

A survival guide to

Child protection for Roma parents



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Making sense of the law and your rights

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for you if:

- you live in England, **and**
- you are a parent, **and**
- Children's Services contact you about your children, or
- Children's Services tell you they are thinking of starting care proceedings.

Children's Services is the name given to the department in each local council that is responsible for the safety, health and well-being of all children. Children's Services employ social workers.

We have created this guide for Roma families but the information is also relevant to anyone else in this situation who lives in England. However, we know that some Roma might find the guide too detailed to use on their own without help, for example, from community, support or advice workers. So, although the guide addresses Roma families directly, we anticipate that it's these workers who, in practice, will be the main users of the guide. We hope that our community, support or advice worker readers will select the key messages that are most relevant for use with their Roma clients on a case by case basis.

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Introduction

If you've been contacted by Children's Services you may feel confused or scared. You may be worried about what could happen to your children. It's important you stay calm, and get support from a community organisation that can help you understand:

- what's happening,
- what Children's Services want, and
- the best way for you to get involved and respond to their concerns.

You will find a list of community organisations who work with Roma in England at the back of this guide.

We would like to help you by explaining the law in England to do with protecting children – about:

- how the child protection process works,
- how to build a positive relationship with social workers for the sake of your child and,
- when and why you should get legal advice from a solicitor who specialises in children's law.

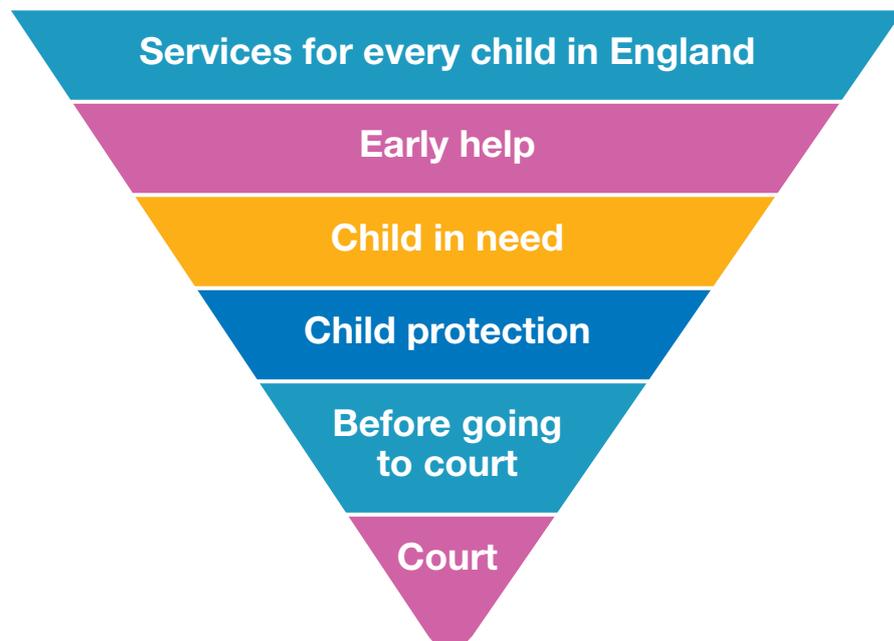
Knowing and understanding more will help you feel less scared and give you more influence over what is happening.

Each country has their own laws. If you have come to live in England from another country, some of the English laws may be different from what you are used to. While you live in England, these are the laws that apply to you.

What is 'child protection'?

Child protection refers to the system for protecting children who are suffering or might be at risk of suffering significant harm as a result of abuse or neglect. We explain what the words 'harm', 'abuse' and 'neglect' mean on **pages 13–16**.

The picture below shows the different ways professionals can become involved with you and your child. We explain each way in more detail in this guide. It's possible to enter the child protection system at any of these levels.



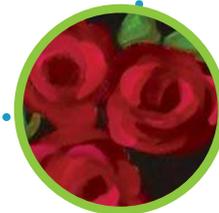
Services for every child in England

Services for every child in England



All children living in England have a right to free health care services and education. These are the services children get from the health visitors, doctors or dentists who help to look after their health or the nursery workers and teachers who help to develop and educate them. These services are usually provided without social workers being involved.

You are expected to make sure your children benefit from these services.



Early help

Early help



Everyone needs help bringing up their children at some point. You may get this help from your family or friends or people like a health visitor, community worker or your child's school or nursery. Early help means providing support as soon as a problem starts. You can get early help at any time in a child's life. Just because you ask for help or talk to someone about your problems does not mean you are a bad parent or that you will lose your children. It shows that you are a responsible parent.

It's OK to ask for help. For example, you may need help to:

- cope with a crying baby, or
- understand why dental treatment for your child is important and how to get it, or
- understand what kind of food your child needs to grow up strong and healthy, or
- deal with your teenager's behaviour.

It may be your child who needs help. For example, they may need help because:

- they have special educational needs, for example they need speech therapy, or
- they are struggling to care for a sick parent.

If you want to ask for help but don't know who to ask or what to say, perhaps because English isn't your first language, is there someone you trust who can ask for you, maybe a friend or relative or someone from your local community centre?

Someone like a doctor, support worker, teacher or health visitor (we explain the role of different professionals on **page 19**) may suggest that they come to your house to ask you questions about your child and family so they can understand what your child needs and how to support you or your child. You may hear this called an 'early help assessment'. They will then explain what extra help they can offer you.

If you're not sure exactly what help they are offering you or you don't really understand what it involves, it's good to ask questions. Have a look at the section on **Working with social workers and other professionals** on **page 23** for suggestions about the questions you might want to ask.

You can decide whether or not to accept the support they offer you as the system is voluntary at this stage. But if someone thinks there are still problems and is worried that you have refused help they may contact Children's Services.

If people like teachers, doctors, health visitors and nursery staff are worried about your child, they will worry more if you avoid them. So:

- Find out what they are concerned about and let them know how you see the problem.
- Be prepared to work with them and accept their help.
- If something is stopping you doing what they suggest or you don't know how to do it, explain this to them.
- Be clear what would help you to do what they ask. For example, if they want you to go to a parenting support group at 10am and the bus you need to catch won't get you there in time or you can't get anyone to look after your children then, tell them this. Ask them if they can help make it possible for you to go. Don't just not turn up because that looks like you don't really want help. Have a look at the section on **How to best help your child and your family** on **page 20**.
- Don't refuse an offer of help because you're scared someone will come and take your children away.

Removing children really isn't something that happens very often and it can't happen unless you agree or a court says it must happen or very occasionally in an emergency.



Early help

Child in need

The law in England says that a child is 'in need' if they aren't likely to reach a reasonable standard of health or development without extra help or services. These extra services could be, for example, day care for children under 5, after school and holiday care, home help, advice or counselling.

Development is a word that describes the process of growing up from a child into an adult and includes a child's physical, intellectual, emotional, social and behavioural development. The NHS provides a helpful explanation of what this process looks like from birth to five years old. This tool explains how your child is likely to develop and when they are likely to gain certain skills and learn new things: www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/birthtofive.aspx

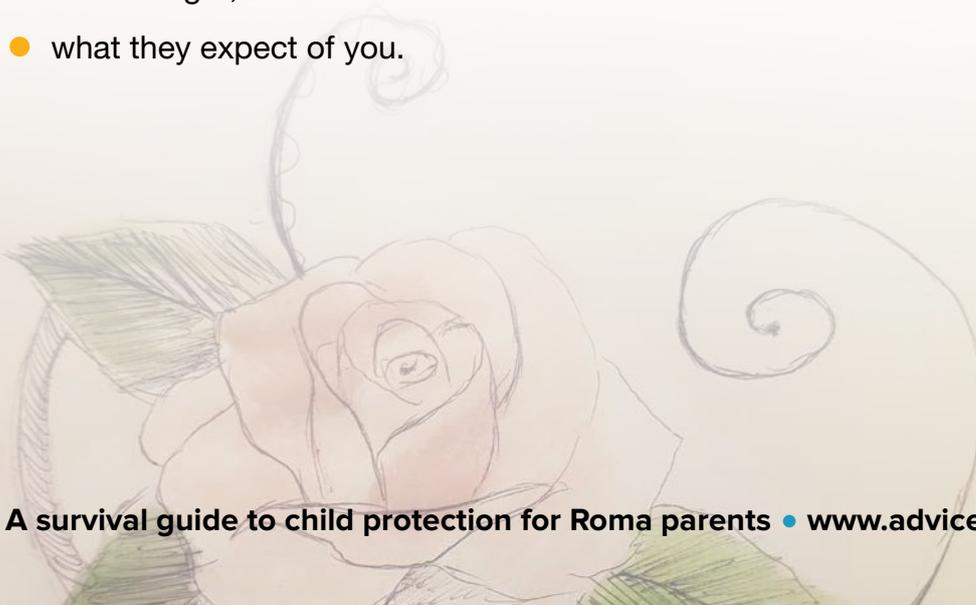
The law also says that any child who has a disability is automatically a 'child in need'. If Children's Services decides your child is in need then they must try to help you to protect and look after your child's wellbeing.

