





Special Guardianship Support



A guide for Special Guardians
and their families



Fostering Team – Post-SGO Support Service



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Introduction

Welcome Special Guardians of Milton Keynes.

This information pack is designed for Special Guardians and their families who live in or who have been assessed by Milton Keynes City Council.

Special Guardians and their families can access post-order support via Milton Keynes City Council if:

- The Special Guardianship Order was granted via Milton Keynes City Council and the court, or
- The order was made by another local authority, but you live in Milton Keynes, and it has been three years since the order was made.
- Your child was 'looked after' by Milton Keynes City Council prior to the Special Guardianship Order being made.

This booklet will provide the information that you need around your responsibility as a Special Guardian, what Milton Keynes City Council offer under the umbrella of Special Guardianship Support, and what generic support you can access locally.

What is a Special Guardianship Order?

A Special Guardianship Order, often known as an SGO, is a legal order made by a Family Court where a carer – usually a relative- is appointed as the ‘Special Guardian’ of the child until they turn 18 years old.

Special Guardianship falls under the category of Kinship Care, also known as Connected Persons Care, which is the idea of keeping children within their family when they cannot be cared for by birth parents.

The SGO was created with the intention of meeting the needs of children who have been separated from their birth parents, it can be a great option for children who are unable to live with their parents as it secures permanence for them whilst maintaining their links with their birth family.

Special Guardian’s share parental responsibility with the child's parents, however, special guardians can make all the decisions relating to the child’s day to day life without consulting the birth parents.

Statistics about Special Guardians in England (Department of Education, year ending March 2021)

- Between March 2020 and March 2021, 3800 SGOs were granted in England. This is a 2% increase from the previous year.
- Approximately 1 in 7 children who left care were placed on SGOs.
- 88% of SGOs were granted to relatives and friends, the remainder were granted to former foster carers of the children.
- The number of looked after children who were adopted fell by 18% in 2021, this is likely due to the impact of the pandemic on the progression of court cases.
- The average age of children at the time that the SGO was granted is 6 years and 1 month.

Please note that more recent statistics are yet to be published by the Department of Education.

Your Role as a Special Guardian

What is Parental Responsibility?

All parents have legal rights and responsibilities, known as 'parental responsibility'. A parent will always retain parental responsibility for their child, the only circumstance where this is completely severed is if the child is legally adopted.

When a Special Guardianship Order is granted, the appointed carer is also granted parental responsibility for the child – which they share with the parent. The Special Guardian has the overarching parental responsibility, which means that they can make nearly all the major decisions about a child's life and day-to-day care – without having to consult or inform their birth parents.

There are certain situations when Special Guardians are required to obtain permission from the child's birth parents, which include:

- Taking the child out of the country for longer than three months.
- Changing the child's surname.
- Changing the child's religion.
- Situations where consent from everyone with parental responsibility is required by law, such as certain medical procedures.
- Placing the child up for adoption.

Understanding Your Role as a Special Guardian

It can be confusing to understand your role as a Special Guardian and what you are and aren't permitted to do.

The most important part of your role is to provide the child with a safe, nurturing, stable, loving home and support them to maintain links with members of their family.

You are also responsible for the child's day-to-day care, which includes meeting their physical and emotional needs.

Our Offer of Support

At Milton Keynes City Council, we recognise that being a Special Guardian can often be a challenging yet rewarding role which requires support and understanding.

We appreciate your role as a Special Guardian and want to support you in the most effective way. We will work alongside you to create a plan that works for your family, and allocate resources based on what you need.

Our goal is to **support you in supporting your loved ones.**



Our commitment to you:

- We will listen.
- We will not be judgmental.
- We will be open and honest.
- We will be advocates for you and your children.
- We will work alongside you.
- We will signpost you to resources that will support you long-term.

We are a task focused service and will work with you on a short-term basis to ensure that all identified actions are completed, our involvement will typically last between 6-12 weeks. We will review all cases at 12 weeks and decide whether further involvement is required or whether our involvement can end.

You can reach out to us at any point to request support, advice, and information:

Post-SGO Support Service

We recently revamped the service that we offer our Special Guardians, as we are passionate about helping families to thrive together. We now have a designated service to support families in need.

