

A guide to

Child protection for Roma parents



Who this guide is 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. The laws and regulations are different in the other parts of the UK.

We know that some Roma might find the guide too detailed to use on their own without help. So, although the guide addresses Roma families directly, we expect community, support or advice workers will be the main users of the guide. Community workers can select the key messages that are most helpful for their Roma clients.

The guide includes information about changes to social work practice and court hearings due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Depending on where you are in the process, you can choose to read the guide from the start or choose a section that is most relevant to you. For example, if you already have a social worker involved with your family you might want to go straight to the sections called [How best to help your child and family](#) and [Working with social workers and other professionals](#).

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Introduction

If you've been contacted by Children's Services you may well 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 respond.

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

This guide explains:

- the different ways Children's Services can become involved with your family from early help to court proceedings,
- how to build a positive relationship with social workers for the sake of your child and your whole family, and,
- when and why you should get legal advice from a solicitor who specialises in children law.

Knowing and understanding more will help you feel less scared about what is happening.



Each country has its 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 and your family.

What does 'safeguarding' mean?

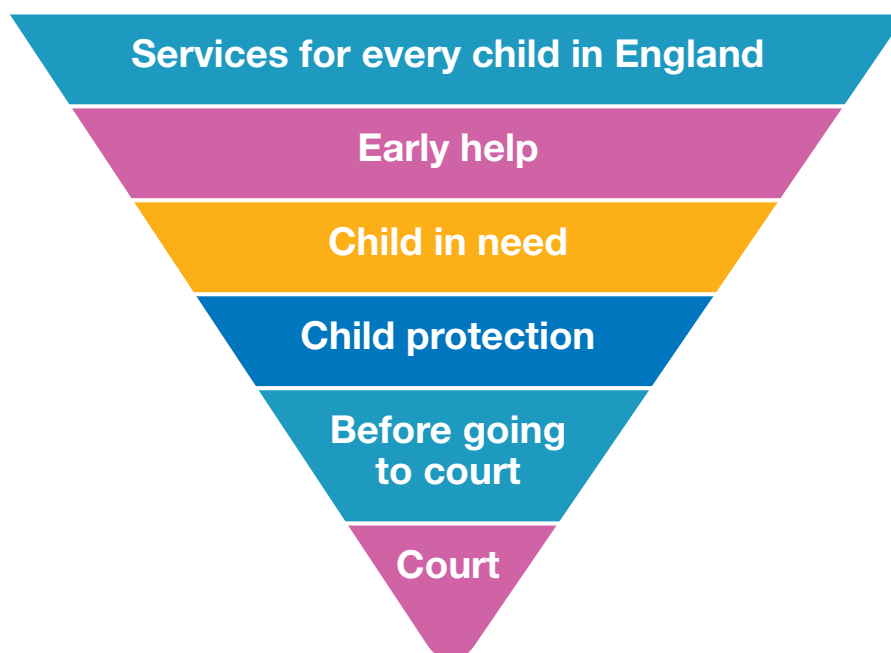
All adults who work with children must promote their well-being and development and protect them from harm.

What is 'child protection'?

Child protection is the name given to the system and processes for protecting children who are suffering, or might be at risk of suffering, significant harm because of abuse or neglect. We explain what the words 'harm', 'abuse' and 'neglect' mean on [page 20](#) and [page 21](#).

The different ways Children's Services can get involved with your family

This picture shows the 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 system at any of these different stages.



Important changes in social work practice due to the pandemic

Social work with families has changed because of the Coronavirus pandemic. In 2020 the government changed the law so that social workers could spend time with families and children in a more remote way. For example, instead of coming to visit inside a family home, they would visit outside or arrange to have a video call so they could see families over a screen, but not face to face.

Some of these changes may stay long after the end of the Coronavirus pandemic. Here, we have listed some of the most important changes that might affect you and your family.

Things that happen in the child protection process	Changes since the start of the Coronavirus pandemic	Suggestions of things that might help you
Meetings	<p>Your meetings with social workers, support workers or lawyers may need to take place 'remotely'. This means by phone call or video call – using WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom or Teams. If you have face to face meetings everyone may need to wear face masks or other protective things – often called 'PPE'. This stands for personal protection equipment.</p>	<p>If you struggle to take part in meetings by phone or video call you need to let your social worker know as soon as possible.</p> <p>For instance, if you don't have a smart phone or credit on your phone or access to internet data, ask your social worker to help. They might be able to provide a phone or phone credit or Wi-Fi data. Or they might be able to arrange for you to go to an office to use equipment there while the other people join by video.</p> <p>If you have problems using digital platforms like Skype, Teams or Zoom you can ask your social worker or support worker from a Roma organisation to help you:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 download appropriate app on your phone, and, 2 help you understand how to use it.
Visits	<p>Before the pandemic visits from the social worker would usually be in your home. This may not be safe at times because of the pandemic. Instead these visits could take place outside your home or by video or phone call.</p>	<p>If you struggle to take part in 'visits' by phone or video call you need to let your social worker know as soon as possible.</p> <p>Look at the Meetings box above for ideas on what to ask for.</p>
Assessments	<p>If the social worker wants to look at or 'assess' the way you look after your child they may need to do this by phone or video call instead of face to face. Or they may do some work with you remotely and some face to face.</p>	<p>If you struggle to take part in conversations by phone or video call you need to let your social worker know as soon as possible. See the box above for ideas.</p> <p>You could suggest you meet outside.</p> <p>Look at the Meetings box above for other ideas on what to ask for.</p>