Children's Services will develop a 'child in need' plan for your child. This will say:

- what works well in your family,
- what the social workers are worried about,
- what support services you and your child will get, and
- what they expect of you.

They should agree this plan with you at a meeting.

If you don't think the plan is reasonable, you can make suggestions about what it should include. Explain which bits of the plan don't work for you and your child and why. If you don't feel confident to do this on your own, ask for help from your local children's centre or a community organisation working with Roma. There is a list of community organisations who work with Roma in England at the back of this guide.



Child protection

Anyone can contact Children's Services if they are worried that your child is not safe or well cared for. This could be a neighbour or people like a teacher, nurse, health visitor, police officer or doctor. You may hear social workers or other professionals call this a 'referral'.

If Children's Services get a referral the law says that they must look into your child's situation. The law is very clear about this because in the past some children have died because nobody stopped their abuse.

The social workers aren't against you or snooping or looking to catch you out. They don't want to find problems but it is their job to look into your child's situation. If they find everything is OK, that's a good day for a social worker.

After being contacted, social workers have 1 working day to decide what to do next. They can decide that:

- Emergency action may be necessary to protect your child from danger and that, for example, they should go and live temporarily with another member of your family.
- They want to know more about your child and your family – to find out if your child is suffering neglect or abuse which are likely to have long term damaging effects. This is called an 'investigation'. We explain what an investigation is on **page 11** and what the words 'abuse' and 'neglect' mean on **pages 14–16**.

- You and your child need support as soon as possible to help you cope and to stop a small problem from getting bigger. The aim is to help make things better for you and your family.
- There is no need to take any action to protect your child because your child hasn't been harmed and they don't think they are at risk of being harmed. They may still offer you support to help you with your parenting.

Children's Services must tell you (and your child if they are not a baby) what they've decided and what they're going to do next.

Visits from social workers

Social workers can make either pre-arranged or unannounced visits to your home – depending on the reason for their visit. Usually they will make pre-arranged visits. They should show you their identification badge but if they don't, ask to see it.

Sometimes a social worker may want to visit unannounced because they have reason to believe that your child is at risk and so they need to investigate. Part of that investigation may involve visiting your home without giving you any advance warning.

If your child has a child protection plan, then the question of how many visits you will get from social workers and whether these will include unannounced visits as well as pre-arranged ones should be discussed at the child protection conference and any meetings in between conferences. For more information about child protection plans and child protection conferences, see **pages 16–18**.

If social workers make an unannounced visit it's best to let them in. You will only give them more to worry about if you don't. They are only doing their job which is to protect children. If you are worried about this or aren't happy about unannounced visits, then contact a solicitor who specialises in children's law as soon as you can and explain what's happened. There is information about how to find this kind of specialist solicitor on **page 36**.

Have a look at the section on **Working with social workers and other professionals** on **page 23** for suggestions about how to talk to Children's Services if they contact you.

Helping a child in immediate danger

If Children's Services or the Police believe that there is a risk to your child's life or they are at risk of suffering serious immediate harm (for example, they have been left at home alone or physically harmed or are being looked after by someone who is giving them alcohol or drugs) then they must make sure your child is safe. 'Risk' means the chance that something bad or dangerous will happen.

If there is someone living in your home that Children's Services believes is a danger to your child, they may ask you to get them to leave if you are able to or agree to the court ordering this person to leave your home so that your child doesn't have to. This person could, for example, be your partner or another relative. It may be very difficult for you to agree to this. But if you don't, Children's Services will believe that you care less about the child they think needs protecting than the other members of your family. If you are in this situation it's very important that you see a solicitor who specialises in children's law immediately. There is information about how to find this kind of specialist solicitor on **page 36**.

If Children's Services decide they must take your child away from your home and you don't agree, they must normally ask the court for permission to do this. This permission is called an Emergency Protection Order. You may hear this called an 'EPO'. There is no need to worry about how you will pay a solicitor to represent you at this court hearing because if you are the child's parent you will automatically get free legal aid (help from the government to pay for legal advice) whatever your financial situation.

An Emergency Protection Order lasts for 8 days (and can be extended) and it means that Children's Services are responsible for looking after and protecting your child while the order lasts. Children's Services decide where your child will live during this time. They may arrange for foster parents to look after your child. If your child is in hospital, the hospital may look after them instead.

Foster parents

Foster parents look after your child in their home. They are approved by Children's Services to do this. They will probably be someone your child doesn't know although a relative or friend of yours can apply to be your child's foster carer. If you have a family member or a friend who could be your child's foster parent, it's very important you tell your social worker about them. And tell them if your child speaks little or no English.

You may be embarrassed about telling people in your family about your problems but if you don't and they don't get a chance to offer to help, then your child could end up being cared for by people they and you don't know.

If there isn't time to get a court order and Children's Services believe that someone might harm your child, then the Police may be able to remove your child from you and hand them over to Children's Services. If this happens to you it is very important that you see a solicitor who specialises in children's law immediately. They will do what they can to make sure that your child comes back to live with you as soon as possible. You can find information about how to find this kind of specialist solicitor on **page 36** and it will cost you nothing.

Voluntary accommodation

If a social worker is concerned that where you live isn't safe for your child and asks you to agree to your child living in accommodation provided by Children's Services it's really important you get advice from a solicitor specialising in children's law **before** your child leaves your care. You need a specialist solicitor because children's law is complicated. They can explain your options in this situation and give you the best legal advice. You can find information about solicitors specialising in children's law on **page 36**. Legal aid (help from the government to pay for legal advice) may be available depending on your financial circumstances. You can check if you are eligible at www.gov.uk/check-legal-aid.

You may hear social workers call this 'voluntary accommodation' or a 'section 20 agreement/arrangement'.

If you agree to voluntary accommodation, you can remove your child at any time but, again, it's really important you get advice from a solicitor specialising in children's law before you do this.

If your child is going to live in accommodation provided by Children's Services then you should ask for a written agreement explaining this voluntary arrangement. You should ask for the document to be in your first language if you're not confident about reading English. This agreement should tell you where your child will be living and where and when you'll be able to see your child and make it clear that you can remove your child from the accommodation at any time.

Children's Services should give you time to look through the agreement and get advice about it from a solicitor specialising in children's law, or from your local children's centre or a community organisation working with Roma.

Investigation

An 'investigation' is when people ask questions and collect and look at evidence to find out the truth. An investigation helps people to make up their minds about what is true.

'Evidence' is information that helps prove that something is or is not true. For example, school attendance records provide evidence about whether and when a child has missed school.



When social workers investigate to find out whether your child is safe and well looked after they should always:

- Respect your family structure, your culture, your religion, and your ethnic origins. For example, social workers may talk to you about whether it would be helpful for them to contact your Embassy. Your Embassy may be able to explain any differences in how your country of origin and England protects children. But respecting your culture does not mean that social workers will accept every way you prefer to live and bring up your children.
- Arrange for an interpreter if necessary.
- Try to understand your family life and show a real interest in your child.
- Speak to you in a respectful way, make eye contact with you and not look at their notes or their computer while they speak to you.
- Establish trust with you before they ask personal questions. In an emergency, social workers or other professionals may have to ask you difficult questions quite quickly after they first meet you if they think they need to do this to stop your child being harmed.
- Help you understand what they say and any letters they send you.