We currently have two Support Workers in post who are available to support you and your family.

Khushboo Shah – Social Worker

Grace Woodall – Social Work Assistant

Our Local Offer

You can reach out to us at any point whilst the SGO is active to request support.

We can support you in several ways, which will depend on your family's individual circumstances and needs. If the child that you are caring for was 'looked after' prior to the Special Guardianship Order being granted, you are entitled to ask for an '*assessment of need*'.

Our Special Guardians have access to a variety of services, our generic support offer includes:

- General advice, guidance, and information around your role as a Special Guardian, including managing issues such as contact, education and behaviour.
- Coordinating services to work as a team around your family, including education.
- Signposting you to organisations who specifically offer support and guidance to Special Guardians.
- Advocating on your behalf to ensure that your family's voice is heard, and decisions are made in your best interests.
- Management of financial queries, including completing your annual financial assessment and access to additional financial support.
- Signposting you to services who can support your family and support with accessing resources.
- Details of our local Kinship Support Group.
- Access to specialist online/face-to-face training and webinars on a variety of subjects.
- Access to Clinical Supervision with an attachment-expert.
- Emotional support and a safe space to talk.
- Networking events where you can connect with other Special Guardians.

How to Access Support

1) You can self-refer into the Post-SGO Support Service. To do this, please contact our service via email or our dedicated phone line, we will take some brief information from you and schedule in a time to have an initial phone call to discuss your situation/needs and to answer any questions that you may have. Alternatively, you can ask another professional, such as your child's teacher, to make contact with us and refer you to our service.

2) During the initial phone call, we may be able to offer you immediate advice and information or signpost you to universal services that you can access. If we feel that your needs require further exploration, we may offer you a home visit to discuss your situation in more detail.

3) Once we have gathered the information we need, we will decide what support our service can offer you and whether your case needs to be allocated to a worker. Please note that there may be a waiting list for allocation to a worker.

4) If your case is opened and allocated to a worker, we will complete an assessment of your needs and explore services and resources to support you and your family. We will work alongside you and be in regular communication with you to ensure that you are accessing the support that you are eligible to receive. We will identify actions together and ensure that they are completed in a timely and efficient way that works for you. This support will take place over an initial 12-week period.

5) Once the initial 12-week period has ended, we will review your case, if there are still matters outstanding and further actions are required, we can extend our support for an additional number of weeks.

6) Once your support case is closed, you will be sent an outcome letter which will set out what has been achieved along with a feedback form which will help us to improve our service.

7) Even after your case has been closed, you can contact our service again if you need to. The process will restart.

How to Contact Us



Post-SGO Support Helpline: 01908 253652



Email: PostSGOSupport@milton-keynes.gov.uk

Our helpline is open from 9am – 5pm Monday – Thursday and 9am – 4.30pm on Fridays (excluding bank holidays). If your call cannot be answered please leave a message and we will endeavour to contact, you the next working day.

If your query is urgent, please contact our Fostering Duty Team on 01908 253206 alternatively if it is out-of-hours then please contact the Emergency Social Work Team on 01908 265545.

Family and Friends Kinship Carers Support Group



Being a Special Guardian can sometimes feel lonely and isolating, it can feel like you are living in a different world that nobody else understands. It can be helpful to meet people who are in a similar situation to you and who truly understand what life is like as a Special Guardian.

A group of Kinship Carers run a local support group in Milton Keynes called Family and Friends Kinship Carers. The group meet every Thursday (during term-time only) from 9:30am to 11:30am, currently in the Community Room @ Westcroft District Centre.

This group welcomes all those caring for children who are not their own, regardless of the legal status of their arrangement. It also welcomes carers who have no legal arrangement, but who want to explore what possibilities there are for them to support their caring. There are many Special Guardians in this group with differing lengths of experience.

The group offers friendship, emotional support and has a wide range of experience and information available. The group also operates a WhatsApp group which is permanently open and is available to find information or support.

There's no need to book, just pop in and chat. The group also operates a WhatsApp group which is permanently open and is available for information and support.

Please email kinshipmk@outlook.com for information about the support group, or feel to drop in on a Thursday morning. You can also call or text Patsy McCarthy on 07891833925 for information about the group.

