

Your child could be
taken into care.

A guide for parents



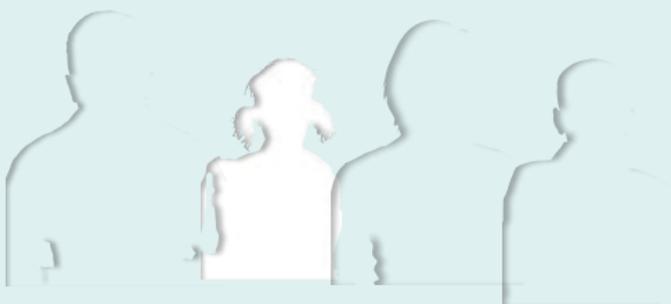
Why is the local authority involved with my child?

Your local authority has a legal duty to protect children. It is worried that your child is not being looked after properly or is out of control.

The local authority will have made enquiries and drawn up a plan for your child that deals with its concerns. This is to help you to make sure your child is kept safe and well-cared for.

It is important that you work with the local authority and show that you put your child's interests first.

If the local authority continues to have concerns about your child, it will send you a letter before care proceedings. Proceedings are what happen when the local authority goes to court and asks a judge if your child can be taken into care.



I've been sent a **letter** before **proceedings** – what is this?

A letter before proceedings sets out the local authority's concerns and what it wants you to do about these concerns. The letter will ask you to come to a pre-proceedings meeting to talk about how your child can be kept safe.

The letter is **very** important and you should not ignore it. You should get a solicitor **now** to help you.

You must work with the local authority or it may go to court and ask for your child to be taken into care. You should get a solicitor to help you.



What is a pre-proceedings meeting?

This is a really important meeting. It is part of the process the local authority uses to decide whether or not to go to court about the care of your child. You must attend and you should also take your solicitor with you.

Your social worker and other professional people involved with your child will be there to talk about their concerns. You will have a chance to say what you think is the best way to look after your child.

The aim of the meeting is to reach a formal agreement about things you and the local authority must do to look after your child better. Try to keep calm in the meeting. Listen to your solicitor and let them speak for you if you are too upset.

You must stick to any formal agreement; otherwise the local authority may go to court to ask that your child is taken into care.



What do I do next?

Read the letter before proceedings very carefully and make sure you understand the local authority's concerns, and what it wants you to do to about them.

Check when the pre-proceedings meeting is and make sure you can go.

See a solicitor – they should attend the meeting too. You can get free legal help if you take your letter before proceedings and some ID to a solicitor. It is very important that you use a solicitor who is an expert in this area.

Community Legal Advice offers free and confidential legal help direct to the public. You can also find a specialist legal adviser in your area.

Telephone: 0845 345 4 345
www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk.

You can also use the **Law Society**;
telephone 020 7242 1222
www.lawsociety.org.uk

Further help and information

Family Rights Group: a national charity that gives free, independent advice to parents and family members whose children are involved with local authority social care services. Confidential advice line: freephone 0808 801 0366 (lines open 10am-3:30pm Monday to Friday); or www.frg.org.uk

You or your solicitor can get further information about what will happen if the local authority goes to court at www.family-justice-council.org.uk

Or you can read a longer version of this leaflet here:

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/guidance/careproceedings.htm>

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB): Free face-to-face information and advice on legal, money and other problems. Find your local CAB in the phone book or at www.citizensadvice.org.uk