Things that happen in the child protection process	Changes since the start of the Coronavirus pandemic	Suggestions of things that might help you
<p>Contact with your child if your child isn't living with you</p>	<p>If your child has to live somewhere else for a while or before a judge makes a final decision, arrangements will usually be made for you to spend time with them. Social workers and lawyers call this time 'contact'. This might be face to face or sometimes it may have to be by phone or video call. Or, if it is safe, it could be a mix of all three.</p>	<p>Face to face contact is much better for your child. Check if it really has to be by phone or video call. Explain you are happy to meet outside if this helps.</p> <p>If you and your children speak a language other than English at home, make sure you explain this to the social worker and ask for an interpreter who speaks the language you use as a family. If there is no interpreter available you will need to speak to your child in English if you can. If you can't, ask if the session can be re-arranged to a time when an interpreter can be there too.</p> <p>Beware that sometimes the social worker or judge will say that contact cannot be face to face for other safety reasons.</p>
<p>Court hearings</p>	<p>Court hearings sometimes need to happen for decisions to be made about where a child will live and who will care for them.</p> <p>If there is a court case about your child, you will need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● go to court, or ● join a court hearing by phone or video call where everyone attending will be taking part in this way, or ● take part in a hearing with some people joining in person and others by phone or video call. 	<p>If you struggle to take part in meetings by phone or video call then taking part in a court hearing this way will be even harder.</p> <p>Make sure you ask the social worker or your solicitor if there is a way you can go to the place where the hearing is, even if other people join the hearing by video call. Or ask your solicitor if you can go to their office and attend the hearing with them there, through the video call.</p> <p>If you need an interpreter being in the same place as them will help. Explain this to the social worker or solicitor.</p>

In the next section we talk about people who might work with your child and people you might meet if Children's Services get involved with your family.

Professionals who work with children

Professionals who work with children

In this section we talk about professional people you may meet when you have children.

There are lots of different professionals who might work with your children at some point during their childhood. Well known examples of such people are teachers, doctors, dentists, and nurses.

All professionals who work with children have a duty to protect and help them. This duty is known as the 'safeguarding duty'. If a child appears to be hurt, distressed or injured they will usually need to tell Children's Services about their concerns.

Next we explain some of roles you may be less familiar with.

Social worker

There are many types of social workers, but they all work to help people who are experiencing difficulties. A social worker who works with children must make sure children are safe and well with their family.

If they are worried your child isn't safe and well, they have to look at what is happening more closely and give support to parents. They must work hard to keep families together. But, if after giving support, they still don't think your child is safe and well they can ask the court for an order that says your child must live somewhere else. This is a last resort and social workers work hard to avoid this.

Family Support worker

These people work for Children's Services or for charities. They can give you practical help and emotional support if you are going through a difficult time.

Education welfare officer

Education welfare officers work for the local council. Their job is to work with schools and families to make sure that all children of school age (5 years and above) go to school regularly.



Other professionals you might meet and need to work with

Other professionals you might meet and need to work with

You may meet other professionals too if the social worker has ongoing worries about your child – here we explain a bit about what they do. We talk more about them in the section called [Court](#).

Lawyers

The word ‘lawyer’ is often used to describe someone who is legally qualified and trained to advise and represent someone who has a legal problem. It can be used to talk about solicitors and barristers. Solicitors represent a person by advising them on the law, and if needed, will prepare the case for going to court. Either a solicitor or a barrister will represent you in court.

The Children’s Guardian

This person is an independent social worker, from [Cafcass](#). They are appointed by the court if Children’s Services ask the court to decide who can care for your child. They have to advise the court on what they think is in your child’s best interests. They speak to your child and will tell the court about your child’s wishes and feelings. They will speak to everyone else involved too, to do their assessment. This includes you as parents and the social worker. The Children’s Guardian will have their own solicitor to represent them and your child.

Judges

The judge or judges decide what has to happen in a case if the people involved can’t agree. Their decisions become court orders that must be followed.

Experts

In some cases the judge might decide that they need help from an expert. For example, if your child has a particular medical problem, the judge might ask a doctor who knows a lot about that medical problem to tell the court about it in detail. The expert will help the judge make the right decision when there is an issue outside of the Judge’s knowledge and experience.

In the next section we talk about the help given to all children living in England.

Services for every child in England

Services for every child in England

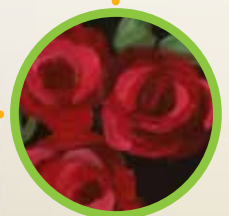


All children living in England have a right to free health care services and education. These are the services children get from the health visitors, doctors or dentists who help to look after their health or the nursery workers and teachers who help to develop and educate them. These services are usually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

You are expected to make sure your children benefit from these services. Ways you can do this include:

- registering with a local GP,
- going to health visitor clinics when your child is little,
- going to doctor and dentist appointments regularly,
- getting your child vaccinated against childhood illnesses,
- making sure your child has a place at a local school in the school year when they turn 5,
- making sure your child goes to school and is on time each school day,
- working with your child's teachers to support your children's learning, for example, talking to the teacher if there are problems at school with bullying.

If you find you need a bit more help there is something called 'early help'. We talk about what that means next.



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 some extra support as soon as a problem starts. The aim of early help is for you to get support before small issues get worse and turn into bigger problems.

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 and want the best for your child.

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?

How early help works

You can ask for help from someone you are already in contact with, like your GP or health visitor. Or a professional who is working with your child might suggest it to you.

Step 1 – one professional, such as your health visitor will take the lead and do an early help assessment with you. This involves working out what is going well in the family, what the worries are and what needs to happen to improve the situation.

Step 2 – a team of professionals best placed to help will make a plan with you of what needs to happen and by when.

Step 3 – the plan will be reviewed regularly to make sure the professionals are giving you the support promised and that you and your family are making progress.

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic the support you are offered might need to take place slightly differently. So, for example, conversations might need to take place over the phone instead of face to face for a while.

If you're not sure exactly what help is being offered to 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](#) for suggestions about the questions you might want to ask.

You can decide whether or not to accept the support the early help team offer you as the system is voluntary at this stage. But if any of the professionals involved in your early help plan 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 the concerns are and try to explain how you see the problem. Don't avoid or ignore them!
- Be prepared to work with professionals like health visitors or teachers and accept help.
- If something is stopping you doing what they suggest or you don't know how to do it, make sure you explain why or get help from your community support group if you have one.