"The people I met were so lovely & made me feel very welcome." "It's great to meet other people in the same situation." "I think the group is great." "Finding the group made me feel stronger in being able to cope." "I don't feel so isolated." "Makes me feel as if I have some support."

Therapeutic Support

Many children who live with Special Guardians have had a very difficult start in life, some children may have witnessed or suffered abuse or neglect, even children removed from the care of their parents at birth may have suffered stress in the womb.

These children are often greatly affected by their past experiences. Trauma has a significant impact on the body and the brain, which may lead to children developing difficulties and complex needs.

This can therefore impact the child's behaviour and their feelings about themselves and about the world.

It is important that Special Guardians understand the impact of trauma and past experiences and how this can manifest in children's behaviour. Special Guardians can access a variety of resources to support their child's wellbeing to develop the necessary skills to support the child.

Training

The world of Special Guardianship is constantly growing and changing, and it's important to keep updated.

Training is a valuable resource - it can help you to better understand the children that you look after and how you can support them. As a Special Guardian, it's also important to learn and practice self-care to support your own wellbeing and promote your personal development.

Sometimes, training can seem like a daunting task, and it can be difficult to allocate time to focus on learning – but it doesn't have to be! At Milton Keynes City Council, our Special Guardians can access a variety of fantastic training that works around their routine, meets their learning style, and satisfies their interests.

There are lots of courses and resources to explore which cover a variety of subjects, through several providers including:



You can access face-to-face and online courses, webinars, podcasts, videos, books, and more.

If you would like to explore training, please contact the Post-SGO Support Service. We can recommend courses to suit your family's needs, your learning style, and your lifestyle, or you can request a specific training course that you are interested in.

Please refer to our Special Guardianship Training Brochure for further details around accessing training.

Adoption Support Fund

The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) was established in April 2016 to fund support and therapeutic interventions for eligible families.

The ASF has agreed to continue to fund support for families up to March 2025.

Is my family eligible for support?

If the child that you are caring for was looked after (in care) prior to the SGO being made, then they are entitled to the funding.

The ASF is available for children and young people up to and including the age of 21 (or 25 if they have an Education, Health and Care Plan).

How much funding is available?

The ASF has two fair access limits:

- £2,500 per child per year for specialist assessments
- £5,000 per child per year for therapeutic interventions

What can we access?

The funding can be used for the following interventions for your family:

- **Specialist Assessments** to explore the child's trauma and attachment needs. This will then recommend potential therapies for the child and family moving forward.

Unfortunately, standalone assessments for single conditions, i.e. ADHD, ASD, FASD, are out of scope for the fund so you will need to follow the normal referral route through the NHS for those. You will need to make an appointment with the child's GP to request an assessment via a paediatrician or CAMHS specialist in this instance.

Therapy for your Child:

- **Creative Therapies**, including art, dance, drama, music, Lego, mindful yoga.
- **Play Therapies**, including theraplay, filial therapy, and attachment play.
- Life Story Work
- **Psychotherapy (Talking Therapy)** including cognitive behavioural therapy, educational psychotherapy, eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing therapy, sensory processing, and attachment therapies.
- Therapeutic Short Breaks

Support for You:

- **Parent Training Courses**, including Therapeutic Reparenting.
- **Family Therapies**, including Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy and child to parent violence programmes.

The funding being applied for should help you and your child to achieve the following positive outcomes:

- Improved strategies to support your child's wellbeing, to regulate their emotions and to manage their behaviour
- Improved understanding of your child's behaviour and needs
- Improved attachment, relationship and communication between you and your child
- Improved relationships between your child and their peers, family members, teachers, and school staff
- Improved emotional regulation and behaviour management
- Improved understanding and processing of their life story and family relationships
- Improved engagement with learning
- Improved confidence and ability to enjoy a positive family life and social relationships

How do I apply?

The Local Authority will apply to the ASF on your behalf.

