause for emotions to run high and occasionally people become aggressive. Any persons invited to the conference that are known to become aggressive when upset should be identified by the Social Worker. While it is always a difficult situation this can be prepared for with seating arrangements etc. and the facilitator can engage the participant beforehand to try and prevent the situation occurring. This reaction is not uncommon but can be managed effectively especially when planned in advance.

The information shared at the Family Group Conference is for the purpose of the development of a Family Plan and it is not to be used for any other reason, unless it becomes evident the child/children are at immediate risk. It may also be necessary for family members to be aware that the plan may need to be presented to Court in relation to care proceedings.

At this stage, the family worker with responsibility for supporting the plan will be introduced. They will have knowledge of the family circumstances and capacity to support the actions laid out by the family as well as providing a monitoring role.

5.5 Stage Two – Private Family Time

The family are given private family time (no professionals present) to debate and discuss the information they have heard, and devise a plan to address the concerns.

They can ask for clarification from the FGC Co-ordinator, but need to devise the plan without the inclusion of professionals.

5.6 Stage Three - The Agreement of the Plan

Once the family has developed a plan they meet back with the Co-ordinator and explain their plan. Any specific requests for services are confirmed for example support for family members to apply for a Child Arrangement Order.

It is not a time for making any fundamental changes to the plan.

The family can ask for financial assistance but must have it explained that this will need to be applied for and is subject to the application being approved.

At this time arrangements are made for reviewing, monitoring, and the request for financial resources. The family nominate the person/s that will monitor and review the plan. The Social Worker will be responsible for any funding applications that need to be made.

5.7 Stage Four - Implementation of the Plan

The plan is typed up by the FGC Co-ordinator and the Practice Manager's response will be sought, to ensure that the plan is safe and to consider any assessments needed or requests for further resources which may need to be referred to a Head of Service. All FGC attendees will receive a copy of the plan; the FGC Co-ordinator will upload the family's plan onto ICS.

The individual components of the plan are then implemented and monitored by those who accepted responsibility for them. The family need to be aware that timescales for implementing the plan may be affected by statutory assessments that need to be completed before the plan can be agreed and/or Court timescales should the child be subject to a legal order that needs varying or Care Proceedings issued.

The family worker responsible for supporting the plan will make additional contact with the family to arrange the support where necessary. This will be clearly outlined within the Family plan and will be adhered to by the Family Worker.

6. Measuring the Outcomes and Benefits of Family Group Conferences

Family Group Conferencing is a process in which family members, including those in the wider family are enabled to meet together to find solutions to difficulties that they, a child or children in the family are facing. They are an approach to planning and decision-making, which uses the skills and experience of the wider family and professionals.

Family Group Conferences may be appropriate in a number of contexts where there is a plan or decision to be made. A Family Group Conference can be used to prevent a child being looked after by the local authority or conversely to place a child or children from Local Authority carers back within the family.

The process also allows for a child or children to be cared for by family in order to prevent them becoming subject to Child Protection Plans, thus reducing the identified risk of a child suffering or likely to suffer significant harm.

In accordance with government and local priorities to avoid children becoming unnecessarily Looked After, it is essential for a Family Group Conference to be considered.

Within the information gathered during the Child & Family assessment there will be clear evidence as to whether a Family Group Conference has taken place and the reason given if this has not taken place.

Data will be collected following each FGC, including feedback from professionals, children and family members, which will allow the service to measure the success of FGCs held, and areas for improvement.

FAQ's for data collection purposes are as follows;

- Did the Family Group Conference result in the prevention of a Child / Children becoming Looked After?
- Did it prevent a child / children entering the Child Protection arena?
- Did it result in consideration being given to the child / children no longer being subject to protection plans at the next Review Child Protection Conference?

- Did a child / children cease to be Looked After?
- Was there a plan for permanency?
- Was a contact plan devised?
- Where is the child going to be living and how long will this placement be for?
- What will Children's Services involvement be after the Family Group Conference?
- What is the plan for a Review Family Group Conference?
- Was the plan approved?

In addition, Family Group Conference approved plans can be used in court proceedings as this is evidence that the local authority have consulted family members to assist with the best outcome for the child and prevented any unnecessary delay.

7. Selecting and Targeting Particular Groups

- This is an area that needs to be given consideration. There may be an increase in cases in a specific geographical area, in children being made subject to child protection plans, or in children becoming looked after.
- Consideration may be given about significant changes in categories, for instance an increase in children being made subject to plans under the category of physical harm. For example, using the data collected by the FGC Coordinator/Manager, it may become apparent that cohorts need to be considered due to an increase in a specific area of need, such as Domestic Violence, Neglect or Child Sexual Exploitation.

8. Referring Social Workers Checklist

- Make sure that you have considered the option of a Family Group Conference in your casework plan. If you have decided against making a referral, your reasons for this must be documented, especially where it has been the recommendation of either a Looked After Child review or a Child Protection Conference.
- Complete the referral form fully and explain the blanks. Ensure that the referral is accompanied by a list of participants, and a genogram where possible.
- Make sure that the Practice Manager and FGC Manager/Co-ordinator has scheduled an in-house meeting within 24 hours.
- Ensure the FGC report is completed at the in-house meeting.
- Ensure that the main carer has had the report explained to them, and is in full agreement with the identified presenting concerns.
- Ensure that Social Workers/Referrers come to the conference with a clear understanding on the non-negotiable stance of the department, and the assistance that the department is able to provide.
- Complete the feedback form no later than 14 days after the convening of the conference.