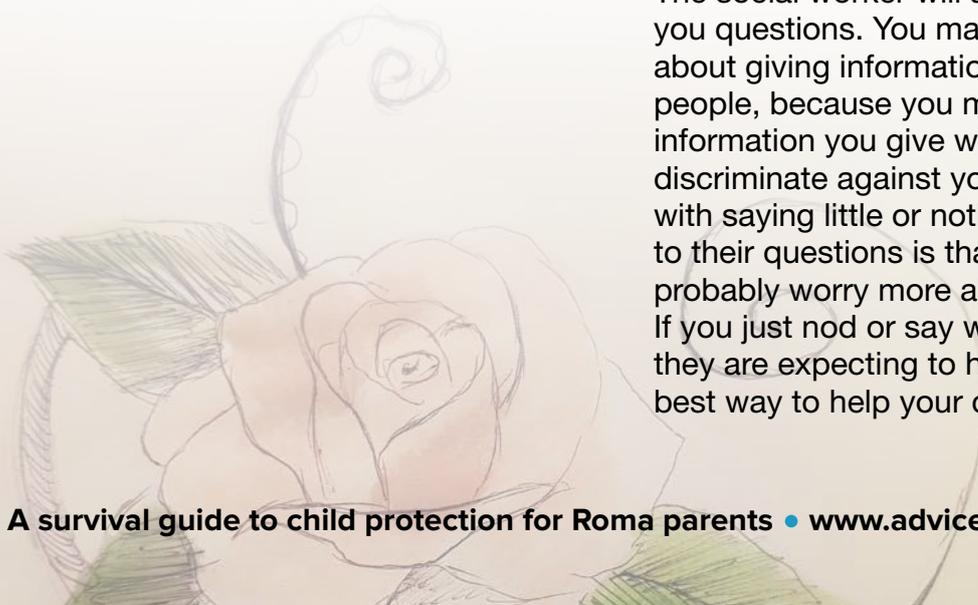
- Value your strengths (for example, your ability to make changes in how you look after your child and your ability to protect your child from someone who might cause them harm).
- Take account of any support that you have, for example, from grandparents, or other family members.
- Be aware of the effects of racial harassment and discrimination – so they shouldn't treat your child less favourably than another child when it comes to getting access to the services your child needs.

If you feel social workers are not working with you respectfully and fairly then you should speak to your solicitor.

A social worker will ask questions to collect information about your child and your family, for example, from your child's nursery or their teacher, your doctor, your health visitor and the police. The law says that all these people must work together and share the information they have about you and your family with the social worker if this might help to protect a child. This is because, in the past, failing to pass on information has contributed to the death or serious injury of children.

A social worker will normally want to see your child. Depending on their age, they will probably want to see your child alone, without you. This is because they need to hear what your child has to say for themselves when you are not there.

The social worker will also want to ask you questions. You may be frightened about giving information to non-Roma people, because you may worry that any information you give will be used to discriminate against you. The problem with saying little or nothing in answer to their questions is that they will probably worry more about your child. If you just nod or say what you think they are expecting to hear that's not the best way to help your child.



Have a look at the section on **How to best help your child and your family** on **page 20** and then the section on **Working with social workers and other professionals** on **page 23** for suggestions about how you can respond in a way that will help you and your family.

Social workers may also look at your Facebook page or other social media to see what information you've put on the internet about you, your family and your child – assuming it is publicly available. If you have applied privacy settings they would need a court order to get access.

Assessing the risk of harm

'Assessment' means the process of considering all the information the social workers have collected about you and your family. Social workers do an assessment to:

- work out what your child needs,
- find out what your child thinks and wants (which may not be the same as what you want for them),
- decide how well you are able to respond to and meet your child's needs and protect them,
- understand the impact of your behaviour on them and their development,
- decide whether your child is a child 'in need' and/or is suffering or might be at risk of suffering significant harm as a result of abuse or neglect (we explain what the words 'harm', 'abuse' and 'neglect' mean on **pages 13–16**),
- work out the type and level of any risk or harm your child is suffering, and
- decide what services and support your child needs to improve their health and well-being.

This helps the social workers get a picture of what you're good at and what you're finding difficult so they can help you improve how you care for your child and decide, fairly, what to do next.

It is the social worker's responsibility to tell you (and your child if they are not a baby) how they will do this assessment.

What is 'harm' and when is it 'significant'?

Harm is what happens when someone treats a child badly or damages their physical or mental health or development.

A parent or anyone else who spends time with a child or who looks after a child can harm them by the actions they take or don't take, or by failing to stop something bad happening to them. We explain the different types of harm in the boxes on **pages 14–16**.

Seeing or hearing parents fight or argue violently at home can cause a lot of harm to children and is one of the most common reasons for social workers getting involved in family life. Children who witness their parents fight may:

- become withdrawn,
- become aggressive,
- behave badly (they harm or lack consideration for other people),
- suffer from depression or anxiety, or
- not do well at school.

Deciding whether the harm is 'significant' or not is about deciding how your child's health and development compares with what social workers and other professionals might reasonably expect to see in a similar child. Is the harm likely to have long term damaging effects on your child?

Four possible types of harm

Neglect

This is when someone doesn't look after a child properly.

For example, they:

- don't feed the child enough or give them enough to drink so they are hungry or thirsty a lot of the time
- don't give the child breakfast before taking them to school
- are drunk or under the influence of drugs
- don't make sure the child goes to nursery or school regularly or on time
- don't make sure the child brushes their teeth or sees a dentist regularly so the child suffers from tooth decay
- don't get the right health care for the child
- frequently leave the child dirty
- frequently leave the child without adequate or clean clothes to wear
- don't supervise the child adequately, for example by:
 - leaving a young child on their own at home. You can find useful guidance about how to decide when it's safe for your child to be home on their own at www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/leaving-child-home-alone
 - leaving young children in the care of another child who isn't old enough to be looking after them. This is common in many Roma families but people in England think this is neglect because it gives too much responsibility to the older child.
 - allowing a young child to smoke a cigarette
 - allowing a child to climb onto a kitchen work surface while hot food is being prepared
 - allowing a young child to run a hot bath, cross a busy road or play outside on their own
- don't pay attention to the child, for example by not listening to them or noticing their feelings
- don't express positive feelings to the child, for example to praise them for something they have said or done
- don't protect them from danger, for example from getting burned, from drinking cleaning products, from hurting themselves with a kitchen knife or taking medicine by themselves
- don't step in to prevent the child from being physically or sexually abused by another person
- don't show their children that they love them.

Physical abuse

This is when someone deliberately hurts a child or treats them badly.

For example, they:

- hit them
- shake them
- kick them
- slap them
- pinch them
- scratch them
- burn them
- pull their hair
- throw things at them.

Hitting or slapping children may be common in many parts of Eastern Europe including in Roma families but people in England now think that punishing children by hitting or slapping them isn't a good way to discipline children. This is because ideas about the best way to bring up children have changed and we know more about the effects of physical punishment on children.

Hitting or slapping a child can:

- make them resentful and angry
- damage your relationship with them
- get out of control, so that you injure them
- lead to them treating other people in the same way because they think it's OK for them to behave like that.

You can find helpful ideas about how to discipline in a way that works at www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/advice-and-info/positive-parenting.pdf

Child
protection

Emotional abuse

This is when someone doesn't do things that are important for a child's healthy development, like show love and care, listen to what they say or talk to them. Emotional abuse is also when someone upsets or frightens a child, for example, by:

- telling them they are worthless or unloved – again and again,
- calling them bad names, picking on them or damaging their things – again and again,
- frequently frightening them, perhaps by shouting at them, pushing or shoving them or threatening them,
- making fun of or criticising them – again and again.