- 1) Contact the Post-SGO Support Service to request an 'assessment of need'.
- 2) You will be allocated a Worker from Post SGO service to complete the assessment, and they will recommend what support your family may need.
- 3) If a specialist assessment or therapeutic support is required, your Support Worker will make an application to the ASF on your behalf.
- 4) The ASF have a timescale to review any applications, which takes at least 20 working days. If the ASF have any questions about the application, the timescale starts again.
- 5) If the ASF approve the funding, they will contact the local authority and the chosen provider, and the funds will be released.
- 6) The provider will contact your family to start the process.
- 7) Once the specialist assessment or therapy has ended, a review meeting will be held between the provider, Special Guardians, and your Post-SGO Support Worker to discuss next steps. If further therapeutic intervention is required, additional applications can be made.

If your child or family require additional therapeutic services but you have reached the maximum funding limit from the ASF, you will need to wait for the next financial year for funds to be available.

Support for your Family

Clinical Supervision

Milton Keynes City Council commission Clinical Psychologists to support those who care for children under Special Guardianship Orders or through fostering.

We know that caring for children who have been hurt can be a tiring, troubling and even confusing experience. Everyone deserves extra support from time to time, or perhaps on a regular basis.

Clinical Supervision is a confidential, supportive, and non-judgmental service, designed to give you the opportunity to talk to and exchange ideas with an attachment expert.

The agenda is set by you – you can talk about specific issues that are affecting you and your family, work through new ideas and approaches to take with managing behaviours or talk about your own general wellbeing and coping strategies.

Please let us know if you would like to book an appointment – these are booked on a first come, first serve, basis.

Networking and Events

Having a good support network is crucial as a Special Guardian. Our aim is to create a community for all of the fantastic grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, family friends, and other relatives who are working hard to support the children that they are raising.

We hope to run annual events for Special Guardians and Kinship Carers, to give you the opportunity to meet and make connections with people who are in similar situations to you.

Kinship Care Week is an annual celebration for us to raise awareness of the important role and challenges that Special Guardians and Kinship Carers face. The week is usually celebrated in October.

The Post-SGO Support Service will send information out to carers about any events that we are holding.

Newsletter

The Post-SGO Support Service are committed to sending out a quarterly newsletter to Special Guardians – SG News.

Financial Support

Special Guardianship Allowance

Milton Keynes City Council conducts annual financial assessments for Special Guardians. Eligibility for a Special Guardianship allowance is determined as part of a means-tested assessment, this means that we will assess the income that you have coming in when calculating any financial allowance. This is in line with the Special Guardianship Regulations, 2005.

Special Guardianship allowances are aligned with fostering allowances.

Allowances are subject to annual review, we will write to you each year to ask if your circumstances have changed. You will need to respond if requested to do so, even if there have been no changes, to avoid any allowance that you currently receive being stopped.

If you are in receipt of full Universal Credit (i.e. not working) we will not means test and you will be provided with the full allowance and no child benefit will be deducted.

If your circumstances change you must inform us immediately.

Please note that any Special Guardianship Allowance is ignored as income when calculating your entitlement to other means-tested benefits and tax credits.

Additional financial support will only be considered in certain circumstances and following an assessment for Special Guardianship support.

If you have any queries surrounding your financial assessment of Special Guardian allowance, please email the Post-SGO Support Service and the Finance Officer will endeavour to respond to you as soon as possible (please do not call the Post-SGO Helpline as we will not have access to the same information).

Universal Financial Support

As a Special Guardian, you have the same right to benefits and tax credits as a birth parent would.

We recommend that you contact your local Citizens Advice Bureau in the first instance, they can help you to consider what support your family may be entitled to.

You can also check your entitlement to income support by using the Turn2Us benefits calculator:

<https://benefits-calculator.turn2us.org.uk/>

You may also be eligible for additional financial support, such as:

Childcare - The government help eligible families with childcare costs. Check your eligibility at: <https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/>

Cost of Living - If you claim certain benefits or tax credits, you may be eligible for an extra payment to help with the cost of living. This could include help with household costs, energy bills, childcare costs, transport costs, and income support.

<https://helpforhouseholds.campaign.gov.uk/>

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money/get-help-with-the-cost-of-living/>

We want to keep you up to date with everything that's happening in Milton Keynes and in the world of Special Guardianship, and to offer you support. The newsletter will feature any upcoming events, useful information and updates about Milton Keynes City Council and Special Guardianship across the country, and details of fantastic resources that we recommend to Special Guardians for you to use with the children in your care.