- Be clear what would help you to do what they ask. For example, if a professional working with you on your early help plan wants 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 care or don't want help. Have a look at the section on [How to best help your child and your family](#).
- Don't refuse an offer of help because you're scared someone will come and take your children away. The more you are able to work with professionals, the less worried they are likely to be about your child.

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. We explain more about this later in the guide, in the section called [Child protection](#).

Working with the professionals involved at this early stage will usually help improve things and mean that they have fewer worries about your child's safety and wellbeing. The early help team should support you and stop problems getting more serious. For this reason it is a good idea to work with them.

If a social worker gets involved and thinks that things are not improving they may suggest that your child would benefit from something called a 'child in need' plan. We talk more about this next.



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. Or, sometimes it could involve doing one to one work with a social worker or other professional or it could be for parents to get help around a problem, such as alcohol misuse.

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 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. If this happens – try to stay positive and ask the social worker what they think you need to do to improve things. It is really important not to ignore what the social worker is saying. Instead, do what you can to understand why they are getting involved. If you can, get help from a Roma support group.

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,

- who will do what and by when, and
- what they expect of you.

You can ask for help yourself, if you think you need it. Or, a social worker can suggest a child in need assessment. This is where the social worker looks at how you care for your child in detail and then writes a report. This is often called a 'parenting assessment'. You can read more about parenting assessments in the section called [Child protection](#). Once the assessment is finished there will be a meeting where the social worker comes up with a plan of how to help your child.

You don't have to accept the help that is offered in the child in need plan. But, if you don't, you may well find that the social worker becomes more worried about your child and gets more involved in your family's life.

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 these organisations in the section called [Community groups who work with Roma in England](#).

Child in need



Children's Services should agree this plan with you at a meeting. Usually this meeting would be face to face. But, it may be that, due to the Coronavirus pandemic, it is safer for the meeting to take place in a different way. For more information on this take another look at the table in the section called [Introduction](#).

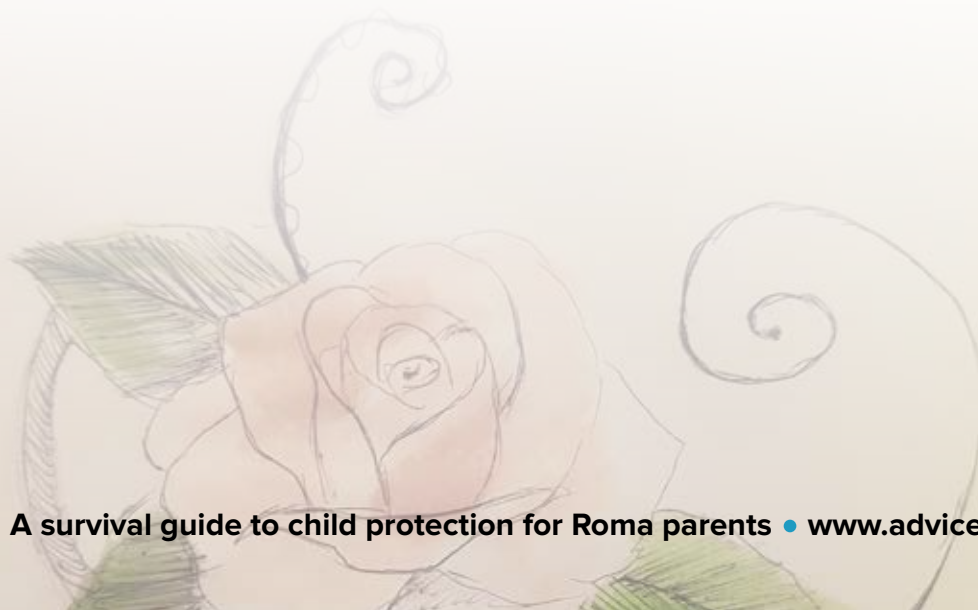
When the plan is in place it is really important to work hard to stay in touch with the social worker and take up the help offered. Keep the social worker up to date about what is happening at home. For example, if you are planning to go away for a few days, talk to the social worker about this.

If things for your child improve a lot, with help from the social worker, a decision will be made to end the child in need plan. This would be a good outcome. If things don't improve the social worker may say that they want to start the child protection process. Various different things can happen in the child protection process, depending on what is happening in your family. We talk about this process next.

Remember!

- Even if you are feeling scared or worried, try hard to listen and be open to the social worker or other professional's suggestions.
- It is normal to feel worried, frustrated or angry, but make sure you try to stay calm and explain your situation. To help you stay calm, see if a friend or support worker can be with you. If you do feel angry or upset you can ask for a short break to help you feel calmer.
- If you need an interpreter, ask for one as soon as possible. Ask for an interpreter who speaks your first language or the language you feel most confident in.

Child in need



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, and help you as a family. 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, or a foster carer.
- 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 18](#) and what the words 'abuse' and 'neglect' mean on [page 20](#) and [page 21](#).
- 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.

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 law immediately. You can find information about how to find this kind of specialist solicitor on [page 49](#).

Child protection

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'. If you are given any paperwork about Children's Services applying to the court for an Emergency Protection Order you need to get legal advice from a specialist solicitor immediately. There is no need to worry about how you will pay a solicitor because if you are the child's parent you will automatically get legal aid – help from the government to pay for legal advice – whatever your financial situation. For more information go to the section called [Finding a solicitor who specialises in children law](#).



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. You can ask for your child to stay with a family member or friend, who can be quickly approved to care for your child for a short period of time.



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 might hear the name 'kinship carer' or 'family and friends carer' used by social workers. These are just different names that might be used for foster parents who are either family members or friends of yours and your child.

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 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 in the section called [Finding a solicitor who specialises in children law](#) on [page 49](#) and it will cost you nothing.



The Coronavirus pandemic has changed the way the family court works and how solicitors work with their clients. For example, some meetings might take place by video or phone call. Some hearings might also take place differently. For more information on this take another look at the table in the section called [Introduction](#). We also explain more about this in the section called [Court](#).