Sexual abuse

This is when an adult touches a child's body or their private parts or makes the child do sexual things like touching someone else's body or private parts.

Sexual abuse also includes actions like allowing a child to look at films or pictures of a sexual nature or getting them to send pictures of themselves with no clothes on over the internet. You can find more detailed information about sexual abuse at www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/child-sexual-abuse

Child sexual exploitation is a type of sexual abuse. It can involve a child being given food, somewhere to live, drugs, affection, presents, status or money in return for doing sexual things or having sexual things done to them.

After investigation and assessment

Social workers can make a range of different decisions after they've thought carefully about all the information they've collected about you and your family.

They can decide:

- they don't need to be involved anymore, or
- that you need help but not from them, or
- that your child is or may be at risk of suffering significant harm (we explain what 'harm' means on **page 13**).

If they think that your child may be at risk of suffering significant harm they may decide they need a special report to help them work out whether this is true or not. For example, from a child psychologist about how your child is developing and how well you can meet their needs or a physiotherapist about how to improve your child's physical fitness and your ability to help make those improvements happen.

If they are still worried about your child then they will organise a meeting between them, you, other members of your family and other people involved in your child's life, like a teacher and a doctor. You may hear this meeting called a 'child protection conference'. The people at this meeting will make decisions about your child's future safety, health and development.

If you are a parent you will normally be invited to this meeting unless social workers think you will disrupt the meeting or intimidate someone else or prevent them focussing on what your child needs.

It is important that you attend this meeting as this is your chance to explain things to the social workers and other professionals.

Have a look at the section on **Working with social workers and other professionals** on **page 23** for suggestions about how to talk to the people at this meeting.



Ask the social worker (or your solicitor if you have one):

- what they are planning to talk about at this meeting,
- who will be there,
- how the room will be set up,
- what you can do to prepare, and
- how you can take part in the discussion.

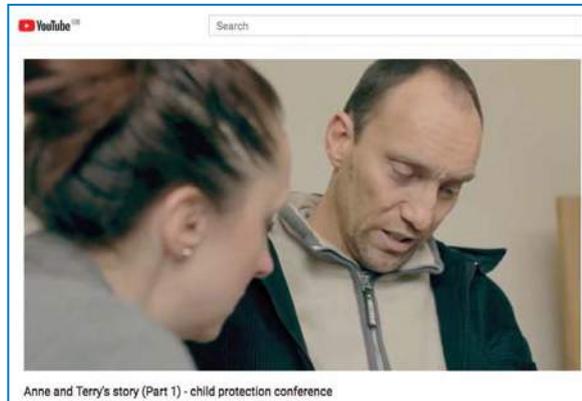
You can take a solicitor with you but you may need to pay for their help as legal aid (help from the government to pay for legal advice) doesn't usually cover paying for them to go to these meetings with you.

If you can't take a solicitor with you, it's a good idea to take someone else to help you explain your opinion. Although you don't have a legal right to do this, the social workers should allow your supporter into the meeting. Your supporter could be someone from your local children's centre or a community organisation working with Roma.

If your supporter doesn't know anything about children's law, they can talk to the Family Rights Group – an organisation that supports parents when social workers make decisions about their children – on your behalf. The Family Rights Group runs a free and confidential telephone advice service on **0808 801 0366** which is open Monday to Friday 9.30am–3.00pm (excluding bank holidays).

You can find tips to help you get ready for a child protection conference at www.frg.org.uk/ypa/images/pdf/child-protection-conference-tips.pdf

Here are 2 short films that will give you an idea about what happens in a child protection conference:



https://youtu.be/EjRX38_P5HU



<https://youtu.be/3Q11zm-L-hQ>

If the people at this meeting think your child is at risk of significant harm, the social workers will prepare a plan and decide whether they need to go to court. You may hear this plan called a 'child protection plan'. If your child doesn't have leave to remain in the UK, the social workers will also think about whether they should inform the relevant Embassy that they are making a child protection plan for your child.

Child protection



Child protection

The plan should set out:

- what help you and your child will get,
- what you need to improve,
- how much improvement is needed,
- what success looks like, and
- who will review your progress and how this will be done.

After the meeting, you need to start work on improving your parenting immediately – using the help offered in the plan. The social workers and other professionals will be looking out for evidence that you are improving how you care for your child quickly enough and that the changes and positive effects for your child will carry on into the future. For example, if your child has tooth decay, they will want to see evidence that you are following the advice of your child’s dentist about how to care for your child’s teeth and gums and that their dental health is beginning to improve. They also need to be confident that you will make sure your child’s dental health continues to get better and better. If you need help or don’t know how to make the changes the professionals want to see, you can

ask for support from your social worker or your local children’s centre or a community organisation working with Roma.

The full child protection conference will review the plan every 3 to 6 months after the first meeting. In between times, a smaller group of professionals who have most contact with your child will meet regularly to help everyone make the plan happen. It’s very important that you attend all these meetings.

The plan will end if it’s not needed any longer to make sure your child is safe and developing well or your child becomes 18 years old or leaves the UK.

If the social workers decide your child is not at risk of harm but still needs extra support they can prepare a different kind of plan – a ‘child in need’ plan. This is a positive change and a less serious process than child protection. See **page 8** for information about a ‘child in need’.



Role of the different professionals involved in child protection

Role of the different professionals involved in child protection

All these different professionals meet children in their everyday work. If they see or hear things that make them worry that a child is not safe or well cared for, the law in England says that they must act to protect the child by telling Children's Services about their concerns.

Doctor/nurse

Doctors and nurses look after our health. If they are worried that you are neglecting your child's health and development or there are signs you or someone else may have injured or abused your child, they have to contact Children's Services.

Dentist

Dentists look after our teeth, mouth and gums. If they are worried that you are neglecting your child's dental health, they have to contact Children's Services.

Health visitor

Health visitors are there to help you as you get ready to have a baby and to visit you afterwards to help with parenting, feeding, immunisation, physical and developmental checks, safety, relationships, nutrition, speech, language and communication, and play.

If they are worried that you are neglecting your child's health and development or there are signs you or someone else may have injured or abused your child, they have to contact Children's Services.

Police officer

Police officers prevent and investigate crime. They also have a duty to protect children. Many forms of abuse involving children are crimes and if a crime has or may have been committed involving your child, they will be very concerned and must contact Children's Services.

Teacher/nursery worker

Teachers and nursery workers help children to learn and develop. If they are worried that you are neglecting your child's health and development or there are signs you or someone else may have injured or abused your child, they have to contact Children's Services.

How to best help your child and your family



How to best help your child and your family

If Children's Services get involved with your family, the last thing they want to do is to take your children away from you. This is a very expensive thing to do and a last option. What they will try and do is to work with you and support you to make changes so that your child is safe and well looked after. Like you, they want what is best for your child.

- If you try and avoid people like social workers, teachers, doctors and nursery staff because you are frightened that your child will be taken away from you, the more likely they are to worry that there is a problem.
 - Don't close the door on them.
 - Don't ignore the situation.
 - Be prepared to work with them and accept their help.
 - Don't stop taking your child to nursery or to school.
 - Don't stop taking your child to the doctor or the dentist for check-ups or any treatment your child needs.
- Some social workers and other professionals may expect you not to co-operate with them. Prove them wrong by co-operating with them.
- Be open about any difficulties you have caring for your children. Social workers and other professionals can't support you properly if you don't help them understand what the problems are.
- Be open and honest about who lives with you as part of your child's family, what other family members your child has, where they live and how you get on with each other.
- Be honest. If you lie, even about something small or just once, it is very likely that the social workers or other professionals will find out. And that will make them question other things you say – things that may be true.

