

Information leaflet

Support network

Having a strong support network in place can positively affect a special guardian's health and wellbeing. Knowing that they have people to rely on and that they do not need to take all the strain on their own is important if they are going to look after themselves and be the best carer they can be for their child.

It is important that they let friends and family know when they need support and when they can step away. Most people will assume that special guardians are coping and doing okay unless they ask for help and support directly. Reassure special guardians that asking for help is not a sign of weakness – it shows that the carer understands when they need some a help and it is vital for the sake of their own wellbeing and for their child.

Friendship

When someone takes on the role of a special guardian their life changes and the relationships they have change too. Special guardians will want to find others who are in similar situations and who can relate to what they are going through.

A carer's existing friends and family connections may be able to introduce them to other special guardians or they can search locally for support groups. The local authority may run a group for special guardians or kinship carers that they can attend. Try to find out what is available locally and share this information with special guardians whenever you can.

Many special guardians say they lose friends when they make the decision to care for a child that is not their own. Friends can drift away as they might not understand their choice and cannot relate to their situation. If special guardians that you care in contact with have relationships that are bringing them down then talk to them about strategies for breaking these negative links so they can be supported and feel ready to find new positive relationships.

Respite

The local authority might be able to offer support with respite and professionals should try and find out if any respite support is available locally to special guardians. Many special guardians are probably more likely to get a break through help from their immediate family, friends and other relatives. They may all be able and willing to provide short breaks over weekends, sleepovers during the week or offer child minding for a couple of hours after school or during the school holidays.

Practical tips

If special guardians feel like they are lacking support but are unsure what kinds of support they are missing or where to find that support advise them that they might find it useful to take time out and write a list of areas where they need help. Remember that special guardians might have practical support but may be lacking emotional support.

Professionals can help special guardians to think about what their support network looks like – they should go beyond close friends and family. Such an exercise might help them to find support from work colleagues, at the child’s school or online.

Special guardians might also find it useful to think about and make a list of the people they turn to for different needs and support. Some people in their support network might not be able to physically help out with their child but they can schedule in a call for a chat.

Remember that special guardians can always call us for practical and emotional support.

Key points

- If a special guardian is struggling, remind them that they can call our helpline or chat to a Support Worker on the web chat function.
- A special guardian’s existing friend and family connections may be able to introduce them to other special guardians or you can help them to search locally for support groups.
- If special guardians feel like they are lacking support but are unsure what kinds of support they are missing or where to find that support advise them that they might find it useful to take time

Useful links

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 for 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

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