9. SAFEGUARDING POLICY

This policy should be used in conjunction with Rochdale Safeguarding Children Board's Child Protection (RBSCB) Procedures.

The following procedures should be applied during the preparation and meeting stages of Family Group Conferences (FGCs):

1. Confidentiality can only be maintained where it does not compromise the safety or welfare of children and young people. The limits of confidentiality need to be stated to every FGC member during the preparation stages, and re-iterated at the start of the meeting.
2. Should any safeguarding issues arise whilst preparing children or family members for the FGC, the preparation should be put on hold, and the RBSCB Child Protection procedures followed. The FGC Manager should be notified.
3. Should any safeguarding issues arise during the course of the FGC the conference will be put on hold and the RBSCB Child Protection procedures followed. The FGC Manager should be notified.
4. Perpetrators of Domestic Violence will not usually be invited to FGCs if the victim is present however Co-ordinators may seek their views in other ways.
5. FGCs may not be suitable in cases where a child or young person is at risk of forced marriage due to the physical danger and potential emotional manipulation they may experience during this type of session with their parents, other members of their family, or community. There must not be any burden on the child or young person to agree to an FGC.
6. All FGC members should be made aware of the safeguarding or welfare concerns that must be addressed by the family plan, at the start of the meeting.
7. Children's safety needs to be ensured in all FGC plans. If Co-ordinators have any concerns that a plan is not safe for a child they should discuss it with the Social Worker, and the family. More time may then be allocated to the family to revise their plan.
8. FGCs would not be appropriate in cases where:
 - There are concerns about multigenerational sexual abuse.
 - There is concern about network abuse
 - Where there is suspected professional abuse
 - Where there is a clear requirement for a child protection plan by professionals.
 - Where it may place a child/ young person, or other family member, at risk.

For Children and Young People attending FGCs

- Anyone caring for younger children at FGCs, in a professional capacity, must have a DBS check and an appropriate childcare qualification.
- Children should be cared for in appropriate safe and clean space with toys and resources appropriate to their age and stage of development.
- Refreshments, toilets and changing facilities should be provided.
- Children & young people attending FGCs will be offered the services of an advocate or other means of support in order for them to have their voices heard.
- Children and young people attending FGCs will be made aware that they can come out of the meeting at any time that they feel uncomfortable, or need to take a break, and can speak to the FGC Co-ordinator for support if needed.

| In order to safeguard children, FGC Co-ordinators must have: |
|--|
| Attended appropriate Safeguarding/Child Protection training |
| Completed FGC Induction |
| Access to support and supervision in relation to FGCs (Internal & External) |
| Received a copy of the safeguarding procedures for FGCs |
| A current DBS check, against the child workforce, undertaken by Rochdale Borough Council |
| Names & contact numbers of who to contact should a child protection issue arise out of normal working hours. |
| A mobile phone when carrying out FGC work |



Report for Family Group Conference (Appendix A)

Re: _____

Concerns

-
-
-

Non-Negotiable Stance of Children's Services:

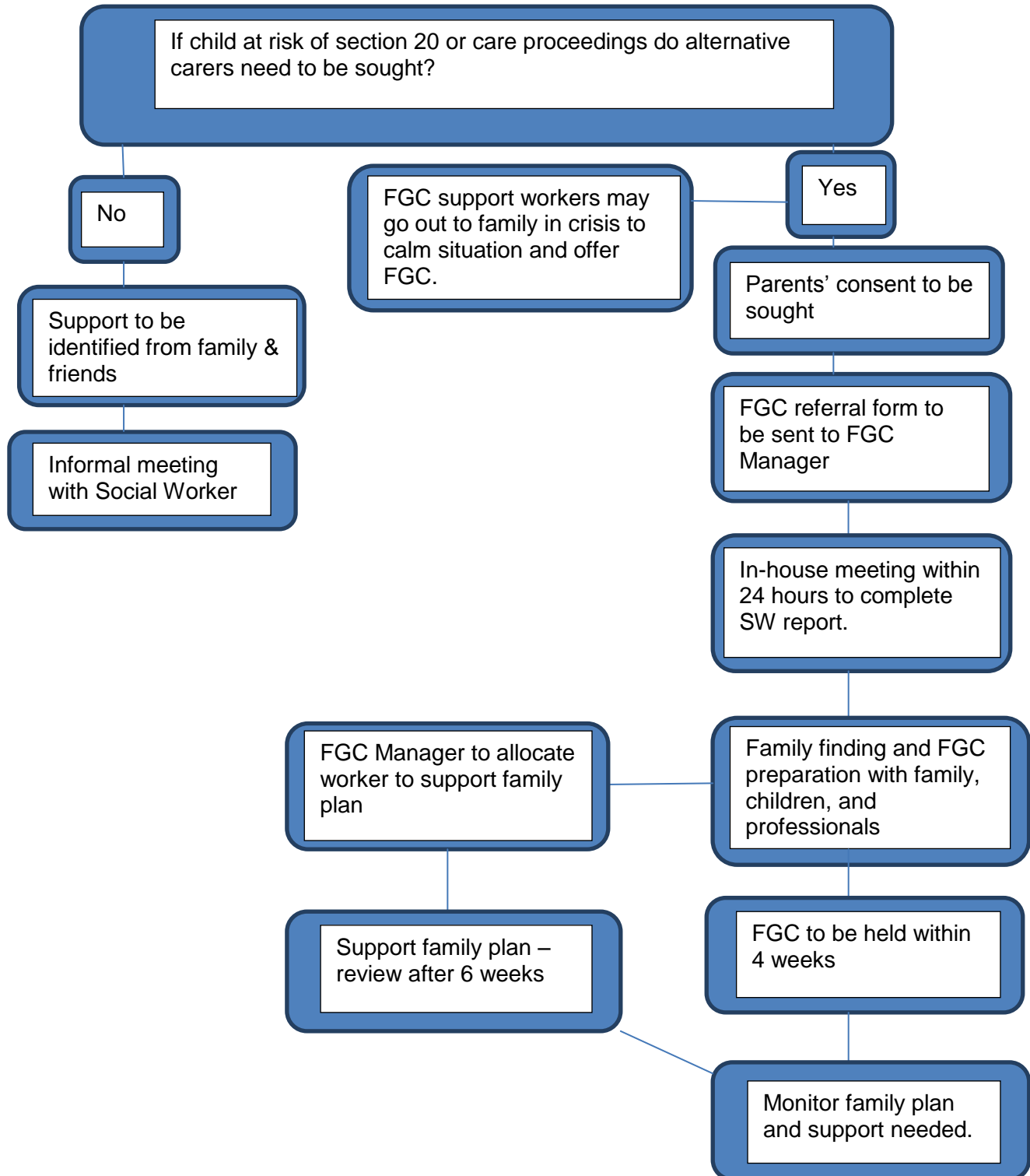
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Social Worker Signature:

Practice Manager Signature:

Date:

Family Group Conference Referral Procedure Flowchart (Appendix B)





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FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE - REFERRAL FORM (Appendix C)

Child / Children's Details:

DATE:

REFERRER:

TEAM:

NAME

D.O.B.

ETHNIC ORIGIN
(see options below)

PLACEMENT / CURRENT ADDRESS



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For ethnic origin please select from the following: Caribbean – African – Any Other Black Background – Indian – Pakistani – Bangladeshi – Any Other Asian Background – White British – White Irish – Any Other White Background – White and Black Caribbean – White and Black African – White and Asian – Any Other Mixed Background – Chinese – Any Other – Declined to say.

What is the status of the current placement? I.e. Interim / Stable / Long Term / Fragile.

Are there any orders in respect of the child / children? If yes, which Local Authority solicitor is involved?

Has there been a Child Protection Conference?

HISTORY:

Please give a brief history of Children's Services involvement, or attach a chronology.



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REASON FOR REFERRAL:

Please give a brief description of the reason for this referral, including current issues and identified risks.

Family Contact Details:

Name

Address

Telephone Number



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Family Group Conference (Appendix D)

For

Child's Name (Date of Birth)

Venue:

Date:

Start time:

Family and Friends Present

Relationship to Child

Family and Friends Contacted (not present)

Relationship to Child

Professionals present

Reason for Family Group Conference



Family Group Conference Procedures

Family Plan

(Individual to each family)

FGC Support

Name of Worker:

Contact tel. number:

The family are aware that this plan will be overseen by a Manager in Children's Social Care, and assessments may need to be undertaken. This plan may be presented before the Courts.

Glossary of Terms (Appendix E)

| Term | Meaning |
|------------------------------|---|
| Advocate/Advocacy | Acting on behalf of another person to ensure their views are heard. |
| Co-ordinator/Facilitator | The person who organises the Family Group Conference. |
| DBS | Disclosure and Barring Service |
| FGC | Family Group Conference |
| Family finding | Visits by the FGC Co-ordinator to family/friends of the family. |
| FGC Support Worker | Family Worker or Residential Child Care Worker trained to support the implementation of Family Plans. |
| ICS | Integrated Children's System |
| In-house meeting | Meeting held with Family Group Conference Co-ordinator, Social Worker and Practice Manager to complete Family Group Conference report. |
| Non-negotiable stance | The Local Authority's position on what they would not be able to agree as a plan for the child. |
| Parental Responsibility (PR) | <p>Parental responsibility means the legal rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority a parent has for a child and the child's property. The following people automatically have parental responsibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All birth mothers • Fathers married to the mother at the time the child was born • Fathers who are not married to the mother, but are registered on the child's birth certificate. The registration or re-registration must have taken place after December 2003 • Civil partners and partners of mothers registered as the child's legal parent on the birth certificate. <p>Parental responsibility can also be obtained by a Court Order for example Adoption Order, Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangement Order.</p> |
| PLO | Public Law Outline |



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