- Tell the social workers or other professionals if you don't understand what they say. It's OK and important that you do this. If you don't feel confident to do this on your own, ask for help from your local children's centre or a community organisation working with Roma.
- If you don't understand what they say because you don't speak English well, or because social workers are using complicated words, make sure you or your support worker asks for an interpreter. Tell the social workers or other professionals what language you need the interpreter to speak. If your first language is Romanes, you can ask for a Roma interpreter. This may not be available in your area but they will try to find one.
- Tell the social workers if you don't understand the interpreter or the interpreter doesn't understand you.
- It's OK to ask social workers to get a different interpreter if you don't feel comfortable with your current interpreter.
- You may be stressed and afraid, but if you shout at the social workers or become aggressive this will not help the situation because they may think that this means you behave like this at home in front of your child.
- If social workers ask you to change something about how you look after your children, don't say that you will but then never do it or do just enough to get them off your back. Social workers are usually much more worried by parents who say they are doing something when they're not than those who are open about any difficulties they have making the changes the social workers want to see.



- If something is stopping you doing what a social worker or other professional asks you to do, explain to them what this is. Be clear what would help you do what they ask.
- If you don't agree that it's in your child's best interests to do what the social workers or other professionals are asking you to do or you think they are wrong about something, it's best not to get into an argument with them. Instead, get some advice from your solicitor about how to respond.
- See if you can get help from a support worker. This may be someone from your local children's centre or a community organisation working with Roma. You may also hear this person called an 'advocate'. An advocate's job is to help you understand what's going on and to find the confidence to speak for yourself where possible so you can better take part in the child protection process. They are also there to encourage good communication and a positive working relationship between you and the social workers.
- You can talk to the Family Rights Group. They are an organisation that supports parents when social workers make decisions about their children. They can advise you about your rights and options when social workers or courts make decisions about your children. They run a free, confidential telephone advice service on **0808 801 0366** which is open Monday to Friday 9.30am–3.00pm (excluding bank holidays).

How to best help your child and your family



Case study

Social workers became concerned about the children of a Roma family from Poland. They were worried about the children's dental health and because they kept missing doctor's appointments.

After a community organisation got involved, it turned out that the family sometimes missed a doctor's appointment because, for example, a child had recovered quickly from a simple cold. The family didn't understand that they should cancel the appointment if they no longer needed it.

The community organisation recognised that this family spoke and read only limited English, had difficulty understanding how public services operated, and didn't understand what was expected of them when bringing up their children in England. By repeating information, explaining difficult words using everyday language, using pictures to support information, for example when discussing a healthy diet – they were able to improve the family's understanding of the changes they needed to make and how to change.

They were also able to explain how to cancel an appointment and that if they missed doctor's appointments, professionals might become concerned that they weren't taking enough care of their children's health. Their attendance at health appointments improved.

The children had very poor dental health. All of them had to have fillings. Watching her children being treated by the dentist was hard for Mum but it helped her realise just how important it was that her children ate and drank less sugar. She started going to cooking sessions at the community centre and accepted early help from the social workers.



Working with social workers and other professionals

Lots of professionals could be involved in the case about your child – people like social workers, doctors, health visitors, and teachers.

Here are some tips to help you work with the social workers and other professionals you may meet.

Getting ready to meet a social worker or other professional

It's OK to ask questions. Make a list of your most important questions.

Or get someone else to write them down for you.

Ask a friend, family member or support worker to go to the meeting with you.

Ask your friend, family member or support worker to write down the most important things the professional says.

This meeting may be very difficult for you but you need to try and stay calm during it.

Working with social workers and other professionals

Case study

A Roma family from Romania lived in a small flat. They struggled to pay utility bills and had large rent arrears. The father worked long hours to earn enough money for them to live on. The mother was pregnant and occasionally left her two young children (aged 3 and 5) at home with her 13-year-old daughter so that she could attend various medical appointments.

A neighbour noticed that the children were left at home alone with a teenager and contacted Children's Services. Social workers made an unannounced visit with a Romanian interpreter. The mother doesn't understand Romanian well and got increasingly frustrated as the conversation went on. She started to raise her voice, used swear words, became very emotional and, in the end, threatened to kill herself if her children were removed. The children were frightened and distressed. As a result, the social workers became even more concerned about the mother's behaviour.

Another member of the family contacted a Roma community organisation immediately. They provided a bilingual Roma support worker who helped the mother to understand the situation, to feel listened to and to express herself better. The mother calmed down as did the children. Communication between the mother and the social workers improved significantly. They were able to discuss what support the mother needed to help her manage her current situation better.

Understanding what a social worker or other professional says

If a social worker or other professional wants to talk about your children, it's important you understand what they say to you. Don't be afraid to ask questions if you don't understand. If you don't feel confident to do this on your own, ask for help from your local children's centre or a community organisation working with Roma. If you don't ask any questions, they will probably think you understand everything and that you agree with them.

You could say: 'I would like to check that I understand what you said.' Then tell them what you think they've told you. Then you could say: 'Have I got that right?'

Or you could say: 'I don't understand. Please can you explain that again?'

If you don't understand some of the words they say, ask them to explain them.

There is no shame in asking questions because you don't understand the child protection process. It is complicated and difficult to understand for everyone – including people whose first language is English and who have lived in England all their lives.



Asking for an interpreter

If you don't feel confident understanding or speaking English, ask for an interpreter.

Tell the social worker or other professional what language you need the interpreter to speak. You could say: 'My first language is Romanes. Please can I have a Roma interpreter?' (This may not be possible as there are not a lot of Roma interpreters, but it is worth asking.)

The interpreter should translate every word they hear. If you don't think your interpreter is doing this, you should tell the social worker or other professional. The interpreter may need to explain some difficult words, words that may not exist in your language or may mean something different.

Working
with social
workers
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professionals



Case study

Social workers had tried working with a Roma family from Slovakia for 2 years to provide early help. The family were not engaging – not providing information they were asked for, not attending meetings, not asking or answering questions. As a result there was little change in how they cared for their children.

A support worker from a local community organisation visited the family to explain the serious position they were in, that if they carried on not engaging there was a risk they might lose their children. This was exactly what the family were frightened about. They thought the way to stop this happening was to have as little contact as possible with the social workers.

The support worker was able explain in both Slovakian and Romanes that the social workers were there to help them and did not want to remove their children unless they had no choice. She was also able to explain the difficult words used by the social workers using everyday language and examples. She helped the family understand what Children's Services expected them to do and how to make those changes.

As a result, the family started attending meetings, went to the community centre playgroup, talked with the health visitor, and asked questions about how to best care for their children. The children are now developing well. Both the family and the social workers can see the difference and are happy with the progress that has been made.

Working
with social
workers
and other
professionals

You should also tell them if you don't understand the interpreter or the interpreter doesn't understand you or isn't being fair to you.

It's OK to ask the social worker or other professional to get a different interpreter if that would help you talk about your child and your family.

Difficult questions

Social workers and other professionals can ask you questions that might make you feel uncomfortable. Although they are only doing their job, it's OK for you to explain that in your culture it's not allowed to speak about some subjects in mixed (male/female) company. This doesn't mean you can avoid talking about these things but it may help the

social worker or other professional think carefully about how to talk to you about the subject.

If you feel uncomfortable, perhaps because the professional is a different gender or much older or younger than you, it's important that you say this. You can ask to speak to someone closer to your own age or the same gender as you if they want to ask questions about a sensitive subject, like your physical or mental health or whether and how much you use alcohol or drugs.

If you try to avoid answering their questions or seem secretive or defensive, this just invites the social worker or other professional to keep on asking more and more detailed questions until they are satisfied.



Understanding what a social worker or other professional is worried about

If a social worker or other professional is worried that your child isn't safe or well looked after, make sure you understand what they think the problem is.

You could say:

- What is it you think I need to change or stop doing?
- What do I need to do instead?
- What is the standard you want me to meet?
- What does success look like?

Ask your friend, family member or support worker to write down the most important things they say.

It's very important that you understand what you must do to keep your child in your family. If you don't understand or aren't clear about what you need to change or do differently or how to make these changes, ask the social worker or other professional to explain it to you. Ask them to confirm what they say in writing.

Understanding when and why your child may be seen by another professional

A social worker may say that they want someone else, for example, a children's doctor to see your child.

