

A Guide to Children's Social Care Services for Children and Families in Bracknell Forest



About this guide

For some people, finding out about the Children's Social Care services available in their local area can seem like a difficult and confusing task. In producing this guide we have attempted to make this task easier. This guide:

- gives you information about what we do
- tells you where you can find out more about the services we offer
- tells you who can get help.

Comments about this guide and our services

While we have made every effort to ensure that the contents and listings in this guide are accurate and up to date, things do change and people come and go. If you find that something is inaccurate, please let us know. We hope that you will find this guide useful and informative.

It is helpful for our staff to know when they have done something well. We also need to know if things have gone wrong for people using our services. If you are happy or unhappy with the service you have received please let us know (see section 17 on Comments, Compliments and Complaints).

Contents

- 1 Who Can Get Help? 4
- 2 Will I Have to Pay? 5
- 3 What About Choice? 5
- 4 Disabled Children and Their Families 6
- 5 Protecting Children 8
- 6 Children Looked After by Children’s Social Care 9
- 7 Becoming a Foster Carer or Adoptive Parent 11
- 8 Services for Adopted Adults 12
- 9 Step Parent Adoptions 13
- 10 Special Guardianship 14
- 11 Family Support 15
- 12 Private Fostering 17
- 13 Youth Offending 18
- 14 Care Leavers 19
- 15 Supported Lodgings 20
- 16 Carers 21
- 17 Comments, Compliments and Complaints 22

- How to Contact Children’s Social Care Out of Hours
Emergency Duty Team 23

1 Who can get help?

We may be able to help if:

- a family is caring for a child with disability or serious illness
- there are concerns about a child's development
- a child or young person is running the risk of getting into trouble by committing offences, or is involved in 'risk taking behaviour'
- you are a child or young person who is or has been looked after by the local authority
- a family is under considerable stress, for example where the care arrangements of a young person at home may break down
- you wish to adopt or foster a child
- you are an adopted adult who wants to trace your birth family

How we find out if we can help you

To find out if we can help, we will complete an assessment of your needs and circumstances, which will usually involve talking to any other professionals who are helping you.

Our Standard

For children and families who may need our help we aim to complete an initial assessment of your needs within 7 working days (fuller assessments will take longer).

Will I get a service?

Not everyone is entitled to a service. Following your assessment we will tell you if you are eligible for a service. This will depend on your needs and circumstances. Our aims are to enable children to be brought up with their own families; to protect children from abuse; to prevent family breakdown; and where required, to assist young people in preparing for independent living.

More details are available in our leaflet "Accessing Children's Social Care Services".

www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/living/liv-children-and-families.htm

2 Will I have to pay?

No-one has to pay for the assessment which decides whether we can offer you our help and there are no charges for our services, unless the child or young person has a substantial income or substantial capital in their own right.

3 What about choice?

You will have an important say in deciding what services you and your children will receive.

Following your assessment you will have the opportunity to discuss how we intend to assist you and your family if the assessment has identified a role for Social Care.

4 Disabled Children and their families

Who can get help?

We help children and young people who have physical disabilities and/or learning disabilities, and their carers. We aim to support children and young people with disabilities in their own homes wherever possible.

To find out if we are able to help, we will complete an assessment of the disabled child's needs and circumstances. If you care for a disabled child please refer to chapter 16 for information for carers.

Our Standard

Disabled children are children in need under the Children Act and we aim to complete an initial assessment within 7 working days. Fuller assessments will take longer.

Whether we arrange to provide these services ourselves or through other organisations, we will always try to ensure that the choice is right for you and your child's individual needs. Depending on your needs, we can arrange:

Social work services from the Disabled Children's Team; they work with disabled children and their families to assess their needs and plan what support can be given.

Home support services, which provide personal and practical care and support within your own home.

Occupational Therapy services, which can advise on adaptations and equipment to assist with everyday living.

Direct Payments so you can organise the services you need yourself.

Short Break Care, which is the name given to services which provide a break away from the home or within the home, and so give support to disabled children and their families. It can be provided through a number of sources, and the services described here will depend on a social work assessment of the needs of the child/young person and their family. Short-break care through Children's Social Care can be offered in the following ways:

The community childminding service: these are childminders who have undergone additional training, and can offer a service to children with special needs.

Family based short break care is a service which links disabled children and their families to volunteer families and individuals who can provide them with short breaks on a regular basis.

Larchwood is a short break care unit offering a range of services to children with disabilities and their families including:

- Overnight care
- Social activities after school
- School holiday activities

Other short break care services are available through the Voluntary and Community Sector and new services are being developed.

Where else can I find help and information?

If you would like to find out more about the range of services available for disabled children in Bracknell Forest please call:

The Children's Information Centre
Bracknell Drop-In
49 Broadway, Bracknell
Telephone: 0800 328 9148
Email: enquiries@childrensinfo.org
Website: www.childrensinfo.org/bracknellhome.html

and ask for the Special Needs Resource Guide.