Voluntary accommodation

If a social worker is concerned about your child's safety and well-being in your care they might ask you to agree to your child living in accommodation provided by Children's Services for a while. They will ask you to make some changes to improve the situation before your child can come home. If this happens, it will usually be better for your child to stay with family or friends if at all possible. This will help your child stay connected to their community and culture.

It's really important you get advice from a solicitor specialising in children law **before** your child leaves your care. You need a specialist solicitor because children 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 law on [page 49](#).

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 <https://www.gov.uk/check-legal-aid>.

You may hear social workers call this 'voluntary accommodation' or a 'section 20 agreement/arrangement'. Your child can only move out of your care in this way **if you agree to it**. So it is very important you understand exactly what you are agreeing to and what will happen if you don't do what it says you will do in the agreement.

Remember!

Don't sign anything that you don't understand. Make sure you get legal advice if you don't understand what the social worker is asking you to agree to.

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 law **before** you do this.

The social worker must work with you and your family to reach an agreement about what is going to happen. 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 law, or a community organisation working with Roma who can help you find a solicitor.



Child protection

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 can complain to the social worker's manager or speak to your solicitor for advice on what to do.

A social worker will ask questions to collect information about your child and your family as part of the child protection process, 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, at home or school or in the community. 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. This might be face to face or if necessary, because of Coronavirus, this might be by video call. Wherever possible, it should be face to face as this will help the social worker get to know your child and your family more easily.

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](#) and then the section on [Working with social workers and other professionals](#) 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.

How social workers carry out their investigations has changed because of the Coronavirus pandemic. For example, they have been using video and phone calls to make contact with people instead of face to face meetings. In the future, they may well use a mix of these different ways of working. If you have problems with video or phone calls, for example, because English is not your first language or you need an interpreter, it is really important to explain this.

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 (this part is sometimes called a parenting assessment),
- understand the impact of your behaviour on them and their development,
- understand the impact of your child's wider family and community on your child's needs,
- 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 [page 20](#) and [page 21](#)),
- 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 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. They also need to give you or your solicitor a copy of the assessment report when it is finished.

You can ask your social worker to explain to you what is in the report. It is really important that you understand everything in this report, especially things that the social worker thinks you need to do and when. You can ask for the assessment report and other letters and documents to be translated into your first language.

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 below.

To work out if the harm is 'significant', the social worker has to compare the health and development of your child with that of a similar child.

Types of harm

There are four main different types of harm.

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 or letting them witness this happen to someone else,
- 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 by searching online for [NSPCC 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.

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 by searching online for [NSPCC staying 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

Child
protection

Physical abuse

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

For example, they:

- hit, slap or smack them so hard it leaves a mark
- shake them
- kick 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 by searching online for [NSPCC positive parenting](#).



Domestic abuse and violence

Domestic abuse is not only about one person being physically violent to the other. It happens when one person controls the other in a family or intimate relationship. There are many different types of abuse including:

- emotional,
- psychological,
- economic, including financial,
- physical and
- sexual.

It can happen at any time and can often get worse when you split up, when your ex may try hard to keep controlling you.

If you think your ex has been or is being abusive to you, start by speaking someone from your local community group who works with Roma. Or, go to [Refuge](#) for help and support.

Children and domestic abuse

Social workers take domestic abuse very seriously. Even if children aren't physically harmed it is still really damaging for them to grow up in a home where their parents are in an abusive relationship.

If you are in an abusive relationship it is really important to get help. If you don't, the social worker might decide you are not managing to protect your children enough from the harm of witnessing domestic abuse.

Child protection

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.

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
- you need a bit more help and support to improve things for your child (see the sections called [Services for every child in England](#) and [Child in need](#)), or
- that your child is or may be at risk of suffering significant harm (we explain what 'harm' means on [page 20](#).)

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 find out more. For example, a child psychologist could be asked to do a report about how your child is developing and how well you can meet your child's needs. Or a physiotherapist could be asked to do a report about how to improve your child's physical fitness and your ability to help make those improvements happen.

Child protection conferences and child protection plans

If the social work team 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.

Some or all of the following people will take part in the meeting:

- social workers,
- someone from your child's school,
- health care professionals working with your child such as the GP or health visitor,
- the police,
- probation,
- any other professionals who are involved.

The person in charge of the meeting is someone called an 'Independent Reviewing Officer'. They are not part of the social work team. They are there to make sure that the meeting is run fairly and you get a turn to speak.

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 and help shape the plan for the future. As a parent you should be consulted and kept up to date about the child protection conference and what happens next. This is so you can get legal advice and prepare for the meeting.

The meeting usually takes place at the Children's Services office but since the Coronavirus pandemic, these meetings have taken place by video call. This way of having these meetings may carry on in the future as it helps lots of busy professionals get the chance to join in more easily, to help your child. You can join by video or phone call. If you think this will be hard for you it is important you explain why to the social worker. For example, you might need an interpreter and it is easier to be in the same place for you both.

Have a look at the section on [Working with social workers and other professionals](#) 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 or how will the video call work,
- what you can do to prepare, and
- how you can take part in the discussion.





You are allowed to take an advocate, friend or supporter with you. This does include a solicitor but sometimes some local authorities say that solicitors are not allowed. Check with the social worker beforehand if you want a solicitor to go with you.

You may need to pay for a solicitor to come with you 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 views. Your supporter could be someone from a community organisation working with Roma. It is a good idea to check with the social worker before the meeting if the person you would like to have there as a supporter can join in the meeting too.

If your supporter doesn't know anything about children 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). It also has lots of useful information on its website.

You can find top tips to help you get ready for a child protection conference by searching online for [Family Rights Group top tips](#). Click on the option called 'Our guides for families and practitioners', and then choose the one about child protection conferences. You may well find their other top tips guides useful too!

The Family Rights Group also has some helpful short films to help you understand more about getting ready for and going to a child protection conference. To find them online search for [Family Rights Group child protection film](#).