In this situation, it's OK to ask the social worker questions to help you decide whether or not to agree to this, such as:

- Who are they?
- What is their job?
- Why do they need to see my child?
- What do they want to find out?
- Will they see my child on their own or together with me?
- If I can't be there, is it OK if another member of my family or a friend goes to the appointment?
- When will I get to see their report?

Medical condition or disability

If your child has a medical condition or a disability you may need support to look after them. Although you know your child well, you may not have important information about your child's condition that would help you to look after them or manage their disability better. There's no shame in asking for this help. It could help you and your child have a better life.



Case study

A Roma family came to England from the Czech Republic. The father works long hours, six days a week in a factory. The mother is pregnant and looks after their three children. Their oldest child, Yvetka, has autism and is also profoundly deaf. The mother finds it difficult to look after her younger children and cope with her disabled child.

The school became concerned about Yvetka's behaviour in school. They invited the parents into school to talk about the problem but they didn't go. The school then referred the family to Children's Services.

A social worker visited the family and realised that the parents didn't understand what autism was and couldn't use British Sign Language. She explained autism to the parents and organised services to help the parents support Yvetka in everyday situations and manage her challenging behaviour. The mother started going to British Sign Language classes so that she could use it to communicate with Yvetka.

The social worker made sure that the school understood the parent's situation and that they provided specialist support in school for Yvetka. She also arranged after-school activities for Yvetka to allow her mum to spend more time with her younger children.



Getting letters and reports

Letters and reports from social workers or other professionals can be long and complicated. If you get a letter or report that you don't understand, ask the person who sent it to read it to you face to face or take it to your support worker or solicitor and ask them to read it to you and help you understand it.

Don't be afraid to say if there's something in the letter or report that you don't understand.

It's OK to ask questions about what's in the letter or report. If you don't, they will probably think you understand it.

You could say: 'I would like to check that I understand what the letter or report says.' Then tell them what you think it says. Then you could say: 'Have I got that right?'

Or you could say: 'I don't understand. Please can you explain that again?'

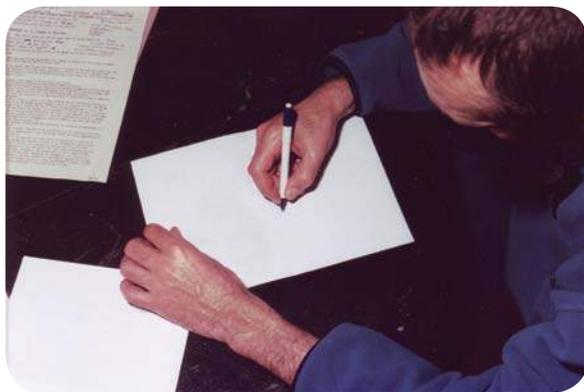
If you don't understand some words or expressions in the letter, ask them to explain them. You could say: 'What does this mean?'

The letter or report may be translated into a language of your country of origin. But this may not be enough for you to understand every detail. There may be words you don't understand. It's OK to say this.

Keeping letters and reports

It's important that you keep all the letters and reports you get and that you keep them together in one place. If you need help to organise your letters and documents or to understand them ask your local children's centre or community organisation working with Roma to help you.

Working
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Writing letters about your child

If a social worker or other professional wants to write to someone about your child, you can say: 'I would like to have a copy of any letter you send about my child.'

Signing documents

Don't sign any documents if you don't understand what they mean. It's very important that you understand everything in a document before you sign it and that if by signing the document you are agreeing to do something, that you then follow through and do it.

Before the meeting ends

Before a meeting with a social worker or other professional ends, find out what will happen next. Ask your family member, friend or advocacy worker to write down what the social worker says. You could say:

- What happens now?
- When will it happen?
- What do I need to do next?
- Who should I contact if I have any questions after this meeting?
- Where can I get more information about what's happening to my family?

- Are there any support groups that can help us?
- Are there any letters or reports written about my child or my family? I would like to have copies of these. (If they say they can't give you any, ask them what information they will share with you.)

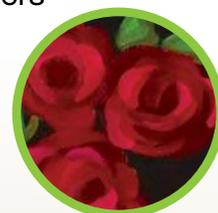
After the meeting

Put any appointment dates somewhere safe – to help you remember so you won't miss them. Maybe put them in your phone if you have one or buy a calendar and put it somewhere you can always see it. You can mark appointments on the calendar and cross out the date every day so you can see when your next appointment is coming up.



If you don't get a letter or report the social worker or other professional promised you, it's OK to remind them or ask your support worker to do this.

Let the social workers know if you move to a different address – so you don't miss getting important letters about your child.



Working with social workers and other professionals

Before going to court

It's important to understand that if Children's Services go to court, the court has significant powers over:

- where your child lives,
- whether they should live with you or not,
- whether you should see them or not, and
- whether they should live permanently with someone else.

But the court won't want to limit or end your involvement in your child's life unless it has to. It will try and make sure that your child continues to be brought up in your family – as long as this is safe for your child.

This means you need to be open and honest about any difficulties you are having and accept the support services you are offered, so that your child gets the care they need.

If you only give the impression that everything is OK and can't show or accept that you understand that there may be difficulties, the social workers and other professionals may think you are unable or unwilling to help them to help your child. If they think you can't recognise what the problems are or won't try and improve, they will look at other options for your child like foster care.

Unless things are very urgent, Children's Services must organise a special meeting with you before they go to court. This meeting is usually your last chance to talk to the social workers about how they want you to care for your child and the changes they want you to make before they decide go to court and ask for permission to remove your child from you. If you are able to make the changes that Children's Services want, then you may be able to stop them going to court.

You may hear this meeting called a 'pre-proceedings meeting'. It's very important that you go to this and any follow up meetings and that you take a lawyer specialising in children's law with you. There is information about how to find this kind of specialist solicitor on **page 36**. Their services will be free.

Before
going to
court



You should get a letter from Children's Services inviting you to this meeting. This letter should explain what Children's Services are worried about and what changes they want you to make. You may hear this letter called a 'pre-proceedings letter' or a 'letter before proceedings'. The letter from Children's Services will usually tell you:

- What you need to change to be able to keep your child.
- What help you will get to make those changes.
- What help you've already been given and why they feel that not enough has changed.
- About any more special reports that Children's Services want to get to help them work out what's best for your child. (It's important that you go to any meetings and appointments set up to prepare such a report.)
- That you are invited to a 'pre-proceedings meeting' to discuss what you need to do to improve your parenting.
- How you can get free legal advice and representation from a solicitor.

If you are sent or given this kind of letter, or a social worker even mentions the possibility that your child may not be able to stay living with you, it's very important that you see a solicitor who specialises in children's law immediately. You need a specialist solicitor because children's law is complicated and you need the best legal advice for your situation.

There is no need to worry about how you will pay the solicitor because if you are the child's parent you will automatically get free legal aid (help from the government to pay for legal advice) whatever your financial situation.



Before
going to
court

Court

If you can't make the changes that Children's Services want you to make and they are still concerned about your child, then they can ask the court for a 'care order'. A 'care order' is a decision of the court giving Children's Services 'parental responsibility' for your child (which means they will share parental responsibility with you) and allowing them to decide where your child lives and who they see. If the court makes a care order, Children's Services will be able to make decisions about your child which you may not agree with. The process of asking the court for a care order and going through the court proceedings is called 'care proceedings'.

The court should make its final decision quite quickly – within 26 weeks of the case starting.

The social workers must show the court how they have tried to support you and your family to make the changes they think that your child needs.

What is 'parental responsibility'?

Parental responsibility is how the law describes the rights and responsibilities that go with being a parent. If you have parental responsibility you are responsible for your child's care and well-being.

Mums have parental responsibility from the moment their child is born. Dads who are married to their child's mum automatically have parental responsibility too. But unmarried dads don't have parental responsibility automatically. If you are an unmarried dad and your child's birth was registered after 1 December 2003 and you were named on the birth certificate as their dad, then you do have parental responsibility automatically. If not, there are things you can do to get parental responsibility.

