Special Guardianship

Foster Carer Policies and Procedures · https://handbook.co.uk/docs/special-guardianship/

Special Guardianship – when long-term stability grows into family permanence

A **Special Guardianship Order (SGO)** gives a child secure, court-granted permanence without the complete legal severance from birth parents that adoption involves. It is often the best route when:

- the child is older and wishes to keep a legal link to birth family;
- extended family or long-term foster carers have become the child's secure base;
- cultural or faith reasons make adoption inappropriate.

Under an SGO the Special Guardian(s) gain **enhanced parental responsibility (PR)** that they may exercise independently on almost every decision, while birth parents retain limited PR (e.g., must still consent to adoption in the future, but cannot override day-to-day matters).

Pathway from fostering to Special Guardianship

1. **Exploration stage** – the child's social worker raises SGO as a permanence option; you discuss implications with your Supervising Social Worker (SSW).
2. **Legal & welfare assessment** – the Local Authority prepares a Special Guardianship Report for court, including checks, references, accommodation, finances and support plan.
3. **Court hearing** – if satisfied, the judge grants the SGO; the Care Order or placement order ends.
4. **Support package** – may include financial allowance, therapeutic services, training and respite—set out in a written Special Guardianship Support Plan.

Key points for foster carers considering an SGO

Area	What changes	What stays / may change

Legal status	You become the child's legal carer to age 18 (and beyond informally). Care proceedings end.	Birth parents keep limited PR but cannot remove the child without a court order.
Financial support	Fostering allowance stops; LA may pay means-tested SGO allowance plus child benefit/universal credit.	Discuss carefully; rates vary by LA.
Agency relationship	You are no longer subject to fostering regs or annual panel reviews.	You can still access agreed support services outlined in the SGO Plan.
Fostering approval	If you wish to continue fostering *other* children, a new assessment is required because household dynamics change.	Talk early with your SSW about managing dual roles.

Things to think about

- **Motivation** – is permanence right for you and the child?
- **Long-term finances** – allowances taper when the child turns 18.
- **Support network** – grandparents, Enhanced Support friends, respite arrangements.
- **Future contact** – court may set out birth-family contact; you'll manage it.
- **Identity & belonging** – talk with the child about surname, school information, Life-Story book updates.

Next steps

If the Local Authority raises Special Guardianship—or you are interested in proposing it—ask your SSW for:

- the detailed **Special Guardianship Information Pack**;
- sign-posting to independent legal advice;
- introduction to another carer who has already been through the process.

A well-planned SGO can give a child the best of both worlds: the permanence of family and the continuity of origin. Explore it thoughtfully, supported by your team, before making the final leap.