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

The plan should set out:

- the concerns about your child that have led to the decision to make a child protection plan for them,
- what help you and your child will get,
- what you need to change,
- what will happen if you don't manage to make the changes they are asking you to make,
- what the social worker and other professionals will do to help protect your child and by when,
- what the professionals expect to come out of the process in terms of your child improved wellbeing, and
- who will review your progress and how this will be done.

Your social worker should try hard to make sure you understand everything in your child's plan. If you don't understand it, it is important to say that and ask for them to explain it more carefully.

It is very important to follow the child protection plan and make the most of the help offered to your family. Try to keep in touch with the social worker and let them know how things are going at home.

The social workers and other professionals will be looking out for evidence that you are improving how you care for your child and that the changes and positive effects for your child will last. 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 your child is missing school a lot and is falling behind in their learning the social worker will want to see that you accept help from their school to improve their attendance at school.

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, your local children's centre or a community organisation working with Roma.

All the professionals involved in the child protection conference will review the plan every 3 to 6 months after the first meeting. In between, a smaller group of social workers 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 the meetings. You might hear these called 'core group' meetings.

For the whole time the plan is in place it is really important to try and be as open as possible with the social worker. For example, if you plan to go on holiday with your child make sure you talk to the social worker about this. You should not try and leave the UK, even for just a holiday, without talking to the social worker. If the social worker does not agree to you leaving the UK then make sure you get legal advice before going anywhere.

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 13](#) for more information.

If the situation for your child still doesn't improve after the plan is put in place the social work team will get legal advice from their legal team and decide whether or not they should ask the court to make an order so that your child is removed from your care and is looked after by someone else. If this happens you need to read the rest of this guide, and especially the sections called [Before going to court](#) and [Court](#).

How to best help your child and your family



In this section we suggest how you can best help your child and in doing that help your whole 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 because generally, it is much better for children to stay with their family, with support, if needed, than go into foster care or be adopted. What the social workers 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.

It might help to understand that social workers get involved with many families but few cases end up with a child being removed from their parents.

You can search online for [Keeping our children safe – a guide for Roma parents](#). This is a really helpful film that explains the most important things you need to know about keeping your child safe when you live in England. The film is in Romanes, with English subtitles.

It is really important to get a solicitor as soon as you can to help you through the process.

Remember!

The best things you can do to help your child and your family are:

- Listen to what the social worker is saying – don't ignore the problem – it will just get bigger!
- Try to be open and honest with the social worker – this will mean they worry less and you can make some progress together. For example, if you don't understand what is expected of you tell the social worker so they can explain things better.
- Try to stay calm and polite, even when you are feeling scared or frustrated. Getting angry or defensive will make the social worker worry more.
- Try and find someone to support you, be that someone from a Roma community organisation, or a solicitor or both.
- Be open about being Roma. This may help the social worker understand your culture and any difficulties you may have in working with them.

How to best help your child and your family

- 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.
- 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. You may also find our film [Keeping our children safe](#) helpful. This film is in Romanes with English subtitles.

- 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.

How to best help your child and your family



- 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. It is important to make sure you know why they want you to change what you are doing – if you don't understand it will be hard to make the change.
- 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 also 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.



In the next section we talk about the ways you can work with the social worker to help your child. It won't always be easy to work with people you don't know who want to get involved in your family life. But, remember that even if it feels really hard, you need to do it for your child.



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.

Don't forget

- Always say, if you don't understand something you are being told or that is written down. Ask for it to be explained – if you don't understand what is happening you won't be able to get across what you think or feel about it all.
- The things the social worker is worried about won't just disappear if you ignore them or even decide to leave the area. The social worker will just get more worried. So, do what you can to work with the social worker.

Visits from social workers

The Coronavirus pandemic has meant that social workers have done lots of their work with families by phone call or video call, instead of face to face.

There are good things and bad things about meetings over video or phone call. In some ways it can be easier for you. For example, it means you don't need to travel to an office somewhere else which can be tricky with childcare and costs of travelling. On the other hand, it can be harder to say what you want to say if you are on a video or phone call. If you need help with understanding English then it is really important to make sure the social worker knows this so that they have time to organise an interpreter and decide if a video or phone call meeting is actually going to work for your family.

Social workers can make either pre-arranged or unannounced visits to your home – depending on the reason for their visit. 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 warning. If the social worker is worried about the conditions your child is living in at home they will do a home visit even if less important meetings take place by video or phone call. If and when they feel reassured they may visit less often and have more meetings by video or phone call.

Working with social workers and other professionals

You might feel uncomfortable about the social worker coming into your home, for many different reasons. But, the social worker will feel more worried about your child if you don't let them in when they come. This is because they will think you are hiding things. They are only doing their job which is to protect children. It is fine to ask, politely, the reason for the visit and what they are looking for so that you can understand what's happening and why.

It is better to try hard, even if this is very difficult for you, to show them what they ask to see. This way, they will see you are willing to work with them, even if it is difficult for you. This will help to show them you are putting your child first, even when it might be hard for you.

If you are worried about unannounced visits, then contact a solicitor who specialises in children law as soon as you can and explain what's happened. You can find information about how to find this kind of specialist solicitor in the section called [Finding a solicitor who specialises in children law](#) on [page 49](#).

Getting ready to meet a social worker or other professionals

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 the social worker what you should bring along to the meeting and if there is anything you could do to prepare.

Ask a friend, family member or support worker to go to the meeting with you. If you have a face to face meeting make sure you are on time or better still, early! If your meeting is by phone or video call, make sure you have everything ready and set up before the meeting starts and if possible, a quiet and private place to be while you are on the call. If you can't find a quiet place, headphones might be helpful.

If your friend, family member or support worker can join the meeting, ask them 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. If you interrupt, you lose your temper or shout the social worker will worry that you do this at home in front of your children.

It is very important to go to all the meetings that you are asked to attend. Try to keep a diary or calendar with all the dates and times so you don't miss anything.



Working with social workers and other professionals





Case study

A Roma family from Romania lived in a small flat. They struggled to pay their gas and electricity bills and had large rent debt. 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 properly 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.

