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Rivers®

A young person's guide to...

Care proceedings

'People are trying to make sure you are safe'



In this leaflet you'll find some helpful information about what happens during court proceedings, and what to expect. It's important to know that if you do have any questions that it's okay to ask your carers and support workers who will be more than happy to answer any questions that you have.

Our leaflet has information from an organisation called Cafcass, which stand for Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service.

There is also a website that you can visit that will give you the most up-to-date information, and guidance. Click this link which will take you straight to the website: www.cafcass.gov.uk/young-people/young-persons-guide-care-proceedings/



Some information to help you to understand things

When people are concerned about the safety of a child, something called care proceedings can begin. Care proceedings or a care order is something that the family court can put in place to keep a child safe. This will be in the child's best interest - it's about doing what's best to keep you safe and healthy.

It's very important that all children are kept safe and looked after properly, and when people are worried that this might not be happening, that's when it's decided that it's safer for a child to go into care.

The most important thing to remember if you are in care proceedings is that **none of this is your fault.**

Care proceedings Q&A

1 What is a family court?

There is a difference between a family court and a criminal court:

- a **family court** is where a judge listens to what everybody has to say and makes a decision about what is best for the child
- a **criminal court** where people go when they might have done something wrong.
- the judge in the family court listens to what everyone has to say. It is their job to **make safe decisions for you** and your family

2 What are social workers?

Social workers help to **make sure children and young people are safe and properly looked after**. If they think children and young people are not safe or properly looked after they must act. They will work with your family to see if it is possible for you to safely stay with them.

3 How does Cafcass help?

The court will ask a Cafcass worker (sometimes called a 'Children's Guardian') to **help them decide what is best for you**.

They will do this by:

- looking at what the social worker is planning for you and telling the court what they think needs to happen next
- making sure you have a special legal adviser, called a solicitor

- in most cases, talking with you to find out what you think and how you feel about everything
- in most cases, speaking to other people who care about you, like your parents, family and sometimes your teachers and social worker
- telling the court what they think will help you be kept safe and well

4 What does a solicitor do?

Children and young people in care cases also have a solicitor to help them. The solicitor is a lawyer who works with the Cafcass worker to make sure the best decisions are made for you.

5 How are decisions made?

It normally takes about 26 weeks for a court to decide what is going to happen.

During that time a lot will be happening. The judge will **listen carefully to what everyone has to say**, including your views, and then decide on what's best for you. After the meeting at court, your Cafcass worker will make sure someone explains what the court decided and how it affects you.

Through it all you can choose to have your say but no one should put pressure on you. If you need help and support your Cafcass worker will make sure you get this. →

→ 6 What will happen in the end?

Lots of different things are possible. Everyone will try to make it possible for you to safely stay at home but sometimes children go to live somewhere new.

If you have to live somewhere else, your social worker will try to see if you can stay with someone you already know, like someone in your family. If that is not possible you may have to go and live with people called 'foster carers'.

Everyone will try to make sure brothers and sisters can stay together. Sometimes this isn't possible though. You should let your social worker and Cafcass worker know if you are worried about seeing your brothers and sisters.

Even if you are not living with your parents, you might still be able to see them. The court can also decide how often you should see your parents and where you should see them. This might be where you are living, or it might be at another place such as a family centre.

It is really important to know though that sometimes the court will decide that it is not good for you to see your parents. This could be because they are worried that they might hurt or upset you.

7 What does 'going into care' mean?

Going into care means that the people who have been working with you to

keep you safe and healthy, will also make sure that you have somewhere to live that is safe and where you are properly looked after.

If you require help to understand more, please ask your carers, support workers or an advocate for support. We understand that this can be a confusing and sad time for you, and we want you to know that we are here to help you. This leaflet is a basic introduction to help you understand the basics. ■

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