Family Time with Birth Family or Extended Family

Family time between children and their birth parents or extended family members can be difficult to manage, due to the complex relationships within families.

It's important to encourage family time between children and their birth family if it is safe and appropriate to do so, as it supports their identity, promotes their understanding of their life story, and helps them to maintain links with their birth family.

Family Time Arrangements

Family time between children and their birth family is usually set as part of the SGO Support Plan, this is usually a 'minimum' level of family time which is decided based on the child's best interest, the needs of your family and what you will be able to manage.

There are different kinds of family time:

- Direct family time, which is face-to-face
- Indirect family time which can be telephone calls, video calls and/or letterbox

Family time can also be supervised or unsupervised, as well as held in the community, at home, or in a family time centre. Some carers are managing daily family time, weekly, monthly, or yearly. A minimum level is set out in the SGO support plan which is court directed. Anything over and above this can be decided by Special Guardians.

Family time set out early in the placement is based on that moment in time, however family circumstances and the wishes and feelings of children can change over time as they grow older. It's important to keep an open mind about family time and review the arrangements where necessary which Post SGO service can help and support with.

Child Arrangements Orders (Contact) are set by the court to enforce family time, this determines who the child who have family time with, the frequency and duration of this. Anyone can make an application to the courts to request a Child Arrangements Order. The purpose of the court is to decide whether the child should have regular family time with the person requesting it, and the arrangements around this including frequency of family time, location, and whether this is supervised/unsupervised.

Advice about Managing Family Time

Lots of Special Guardians family time the Post-SGO Support Service seeking advice about managing family time, which could be due to the following issues:

- Birth Parents would like more family time with the children
- The children don't want to have family time with specific people
- The Special Guardians feel unable to manage or supervise family time

- The current arrangements aren't working for either or both party
- An incident happened during family time that worried someone

If you do have concerns about family time, please contact our service who can offer you advice on managing family time and can signpost you to other agencies who may be able to help.

Special Guardians are also able to access training around managing family time with family members.

Legal Advice

It can often be useful to seek legal advice in relation to family time, especially if there are difficulties surrounding this, for example it may be that the birth parents are requesting more family time with the child however you may not feel it is in the child best interests.

The Post SGO service can signpost you to a list of family law solicitors in Milton Keynes, should you need one. Alternatively, you can search for a solicitor:

- Kinship provides a list of solicitors on their website: <https://kinship.org.uk/for-kinship-carers/get-more-support/lawyers-list/>
- The Law Society provide a list of solicitors on their website: www.lawsociety.org.uk and selecting the "choosing and using" option at the top of the page followed by "find a solicitor".

Please contact our service to discuss any requests for funding towards legal advice.

Mediation

Sometimes relationships between family members can become strained, especially if you disagree about something related to a child. If you feel that the issues that cannot be resolved within your family, you may wish to explore mediation to support you to talk through the issues and come to a mutual resolution – it's important that everyone is on the same page and that all decisions are made in the best interests of the child.

Family Mediation is a process where a mediator supports you to work out arrangements about a child, they are there to help you work through disagreements and find solutions that work for both parties.

How does mediation work?

A trained independent mediator will complete a Mediation Information and Assessment Meeting (known as a MIAM) with both parties, to find out more about your situation and assess whether mediation is an appropriate option based on your circumstances.

In mediation, you can still come to a resolution without being in the same room or space with the other person – the mediator can work through the disagreement without you being in direct contact.

RelateMK, Mediation MK, and Mediation1st are mediation agencies who can support with family conflict. The Family Mediation Council (www.familymediationcouncil.org.uk) and National Family Mediation Service (www.nfm.org.uk) are useful organisations to contact for advice.

Can I get financial support with mediation?

The Ministry of Justice are running a time-limited Family Mediation Voucher Scheme to support families to resolve their family law disputes outside of court. If you are eligible, you could receive a financial contribution of up to £500 towards the costs of mediation. Find out more at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/family-mediation-voucher-scheme>

Education

Pupil Premium Plus Funding

Previously Looked After children are eligible for Pupil Premium Plus, which is funding paid directly to state schools to support children emotionally, socially, and educationally. For each child, the school is directly paid £2530 per year (2023-2024 grant). You must inform the school that the child is subject to a Special Guardianship Order to receive this funding.