Working with
social workers
and other
professionals

Communicating with the social worker is key to keeping your family together. This might feel hard to do when you are worried or scared about them being involved. But, the more you are able to work with them the better the outcome for your family is likely to be.

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic the ways that social workers are working have changed. You can look at the table in the section called Introduction, for a reminder. You may need to have video calls with the social worker. The next section explains more about how to do this and ways you can get more help, if you need it.

What you need to make video calls and what to do if you don't have what you need

To make video calls you need

- a smart phone, or,
- a computer, or,
- a tablet – like an iPad or Samsung Galaxy and,
- access to Wi-Fi, or data and
- to download the App that the social worker suggests you use, such as WhatsApp or Zoom,
- a quiet place or headphones with a microphone.

You may **not** have the equipment you need or you may not know how to use the programme or app. If you don't it is important that you tell the social worker. Ask, politely, if they can help. They may be able to give you a phone that can take video calls (a smart phone) or they may be able to arrange a place where you can go to use a computer or tablet for meetings.

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.

If you can, try to get help from a Roma community group – see the section at the end of this guide called [Community groups who work with Roma in England](#) for details.

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.)

Ideally you need an interpreter who speaks the language you use at home. Understanding the social worker well and making yourself properly understood will give you the best chance of a good outcome for your children and your family. If you don't understand or are not understood, things will not go so well.

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.

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.






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 working with the social worker 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

Top tips for working with an interpreter

- Ask for an interpreter if you think you need one.
- Ask for help from a Roma organisation, if there is one near you.
- Try to be patient and calm even if you are tired or frustrated.
- Ask for an interpreter who speaks Romanes, if this is your main language.
- Ask if it is possible to work with the interpreter face to face, rather than remotely as this is harder.
- Make sure you ask the interpreter to speak slowly and repeat information if needed
- If you don't understand the interpreter – try not to be shy or embarrassed – it is very, very important to say so!

If you don't understand, it is a good idea to say something like this: 'Just to make sure that I understand what you said...' – and then say what you understood. You could also add- 'did I understand this correctly'?



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. Social workers must respect your culture. 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 will just make the social worker or other professional ask 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?
- How will you help me improve things?

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 their disability better. There's no shame in asking for this help. It could help you and your child have a better life.

Working with social workers and other professionals

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. If you are not able to have face to face meetings because of the Coronavirus pandemic, ask for the person who wrote it to explain it over the phone or speak to your solicitor over the phone.

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.

Be sure to check the letter or report to see if there is anything you need to do next. If you are not sure, ask for some help.

Keeping letters and reports

It's very 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.

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. If you are at all unsure, it is fine to say you want to get legal advice first.



Before a meeting with a social worker 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.)

Be sure you know how to contact the social worker and other important professionals working with your child – ask them to write down key people's name, job title, phone number and email address you can use to contact them. Keep this list safe.

After a meeting with a social worker

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.

Letters and other important documents are often sent by email these days. If you use emails be sure to check them regularly so that you don't miss important information. Beware, some important emails can end up in your junk folder so check this too! If you don't use emails or don't have internet access, remember to tell the social worker and ask for everything to be sent by post.

Working with social workers and other professionals

Staying in touch with your child's social worker

It is really important to:

- 1** Always tell the social worker any new phone number you have – as soon as you get it.
- 2** Always tell the social worker if you are moving and give them an address where they can write to you and you can be sure to get your post from.
- 3** Always answer the social worker – on the phone or at the door. Or, if you miss them, be sure to phone them back or ask your support worker to help you with this.
- 4** Go to all the meetings the social worker arranges about your children. If there is good reason why you can't get there or join by phone or video, make sure you explain what this reason is before the meeting.

By doing all these things, the social worker will know that you are trying your best to work with them rather than avoiding them, which will make them worry.

If you have any worries about the social worker and their approach to your family you should talk to your solicitor, if you have one. If you don't have a solicitor you can contact the [Family Rights Group](#) to get advice on the problem. You can also ask to speak to the social worker's manager about your worries.



Before going to court

In this section we explain the process that the social worker has to follow if they still have serious concerns about your child.

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 to 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 solicitor specialising in children law with you. You can find information about how to find this kind of specialist solicitor on [page 49](#). Their services will be free for this meeting.

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 children's Services haven't already done an assessment of how you care for your child they will look at doing this now so they have a better understanding of how able you are to meet your child's needs. This is really the last chance to show them you can make the changes they are asking you to make, to keep your child in your care. So, you need to do your very best to work with the social worker at this time. The social worker will also ask you to suggest as many family members or friends you can who might be able to care for your child so that they can be assessed too. You might not like the idea of family or friends being involved

in this but usually it is much better for your child to live with them in a community and culture they know, rather than with a new foster family.

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 law immediately. You need a specialist solicitor because children 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.

It is possible that, because of the Coronavirus pandemic, the pre proceedings meeting will have to take place by video call, rather than face to face. This might be hard for you to take part in properly. There could be different reasons for this, for example, you may not feel confident speaking in English over a video call or you may not have the equipment you need.

If you are able to find a solicitor in time for the meeting you can ask them if it is possible to go to their office to take part in the meeting using their equipment. Being with them will hopefully make you feel more reassured. You can also ask the solicitor to arrange an interpreter if you need one.



Before going to court



Court

In this section we explain what happens if you can't make the changes that Children's Services want you to make. If they are still concerned about your child, Children's Services 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'.

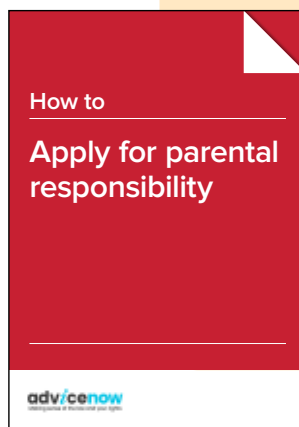
The court should make its final decision quite quickly – within 26 weeks (six months) of the case starting. A case starts on the date when the court receives the application for an order from Children's Services. This means you usually have around 6 months from the start of the case until the judge makes their final decision. This time is really important – you need to use it to make the changes the social worker has asked you to make so that you can keep your child in your care.