We have a separate guide about parental responsibility – what it is and how you get it. It explains how to make a parental responsibility agreement and how to apply for a parental responsibility order, see www.advicenow.org.uk/guides/how-apply-parental-responsibility-without-help-lawyer.



Court



Case study

Maria and Andre have 4 children – 3 boys aged 12, 10 and 7 and a little girl of 5. They are Bulgarian nationals and have been living in England for about a year. Children’s Services are concerned that the little girl, Anna, doesn’t go to school regularly and her school clothes often look dirty. She has missed some dental appointments and isn’t vaccinated. (Vaccination is when doctors or nurses give your child an injection or medicine to stop them from getting disease.) Anna has told her teacher that her dad drinks a lot, that then her parents argue and when they do she gets scared. Although social workers have tried working with Maria and Andre they don’t think that they have changed how they care for Anna enough in the last 6 months to reassure them that Anna is safe. The social workers feel they have no choice but to go to court.



Who is involved in care proceedings?

Children’s Services, your child and anyone who has ‘parental responsibility’ for your child is involved in care proceedings. Each of them will usually have a solicitor to advise and represent them. Your child will also have a Children’s Guardian – a social worker who does not work for Children’s Services – whose job is to tell the court what they think about the situation and about your child’s wishes and feelings, and what they think is in your child’s best interests. They will work very closely with your child’s solicitor.

The children’s guardian is often very influential in the case and it’s important that you make a real effort to get along and work with them. You can find more information about the role of the Children’s Guardian at www.cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/parents-and-carers/care-proceedings/cafcass-role-care-proceedings

What does the court think about when it makes a decision?

The court has to decide whether there are enough reasons to justify making a court order. A court order is what the law calls the decisions that judges make.

The court makes this decision in 2 stages. A case only gets through stage 1 (the law calls this the ‘threshold’ test) if the court agrees that things have happened which:

- have already caused significant harm to your child, or
- pose a serious risk that your child will suffer significant harm in the future, or
- show that you can’t influence and control your child’s behaviour.

Next a case has to pass stage 2. The law calls stage 2 the ‘welfare’ test. The welfare test is about trying to decide, sometimes in difficult circumstances, what is in your child’s best interests. What the court decides is in your child’s best interests may not always be the same thing as what you want or what you think is in your child’s best interests.

The law gives the court a checklist explaining what it must think about when it decides what is in the best interests of your child. You may hear this called the ‘welfare checklist’.



The court must think about:

Your child's wishes and feelings

This does not mean that the court will do whatever your child says they want. But if your child is old enough to understand the questions they are asked and the court can find out what they think, then it will consider what they say. The court will want to know that your child's wishes and feelings are their own and not influenced by their parents (or anybody else). The court will pay more attention to the wishes and feelings of a child the older they are. In a few cases, the court may want to meet your child, or get a letter from them giving their views. The court will decide whether, where and when this will happen, if at all.

Your child's physical, emotional and educational needs

This includes your child's need for love and affection as well as for education, a home and food. It also includes things that can affect your child's emotional health. For example, if you and your partner argue or fight, the court will take this into account.

The likely effect of any changes on your child

Change can be disruptive for children. The court will want to think about the effect of any proposed changes such as who they live or spend time with. Do the benefits of any change outweigh any possible negative effects?

The age, sex, background and any relevant characteristics of your child

This includes any cultural, religious or language needs as well as any disabilities. For example, if your child is going to be looked after by other people, the court may be concerned if there is no plan to try and place your child with Roma foster parents – because such a placement would better meet their cultural, religious and language needs than being placed with non-Roma foster parents. The court might ask the social workers to re-work their plan for your child but if they can't find any Roma foster parents it doesn't necessarily mean that the court won't make an order.

Any harm your child has suffered or is at risk of suffering

Harm can mean ill treatment or damage to your child's health or development. It can also mean the impact caused by them seeing or hearing parents arguing or fighting. The court will look at what the evidence tells them about whether you can protect your child from harm. We explain what 'harm' means in more detail on **page 13**.

How capable you and the child's other parent are of meeting your child's needs

The court will consider whether you have the skills to look after your child and meet their needs. If, for example, you have drug or alcohol problems and these problems affect your ability to look after your child then this is something the court will take into account.

Court

These are the 5 main stages in care proceedings:

Starting the case ▼	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Children's Services complete a form telling the court about your child and your family, why they are worried and why they need a court order.● The court checks that Children's Services have given them all the information they need and then starts the case.
Court sends notices and directions ▼	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● The court sends a notice to each parent telling you that the case has started and when and where the first hearing will take place.● The court also sends out directions – these are instructions telling everyone involved in the case what they need to do before the first hearing.
Case Management Hearing ▼	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● The court looks at whether you and Children's Services agree about where your child should live and who your children should see between now and the final hearing.● If you don't agree, the court will decide – either at this hearing or later.● The court decides what extra information it needs to make a decision about your child's future, for example a statement from you explaining your views, a report about whether a member of your family could care for your child or a report from a children's doctor.
Issues Resolution Hearing ▼	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Before this hearing you should:<ul style="list-style-type: none">— see the information that the court has about your child.— see the plan that the social workers have made for your child's future.— prepare your own statement with the help of your lawyer.● At the hearing the court identifies what still needs deciding and whether everything can be sorted out at this hearing.● If not, the court sets a date for the final hearing.
Final Hearing ▼	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● The court will decide your child's future at this hearing.● The court will usually hear from witnesses who will explain their point of view.● You might have to speak in court and answer questions. Your lawyer will tell you if this is going to happen and explain what is involved.● The court will use all this information to make decisions about where your child will live and who they can see.

Court

The different orders a court can make about your child

The Family Rights Group has a very helpful chart explaining the different orders a court can make at the end of care proceedings and what each order will mean for your child at www.frg.org.uk/ypa/images/pdf/table-of-orders.pdf

If the court decides that there are enough reasons to justify making a court order, then usually your child will either:

- go home – if the safety and quality of your parenting has improved, or
- go and live with a relative or another person, or
- go and live with a foster parent, or
- be adopted.

If the court makes a care order it is sometimes possible to go back to court later to ask for the court to end the order, but only if all the changes that the court wants to see are carried out.

What is adoption?

Adoption is where a child leaves the family they were born into and becomes part of a new family – permanently. The child's birth parents are no longer the legal parents of the child and have lost 'parental responsibility'.



Court

Finding a solicitor who specialises in children's law

You can find a specialist solicitor by searching at <http://solicitors.lawsociety.org.uk/?Pro=True>. Choose 'Family public law – legal aid' in the drop-down menu offered under the heading 'Area of practice' and 'Children' in the drop down-menu offered under the heading 'Second area of practice'.

If you find it difficult to use the internet, ask a community organisation to help you by doing this search for you or call **020 7320 5650** (line open Monday to Friday from 09:00 to 17:00) and ask for help to find a solicitor specialising in child protection.

Many solicitors who specialise in children's law have an out of hours emergency number you can call if, for example, social workers contact you in the evening or at the weekend or you suddenly find out you have to go to court the next day. They will usually provide a limited amount of free advice before you can get legal aid. Check the solicitor's website for details of the firm's emergency number.

Family Rights Group may be able to help you find a solicitor who specialises in children's law. They are an organisation that supports parents when social workers make decisions about their children. They run a free advice line on **0808 801 0366** which is open Monday to Friday 9.30am–3.00pm (excluding bank holidays).



Finding a solicitor who specialises in children's law

Paying for a solicitor and legal aid

There is no need to worry about how you will pay your solicitor if Children's Services organise a 'pre-proceedings meeting' or go to court because if you are the child's parent you will automatically get free legal aid (help from the government to pay for legal advice) whatever your financial situation.

If you want legal advice at an earlier stage, perhaps when Children's Services first contact you or if there's going to be a child protection conference, then legal aid may be available depending on your financial circumstances. You can check if you are eligible at www.gov.uk/check-legal-aid.



