



Information for carers considering offering a child a permanent home

What is permanency and why is it important

Many children who come into care return home to live with their parents. However, for those who cannot, there are a number of different permanence options in the UK. There is no hierarchy of permanence options; what matters is the welfare and wellbeing of each child and finding the right home and family for them.

Adoption

Adoption is probably the most well-known form of permanence in the UK. When a child is adopted, their new parents take on full parental responsibility for their care as their legal guardian.

The vast majority of children adopted in the UK are aged between 1- and 4-years-old. Adoption is considered to be the best option for around 5 per cent of children in care. There are around 4,000 children who are currently awaiting an adoptive family.

Fostering for adoption is a scheme in England to allow children to be placed with their potential adopters in a fostering arrangement, while the local authority seeks a placement order from the courts. In these arrangements, the foster carers will also need to be approved as adopters.

- For more information, the charity Coram has produced a fostering for adoption leaflet for carers. https://www.coram.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource_files/47%20Fostering%20for%20Adoption%20leaflet%20%28carers%29_2013.pdf
- First4Adoption funded by the Department for Education in England, provides impartial advice and support for those considering adoption in England. <https://www.first4adoption.org.uk/>
- Adoption UK offers adoption advice and support across the UK. <https://www.adoptionuk.org/>

Long-term fostering

Across the UK, foster carers can and do look after children for many years, often until adulthood. However, long-term fostering is different from adoption and other forms of permanence because the local authority (in England, Scotland and Wales) or health and social care trust (in Northern Ireland) in which the child lives remains the child's 'corporate parent'. Foster carers never have parental responsibility for a child that they care for, unlike adopters.

In England long-term fostering has a formal status as a permanence option for looked after children. Again, the child's local authority retains parental responsibility, but foster carers have greater authority to make decisions on behalf of the child and, if all parties are in agreement, meet less frequently with social workers. These changes were made in 2015 with the aim to provide better stability and a better sense of 'normal' family life for a looked after child.

In Scotland long-term fostering refers to a placement of longer than 24 months that is not secured by a permanence order. Young people may also be cared for in a permanent placement, i.e. one that is secured by a permanence order.

Permanence orders (Scotland)

Only a local authority can apply for a permanence order. It removes the child from the children's hearing system and can last until the child reaches the age of 18. It transfers the parental right to have the child living with the parent and to control where the child lives to the local authority. This clarifies that the child will not be returning home, but does not necessarily mean that they will be staying with their current foster carers, although that will often be the case – this will be specified in their care plan."

Kinship foster care (family and friends foster care)

While a looked after child may not be able to live with their birth parents, it may be possible for them to live with a grandparent, uncle, aunt or other relative or a friend of the family well known to the child who has been assessed to be able to meet their needs as a foster carer.

While kinship foster care – also known as family and friends foster care – is often a short-term solution in an emergency situation, if all parties are in agreement, it can be for the duration of a child's childhood.

Across the UK, there are also kinship or family and friends carers who care for children outside of the looked after system, and who are not approved foster carers. In Scotland, all kinship carers are a completely separate group from foster carers, whether or not the children they care for have looked after status.

Special guardianship orders (England and Wales)

Special guardianship orders (SGOs) are usually granted by courts to a member of the child's family, and in much smaller numbers to an unrelated foster carer who has been caring for the child. The special guardian has the care of the child and acquires parental responsibility together with birth parents and anyone else who has parental responsibility. Children under SGOs are not in the care system.

Child Arrangement Orders (England)

Child arrangements orders replace residence orders and contact orders. In respect of permanence options, a child arrangements order decides where a child lives and will give the person parental responsibility for as long as the order continues.

Residential care

For some looked after children, residential care will offer the best form of permanence to meet their needs. This is more often the case for older children and those with special needs that are best met through a residential setting.

Financial Assistance

Cumbria County Council provides a Continuing Financial Support scheme to support specific children in permanent placements. These may include children who are Adopted or whose carers have a Special Guardianship Order.

A decision will have been made as to whether you may be assessed and eligible for a support package including financial support.

A calculation of whether or not financial support is payable can be made during your assessment so that you can have a guide to your finances if a child/ren are placed with you.

The Allowance is a contribution towards the cost of caring for the child and is means tested.

https://cumbriacs.proceduresonline.com/pdfs/support_scheme.pdf