During the six months the court has to make a final decision, the court will often make short-term or 'interim' orders about how your child should be looked after and what contact you can have.

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.

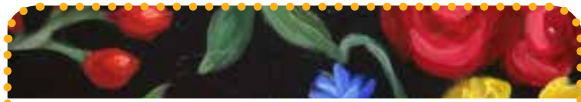
Mums have parental responsibility from the moment their child is born. Dads who are married to their child's mum automatically have parental responsibility too. Unmarried dads have parental responsibility if they are named on their child's birth certificate. If not, there are things you can do to get 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.

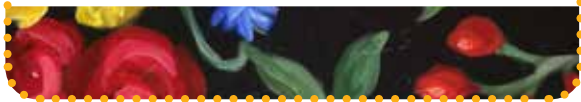
The social workers must show the court how they have tried to support you and your family to make the changes they think that your child needs.

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 all her 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.



The people 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. The social worker will have a solicitor from the local authority, often called the ‘council’ to represent and advise them.

Your child will also have a Children’s Guardian. This is a social worker who works for [Cafcass](#) not for Children’s Services. The Children’s Guardian’s 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. Your child’s solicitor will help them do this.

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 by searching online for [Cafcass’ role in care proceedings](#).

How the court makes a decision about your child

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, usually 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 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 20](#).

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, and support from family or friends to help you. If, for example, you have drug or alcohol problems or you are struggling with your mental health **and** these problems affect your ability to look after your child then this is something the court will take into account.

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 solicitor.● 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 solicitor or barrister 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.

The different orders a court can make about your child

If the court decides that there are enough reasons to justify making a court order, then 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.

The Family Rights Group has a useful section that gives more detail on the types of orders the family court can make in these situations. It is called [What options for a child's long-term care might be looked at during care proceedings? – Family Rights Group \(frg.org.uk\)](https://www.frg.org.uk/what-options-for-a-childs-long-term-care-might-be-looked-at-during-care-proceedings/)

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. Very occasionally, it might be possible to appeal the court order made about your child. This is something you could ask your solicitor or barrister about.

What is adoption?

This is the most extreme type of order the court can make about your child, and should always be the last resort. If an Adoption order is made 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'.

You can read more about the adoption process on the [adoption pages](#) on the Family Rights Group website.



It is really important to speak to a solicitor who specialises in children law to help you understand what is happening and what you can do to make it more likely that your child will come home. The next section talks about how to find a solicitor.

Going to court

The Coronavirus pandemic has changed the way court hearings take place. If you have never been to court before, it will all be new. New experiences can often be worrying, even when they are much less important than a court deciding who can care for your child in the future.

It is important to be prepared and get as much support as possible.

One way to prepare is to learn more about how hearings have changed because of Coronavirus. Read our guide called [Court and tribunal hearings and Coronavirus](#).

This explains more about how hearings can take place in a court building, or by video call or phone call. Sometimes, some of the people involved in the court hearing go to the court or another place like their solicitor's office. This can help if you don't have the equipment or private space at home to join the hearing properly or if you need an interpreter.

Court

Top tips – if you are involved in a court hearing

- Make sure you get a solicitor to advise you and help you through the process.
- Make sure you get advice from your solicitor before, during and after any court hearings. This might need to be by video or phone call if it is not possible to meet face to face.
- If you need an interpreter make sure you explain this to the solicitor – politely and firmly.
- Do not be afraid to say if you don't understand something during any meeting or during court hearings. Sometimes, solicitors and judges use complicated legal language and if you don't understand what they mean it is really important to say so.
- If you don't have a phone or other device (like a tablet or computer) tell the social worker and ask if they can help you with this.
- If you have to speak in a court hearing make sure you are polite. Try to stay calm even if you don't feel it.
- Try hard to be open and honest about what has happened. This will help the social worker and the judge see that you are listening and want to make changes that will help your child.



When and how to find a solicitor who specialises in children law

You need to get legal advice from a solicitor who specialises in children law as soon you can after Children's Services get involved with your family. It is good to get early advice and guidance on what to do, even if the social worker isn't saying they are going to court straight away.

You need to get legal advice **immediately** if:

- The social worker gives you a letter called a 'pre-proceedings' letter
- The social worker asks you to agree to your child living somewhere else for a while – get advice **before** you sign anything!
- You get a letter saying the social worker and their solicitors at the council are applying to the court for an order about your child. This is called 'care proceedings'.

How the solicitor can work with you may be affected by the Coronavirus pandemic. For example, you might not get to meet each other face to face for a while. Instead, your meetings may need to be by video call or phone call. If it is hard for you to do this because English is not your first language it is very important to explain this, or ask a support worker from a Roma organisation to do so for you.



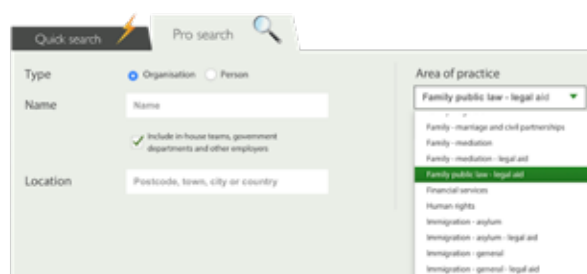
When and how to find a solicitor who specialises in children law

Some councils give parents a list of local solicitors who can help them. If you are given one of these lists it is a good idea to call the solicitors on the list to see if they can help you, or ask anyone supporting you to do it for you.

Don't worry if you aren't given a list – there are other places where you can find a solicitor.

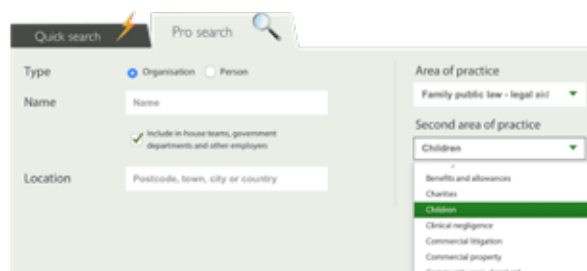
You can find a specialist solicitor by searching online for [Law Society – find a solicitor pro search](#).