Paying for a solicitor and legal aid

Working with your solicitor

Your solicitor is there to represent you and your views and no-one else's. It's important you listen to what they say and ask questions if you don't understand.

Your child will have a different solicitor. This is because your child is a separate person with rights of their own.

Your solicitor:

- can explain your legal rights and the options you have and answer your questions about your case.
 - should record what they advise you in a letter. This letter should summarise the case and the action they are taking for you.
 - may be able to answer urgent questions if your child's social worker can't help.
 - should pass on copies of all letters and reports they get about you, your child or your family. You need to read these carefully and get help from your solicitor to understand them.
 - should find out what your views are.
 - will talk to and write to Children's Services on your behalf so you don't need to do this – but only to say what you want said.
 - should update you regularly.
 - can speak for you in court. Through your lawyer, you will be able to challenge what Children's Services and their witnesses say.
 - can present the court with evidence to support your case, including relevant information about Roma culture.
- can ask that the court considers whether your child can be placed with Roma foster or adoptive parents, if your child can't live with you anymore.
 - can ask that Children's Services makes sure that your child stays in regular contact with their family network and other Roma friends.
 - should let you know who will be coming to court with you instead of them if they can't come.
 - should make sure that if you haven't met the person who is going to speak for you at court, this person comes to court early enough so you have time to speak with them without feeling rushed.



Before every hearing ask your lawyer 'What is going to happen at this hearing?' Don't be afraid to tell them if you don't understand what they say. It's OK to say something like: 'I'm sorry, but I still don't understand what you are telling me'.

Ask your lawyer how you can raise things with them while the hearing is going on. For example, is it OK to whisper in their ear or would they prefer it if you or your support worker passes them a note?

Tell your lawyer about anything you find difficult or that seems unfair. For example, if:

- your interpreter isn't helpful,
- you don't understand what the social workers or the judge are saying,
- a social worker or other professional doesn't treat you fairly or with respect,
- someone asks you to sign a document you don't understand.



Although you can complain about a social worker or other professional, it is best to check with your solicitor before you do this as it might not help your case. It might be better to wait and complain after the case is finished. You can find more information about complaining about a social worker at www.frg.org.uk/6-faqs-for-parents

Working
with your
solicitor

Community organisations who work with Roma in England

Organisation	Description	Region/ Address	Contact details Website
			
Roma Support Group	<p>Roma Support Group (RSG) is a Roma-led charity working with East European Roma refugees and migrants. Since 1998, RSG has worked with thousands of Roma families, offering them a variety of services, engaging the Roma community in all aspects of running and managing the organisation and promoting an understanding of Roma culture in the UK.</p>	London	<p>Email: info@romasupportgroup.org.uk</p> <p>Website: www.romasupportgroup.org.uk</p>
Roma Community Care	<p>Roma Community Care (RCC) is a grassroots, non-profit, advocacy organisation working in the heart of Normanton and Arboretum in Derby, supported by the Multi Faith Centre, University of Derby http://multifaith.wpengine.com</p> <p>It offers support and help primarily to Eastern European Roma.</p>	Derby Derby Roma Community Care, Pear Tree Junior School, Pear Tree Street, Derby, DE23 8PN	<p>Tel: 01332 289818</p> <p>Email: info@romacommunitycare.org</p> <p>Website: www.romacommunitycare.org</p>
Luton Roma Trust	<p>Luton Roma Trust works in partnership with other agencies in Luton helping Roma families to integrate in a holistic way into the UK.</p>	Luton	<p>Email: office@lutonromatrust.org.uk</p> <p>Website: www.lutonromatrust.org.uk</p>

Community organisations who work with Roma in England

Organisation	Description	Region/ Address	Contact details Website
Clifton Learning Partnership	<p>Clifton Learning Partnership works with Roma, providing drop in sessions, job club, ESOL and other activities.</p> <p>It aims to improve the educational outcomes for children, tackle issues of deprivation, diversity and poverty, and increase participation in learning by the whole community.</p>	Rotherham Eastwood Village Community Centre, Erskine Rd, Eastwood Village, Rotherham, S65 1RF	<p>Tel: 01709 728069 Tel: 01709 829087</p> <p>Website: www.clifton-partnership.org.uk</p>
Hibiscus Initiatives	<p>Hibiscus Initiatives is a voluntary sector organisation working with marginalised black and minority ethnic foreign national and migrant offenders and detainees in custody, detention and the community.</p> <p>It works mainly in London, but UK-wide over the phone.</p> <p>Roma Women is a project offering alternatives to custody for vulnerable women and preventing re-offending.</p>	London Resource for London, 356 Holloway Road, London, N7 6PA	<p>Tel: 020 7697 4120</p> <p>Email: info@hibiscus.org.uk</p> <p>Website: www.hibiscusinitiatives.org.uk</p>
Wellspring Healthy Living Centre	<p>The centre's Roma support project provides one-to-one advice and support, signposting towards English classes and training, help with debt, housing, benefits and healthcare.</p>	Bristol Beam St, Bristol, BS5 9 QY	<p>Tel: 07956 409 982</p> <p>Website: www.wellspringhlc.org.uk</p> <p>Ramona Amuza is a Community Engagement Worker who works with the Romanian-speaking Roma community</p> <p>Email: ramona.amuza@wellspringhlc.org</p>

Community organisations who work with Roma in England

Organisation	Description	Region/ Address	Contact details Website
Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Team Bristol City Council	<p>Drop-in for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people.</p> <p>Resources for professionals</p>	Bristol Bristol City Council, BEC, Sheridan Road, Bristol, BS7 0PU	<p>Tel: 0117 922 4770 (Mon–Fri)</p> <p>Mob: 07879 117779</p> <p>Email: heather.mundy@bristol.gov.uk</p> <p>Website: www.bristol.gov.uk/grt</p> <p>Read-easy phone directory of services: www.GRTbristol.com</p>
CHAT Trust	<p>CHAT is an Anglican led Churches Acting Together community outreach project based in the West End of Newcastle. It runs projects and services designed with and for the local community.</p> <p>It provides activities and support for young Slovak and Czech Roma and some support for their parents.</p>	Newcastle CHAT Trust, 250 Philip St Arthur's Hill, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE4 5BH	<p>Tel: 0191 447 0190</p> <p>Website: www.chattrust.co.uk</p> <p>Email: thechattrust@gmail.com</p>
Youth Association Wakefield	<p>The Youth Association has been working with young people from across Yorkshire since 1904.</p> <p>They work with Roma Czech/Slovak and Latvian young people on the streets of Hexthorpe in Doncaster, Great Horton in Bradford and Central Barnsley. Youth workers support them to better integrate with the local community and achieve their aspirations in the UK.</p> <p>They provide intensive support by offering workshops, accredited training and informal activities at street-level to help young people fulfil their aspirations, develop their skills and move towards positive destinations in their lives.</p>	Wakefield The Youth Association, 12 South Parade, Wakefield, West Yorkshire, WF1 1LR	<p>Tel: 01924 333 400</p> <p>Website: www.youth-association.org</p> <p>Email: info@youth-association.org</p>

Community organisations who work with Roma in England

Organisation	Description	Region/ Address	Contact details Website
Granby & Toxteth Development Trust	The trust works with Roma families, mostly from Romania, to find information about public services in the UK, including accessing employment and support with job search. It also supports Roma families to settle in the city and access local schools in order to facilitate engagement with Roma parents, organises an after-school programme and activities in the schools to celebrate Roma culture and history.	Liverpool 129d Lodge Lane, Liverpool, L8 OQF	Roma Development Worker: Alexandra Gabor Email: alexandra@gtdt.co.uk Website: http://www.gtdt.co.uk



Community organisations who work with Roma in England

The information in this guide applies to England only. The law may be different if you live in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland.

The law is complicated. We have simplified things in this guide. Please don't rely on this guide as a complete statement of the law. We recommend you try and get advice from the sources we have suggested.

The cases we refer to are not always real but show a typical situation. We have included them to help you think about how to deal with your own situation.

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Law for Life – July 2018

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