You may also wish to add your child's name to the Voluntary Register for Disabled Children. If your child's name is on the Voluntary Register, regular information is sent out to you about services. The Voluntary Register also enables accurate information on disabled children to be collected to improve the planning of services. The Voluntary Register is managed by the Children's Information Centre which keeps your personal information confidential.

5 Protecting children

What will Children's Social Care do if a child is 'at risk'?

If we hear about a child or children who appear to be neglected, ill treated or not thriving, we have a statutory duty to investigate further. We will contact the parents and find out if there are any particular problems. Often in such situations we will also wish to talk to the child's school or health visitor and GP, or any other professional who has information about the family. We may also involve the police in our investigations.

Usually what is most helpful for children is to support the family so they can stay together. However, the law allows us in certain circumstances, to take action to protect a child from abuse or neglect. This may involve calling a Child Protection Conference to consider whether a child needs a Protection Plan. In exceptional circumstances the need to protect a child may include removing a child from their home for a short period of time or until the problems at home have been sorted out. Such a step can only be taken with the prior consent of a Court or with the agreement of the parents.

Our Standard

If children need protection, we aim to:

- Respond to referrals within 24 hours.
- Review all children who have a Protection Plan at least every six months.
- Allocate a Social Worker to each child with a Protection Plan

What should I do if I think that a child is at risk?

If you think that a child is at risk of being harmed or neglected, please contact us. We will keep your name confidential if you wish. We will carry out a thorough investigation on every case about a child at risk which is reported to us.

How do I contact Children's Social Care?

If you would like to contact us about a child where you have concerns, you will find our contact details at the end of this guide. You will also find our emergency out of hours number.

6 Children who are looked after by the Council

What does it mean to be looked after?

We use the term 'looked after' when we arrange for children to live away from their families, either as part of a voluntary arrangement under the 1989 Children Act, or as the result of a Care Order under the 1989 Children Act. Sometimes this will be for overnight short breaks (see section 5 above), sometimes for a few weeks or months, and sometimes for a much longer period of time. The length of time will depend upon the child's needs and circumstances. Parents continue to have responsibility for their children while they are looked after away from home, but this responsibility is shared with Children's Social Care if the child is subject to a Care Order.

Why are children looked after?

Children can be looked after for all sorts of reasons. For example:

- a parent may be unable to continue caring for them,
- they may be at risk of harm and need to move to a safer place,
- a parent may be ill or may need to go into hospital and there is no other family member or friends available to look after the children.

Our Standard

If children are looked after:

- we will allocate a qualified social worker,
- we will review all cases within the first four weeks and then every six months.

Where do looked after children live?

We look to members of the family or family friends first, to see if they can care for the child and be approved as foster carers for that child. If this isn't possible, then we look for approved foster carers who can offer the child a home, preferably close to their family and school.

What is foster care?

Foster carers are carefully assessed and approved by the Fostering Panel and a Senior Manager. Foster carers are registered with the Fostering Service, which is part of our Family Placement Service.

When a child is living with foster carers, parents continue to have responsibility for their children, and are encouraged to make decisions with Children's Social Care about their children's future.

In choosing an approved foster carer for each child, we look at all our available foster families and find the most suitable one for each child. If several children from one family need to be looked after, we try to keep them together. During the time children are looked after by foster carers, we work closely with Education and Health to make sure that their needs are being met.

Throughout the children's time in a foster home, parents will usually be encouraged to maintain regular contact with them. Everyone involved in the child's care will do their best to help with this.

When is a child placed in residential care?

We try to place children with foster carers where possible. However, residential care is more suitable for some young people.

What treatment should a child who is looked after expect?

All children and young people who are looked after can expect:

- to be treated with respect,
- to have their wishes and feelings considered in all decisions about their lives,
- to have their cultural, religious, language and racial needs taken into account,
- to have their situation reviewed every six months.

7 Becoming a Foster Carer or Adoptive Parent

What are foster carers and adoptive parents?

A Foster Carer is someone who cares for someone else's child in their own home, on behalf of the Local Authority. This may be on a short term or a long term basis. Foster Carers are paid an allowance for doing this, but they have no parental responsibility for the child.

An Adoptive Parent is someone who becomes a child's parent on a permanent basis. He and/or she applies to the Court for an Adoption Order, which gives full and permanent parental responsibility to the Adoptive Parents. If you adopt a sibling group, or a child with special needs, you may also qualify for an Adoption Allowance.

Who can apply?

Anyone living in Bracknell Forest can apply to become a Foster Carer or Adoptive Parent, as long as they are over the age of 21. Priority is given to assessing carers who can meet the needs of our local children. There are a wide variety of children requiring Foster and Adoptive homes, so a range of carers are needed, including those from ethnic minority backgrounds. Your financial circumstances are not a barrier to applying.