Schools have flexibility on how the money is spent. You can ask your child's school what the funding is being used for, or for their Pupil Premium Strategy (which should be published on the school website) and how this supports your child. The funding cannot always be used to support children individually, sometimes, schools collate the funding for all eligible pupils together to commission a service to support a group of students.

The funding can be used for:

- Extra one-to-one or small-group support for children within the classroom.
- Employing extra teaching assistants to work with classes.
- Running catch-up sessions before or after school, for example for children who need extra help with maths or literacy.
- Running a school breakfast club or after school clubs to improve attendance.
- Providing extra tuition for able children.
- Providing music lessons for children whose families would be unable to pay for them.
- Funding educational trips and visits.
- Paying for additional help such as speech and language therapy or family therapy.
- Funding English classes for children who speak another language at home.
- Investing in resources that boost children's learning, such as laptops or tablets.

School Placements

Previously Looked After children qualify for priority admissions into school. Please speak to your child's school in the first instance and make sure you include this on your school admissions form.

Special Educational Needs

If you are concerned that your child may have Special Educational Needs (SEN) then you should speak to your child's school in the first instance.

We also encourage you to contact from the Milton Keynes SEND Information and Advice Service (MKSENDIAS) – www.mksendias.org.uk – who can advise you on the processes for getting your child support within school, such as applying for an Education and Health Care Plan.

Every child is entitled to an Individual Education Plan, which you can request from your child's school. This helps teaching staff to plan for and support your child, including strategies to help them learn and thrive.

Final Note

As a Service, we recognise that being a Special Guardian is a unique role that requires patience, compassion and understanding.

We would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to all Special Guardians, who are keeping children safe, supporting their relatives to maintain connections with their birth families, and helping children to thrive and reach their full potential – outside of the care system.






Feedback

At the end of our involvement with your family, we will ask you for feedback as we are keen to improve our service.

If you have used any services or resources that have been particularly helpful for your family, please do let us know so that we can share them with other Special Guardians.

Post-SGO Support Service
PostSGOSupport@milton-keynes.gov.uk
01908 253206
Milton Keynes Civic Offices, 1 Saxon Gate, East Milton Keynes, MK9 3E

Helpful Organisations for Advice, Support, and Information

	<p>The Kinship Care Charity are the experts in all things about Kinship and Special Guardianship Orders.</p> <p>There is lots of information on their website about your role as a Special Guardian, and the benefits and support that you are entitled to. You can request advice and guidance around any specific issues that you may be facing, and they can offer resources to help you get the support that you need.</p> <p>Kinship can also connect you with other carers in your community and with local support groups.</p> <p>You can access their free, specialist advice service – online, via email, or over the phone. Website: www.kinship.org.uk Contact Number: 0300 123 7015</p>
	<p>Family Rights Group is a charity that advises families about their rights and options within the care system. Website: www.frg.org.uk</p> <p>Contact Number: 0808 801 0366 (available Monday to Friday between 09:30am and 3:00pm)</p>
<p>Citizens Advice Milton Keynes</p>	<p><i>Free, confidential, and impartial advice.</i> Website: www.miltonkeynescab.org.uk Contact Number: 0808 278 7991</p>
	<p><i>Financial Information and Advice Service. Check your benefits entitlement by using the benefits calculator, search for a grant, find out what schemes may be available to you to support with energy and water bills.</i> Website: www.turn2us.org</p>
	<p>Milton Keynes Special Education Needs and Disabilities Information and Advice Services www.mksendias.org.uk</p>
<p>National Family Mediation</p>	<p>Website: www.nfm.org.uk Contact Number: 03004000636</p>
<p>National Association of Child Contact Centres</p>	<p>Website: www.naccc.org.uk</p>
	<p>Website: www.corambaaf.org.uk Contact Number: 020 7520 0300</p>
<p>Fostering Network</p>	<p><i>A charity focused on improving foster care and making a positive difference for children in care and leaving foster care.</i> Website: www.fostering.net</p>

PAC-UK

Specialist independent advice, support, counselling, training, and educational advice for all affected by Adoption and Permanency.

Website: www.pac-uk.org

Telephone: 020 7284 5879

