

Information leaflet

Your support network

Having a strong support network in place can make a big difference to your health and wellbeing. Knowing that you have people to rely on and that you don't need to carry all the strain on your own is really important if you are going to look after yourself to be the best carer you can be for your child.

It's important that you let friends and family know when you need support and when they can step away. Most people will assume that you are coping and doing okay unless you ask for help and support directly. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness - it shows that you understand when you need a bit of help - and it is vital to be able to do it both for the sake of your own wellbeing and for your child.

Friendship

When you take on the role of a special guardian your life inevitably changes and the relationships you have will change too. You will want to find other people who are in similar situations and can relate to what you are going through.

Your existing friends and family connections may be able to introduce you to other special guardians or you can search locally for support groups. Your local authority may run a group for special guardians or kinship carers.

Many special guardians say they lose friends having made the decision to care for a child that is not their own. Friends can drift away as they might not understand your choice and can't relate to your situation. Other friends may find that you have less time than you did in the past to spend with them or realise that you are now less emotionally available to support them because you have other responsibilities. As a result, their friendship with you may change, become more distant or end. Some friends though may surprise and delight you- they may well admire you for the difference you are making to your child's life and want to rally round and help you. Cherish those true friends if you are lucky enough to have them because their support will make such a difference. If your relationship with any of your friends are bringing you down then think about how you can reduce the negativity and break the links if necessary. At the same time do everything you can to find other more positive relationships to give you the friendship and support you need.

Respite

Your local authority might be able to offer support with respite but many special guardians are more likely to get a break through help from their immediate family, friends, and other relatives. They may be able to provide short breaks over weekends, sleepovers during the week or offer child minding for a couple hours after school or during the school holidays. If people offer you respite support then don't be too proud to accept it. Caring for children can be hard however experienced you are in parenting and however much you love the child.

Practical tips

- If you feel like you are lacking support but are unsure of support you are missing or where to find that support sit down with a pen and paper and write a list. It might help you to realise, for example that you have sufficient emotional support but may be lacking practical help.
- Think about what your support network looks like – think beyond your close friends and family. You might find support from work colleagues, people in similar circumstances to you, at your church or community group or online.
- Some people in your support network might not be able to physically help you out with your child but they might be able to help you in other really useful ways – e.g. by scheduling in a regular call with you so you can chat to them and let off steam.

Remember you can always call us for practical and emotional support.

Key points

- If you're struggling call our helpline or chat to a Support Worker on the web chat function.
- Your existing friend and family connections may be able to introduce you to other special guardians or you can search locally for support groups.
- If you feel like you are lacking support but are unsure what kinds of support you are missing, you might find it useful to write a list of issues that you need help with

Useful organisations

Family Rights Group (FRG)

www.frg.org.uk

Helpline: 0808 801 0366

FRG work with parents in England and Wales whose children are in need, at risk or are in the care system and with members of the wider family who are raising children. FRG can provide legal advice where a child was 'previously looked after'. They also have a list of support groups on their website.

Grandparents Plus

www.grandparentsplus.org.uk

Helpline: 0300 123 7015

Grandparents Plus runs an advice line kinship carers. They also offer family events and training for kinship families. They have a list of support groups on their website.

Family Action Head Office 24 Angel Gate, City Road, London, EC1V 2PT

T: 020 7254 6251 F: 020 7249 5443 info@family-action.org.uk www.family-action.org.uk

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