Choose 'Family public law – legal aid' in the drop-down menu under the heading 'Area of practice'.



The screenshot shows the 'Pro search' interface. On the left, there are fields for 'Type' (Organisation selected), 'Name', and 'Location'. A checkbox 'Include in-house teams, government departments and other employees' is checked. On the right, the 'Area of practice' dropdown menu is open, showing a list of categories. 'Family public law - legal aid' is highlighted in green.

Then choose 'Children' in the drop-down-menu under the heading 'Second area of practice'.



The screenshot shows the 'Pro search' interface. The 'Area of practice' dropdown menu is still open. Below it, the 'Second area of practice' dropdown menu is open, showing a list of categories. 'Children' is highlighted in green.

If you find it difficult to use the internet, ask a community organisation to help you by doing this search for you or call the Law Society on **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 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 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).

When and how to find a solicitor who specialises in children 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. This is 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 have a court order that says the child who the social worker is involved with must live with you, you will also get legal aid.

If you want legal advice at an earlier stage, perhaps when Children's Services first contact you, then legal aid may be available depending on your financial situation. Search online for [GOV.UK check legal aid](https://www.gov.uk/check-legal-aid) to see if you can get legal aid for your situation.



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. You can ask if the solicitor is on the Law Society's Children Panel. This means that they are specially accredited to do this type of work and that they have a lot of experience. If they are not on the panel, you can ask for another solicitor in the firm who is.

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

Your solicitor:

- Can explain your legal rights, the options you have, and answer your questions.
 - Should record what they advise you in a letter. This letter should summarise the case and the action they are taking for you. If it is hard for you to read or understand this letter, you can ask them to explain it.
 - 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.
 - Will speak for you in court. Through them, 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 you, their family network and other Roma friends.



- Should let you know who will represent you at the court hearing. This might be them or someone else called a barrister.
- Should make sure that if you haven't met the person who is going to speak for you at the court hearing, this person comes to court early enough so you have time to speak with them without feeling rushed. If the hearing cannot take place in a court building you should be able to speak by video or phone call beforehand.

Before every hearing ask your solicitor or barrister '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 solicitor or barrister 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? If the hearing has to take place by video call make sure you know how you will communicate with them before, during and after. For example, you might use WhatsApp to send messages during the hearing.

Tell your solicitor or barrister 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. You can find more information about complaining about a social worker by searching online for the [Family Rights Group – complaints](#).



Working with your solicitor

Community groups who work with Roma in England

Organisation	Description	Region/ Address	Contact details Website
Roma Support Group	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.	London	<p>Email: info@romasupportgroup.org.uk</p> <p>Website: www.romasupportgroup.org.uk</p> <p>Appointment line 07903 883748 (Tuesdays only 10.00 – 11.00)</p> <p>General enquiries 07949 089778</p>
Luton Roma Trust	Luton Roma Trust works in partnership with other agencies in Luton helping Roma families to integrate in a holistic way into the UK.	Luton	<p>Email: office@lutonromatrust.org.uk</p> <p>Website: www.lutonromatrust.org.uk</p>
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</p> <p>Email: enquiries@clifton-partnership.org.uk</p> <p>Website: www.clifton-partnership.org.uk</p>

Community groups who work with Roma in England

Organisation	Description	Region/ Address	Contact details Website
<p>Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Team</p> <p>Bristol City Council</p>	<p>Drop-in for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people.</p> <p>Resources for professionals</p>	<p>Bristol</p>	<p>Tel: 07469 413134</p> <p>Email: ian.bowen@bristol.gov.uk</p> <p>Website: https://www.bristol.gov.uk/people-communities/gypsies-and-travellers</p> <p>Read-easy website aimed at Gypsies, Roma and Travellers – www.bristol.gov.uk/web/grt-bristol/home</p>
<p>Youth Association</p> <p>Wakefield</p>	<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>	<p>Wakefield</p> <p>The Youth Association, 12 South Parade, Wakefield, West Yorkshire, WF1 1LR</p>	<p>Tel: 01924 333 400</p> <p>Email: info@youth-association.org</p> <p>Website: www.youth-association.org</p>

Community groups 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 Tel: 0151 734 4925 Email: alexandra@gtdt.co.uk Website: http://www.gtdt.co.uk/ https://www.facebook.com/alex.gtdt.39
Connecting Roma C.I.C.	Connecting Roma offers a range of services, spanning Bradford and South Yorkshire. This includes assistance with finances, residency and housing, as well as employment and education, culture and integration, and information on legal rights and responsibilities. Connecting Roma also runs a Covid-19 helpline and offers support with EU Settlement Scheme applications.	Bradford	Tel: 01274 495970 Email: connectingroma@gmail.com
COMPASS	Offers advice and advocacy, sport activities, dance classes, youth club	Peterborough	Tel: 01733 685100 / 07518 945849 Email: contact@compas.org.uk Website: www.compas.org.uk/whats-on/

Community groups who work with Roma in England

Organisation	Description	Region/ Address	Contact details Website
Romani Slovak Czech Community	Assist people in Gravesham and Kent. They also offer virtual assistance, nationally. They have a variety of projects including: advice and advocacy project, English language support project, youth projects, and cultural activities.	Northfleet, Kent	<p>Tel: 07865 080 161</p> <p>Email: slovak.czech.community@gmail.com</p> <p>Website: http://www.romani.top/</p>
Europaia	Europaia provides practical community projects, events, training sessions, advice clinics and legal support to give European citizens the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to integrate into their local communities. They also run a project for Roma Women to give them space to relax and gain new skills through regular face-to-face meetings.	Manchester	<p>Tel: 0333 305 8570</p> <p>Email: support@europaia.org.uk</p> <p>Website: https://europaia.org.uk/</p>

Community groups who work with Roma in England

Notes

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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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Making sense of the law and your rights

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please email guides@lawforlife.org.uk

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