How are foster carers or adopters assessed?

All applicants for both fostering and adoption are individually assessed to ensure that they can provide the best possible care for the children. The assessment starts with police and other statutory checks, and includes a medical check. All applicants then attend a Group Preparation Course, and finally are assessed at home by a Social Worker. A detailed report is prepared by the Social Worker, which is shared with the applicants and then presented to a Fostering or Adoption Panel.

Our Standards

We aim to assess all prospective Foster Carers and Adoptive Parents as quickly as possible. Assessments will vary according to the circumstances of the applicants, but we aim to take up to six months, from the initial application to the recommendation by the Panel.

What support and assistance is provided?

All Foster Carers and Adoptive Parents are supported by a Social Worker from the Bracknell Forest Family Placement Team, called a Supervising Social Worker. This support includes regular home visits. A training programme is offered to all Foster Carers, and in addition Foster Carers are encouraged to undertake NVQ Level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People. A separate training programme is available for approved adopters, and a Post Adoption Support Group also meets on a regular basis in Bracknell.

How do I find out more?

If you would like more information about becoming a Foster Carer or Adoptive Parents please contact the Bracknell Forest Family Placement Team (see contact details on page 23).

8 Services for adopted adults

Who can get help?

Access to Birth / Adoption Records

If you are over the age of 18 and are adopted, you can apply for a certificate of your original birth registration, via the Access to Birth Records service at the General Register Office. The information held here may enable you to access your adoption records and provide you with more information about your origins.

You can also access the Adoption Contact Register. You may be wishing for contact with a birth relative and so you could register on the Adoption Contact Register. NORCAP also hold an Adoption Contact Register, however, these are separate registers so you would need to apply to both.

The Adoption Contact Register was originally set up to put adopted people and their birth relatives in touch with each other if that is what they both wish. However, from 30 December 2005 applicants have greater choice of registration including the option of no contact. It also has the facility for adopted individuals to specify in what circumstances or with whom they are willing for contact to occur.

If you would like more information on these areas we can offer you assistance.

What services are available?

Social Workers from the Bracknell Forest Family Placement Team can provide advice and guidance about the process involved, and will offer a counselling interview when the papers arrive from the Identity and Passport Service, part of the Home Office. Assistance will be given to access your birth records information. Information and guidance can also be offered to assist you in tracing birth family members, if this is something you wish to do.

Our Standard

We aim to offer an interview to all adopted adults within seven working days of receiving relevant papers from the Identity and Passport Service.

How do I get this help?

If you wish to obtain information about tracing your birth records please contact: Bracknell Forest Family Placement Team (See contact details on page 23).

9 Step Parent Adoptions

Who can get help?

If you are a step parent and would like to adopt your step-child/ren, we can give you advice about the issues involved, and the process.

What Services are available?

We will offer an initial interview to all step parents and birth parents who are interested in adoption. This will include advice about whether or not it is the most appropriate course of action, and guidance about alternatives. If you decide to proceed with adoption, you are required to notify the local authority, in writing, of your intention to apply to adopt. A social worker from the Bracknell Forest Family Placement Team will then visit your home on a series of occasions and will provide a report for the court.

Our Standard

We will aim to offer you an interview at the office within 14 working days of your initial contact with us. It is difficult to be specific about the length of time required to complete the court report, because there may be other people involved, for example, the other birth parent.

How do I get this help?

If you wish to obtain information about adopting a step child, please contact Bracknell Forest Family Placement Team (see contact details on page 23), or email: adoption@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

10 Special Guardianship

What is special guardianship?

Special Guardianship is a new and different way of providing long-term stability to a child.

Special Guardians share parental responsibility with natural parents but get to make all major decisions about the care of the child and their upbringing.

Special guardianship is a realistic care option for:

- Relatives or foster carers who can offer long-term care for children in the care system who cannot return home or where adoption is not an option
- Older children and young people who cannot live at home, but do not want to be adopted and do not want to lose the link to their birth family either
- Children being looked after by extended family or friends and who need to be able to make decisions about the child's upbringing
- Community groups where the long-term care of other people's children is encouraged but adoption is contrary to religious or cultural belief

For more information about special guardianship, please contact Bracknell Forest Family Placement Team (see contact details on page 23) or email us at adoption@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

11 Family Support

Who can get support?

Children's Social Care has a responsibility to provide support for children and young people in need and their families, in recognition of the fact that children should grow up within their birth families wherever possible.

Social workers within the service do not work just with children in need of protection and 'looked after children'. They also work with children in need and their families when they seek help and support because things are going wrong. Disabled children are considered to be children in need and a range of support is offered to promote their care within their own families.

Family Support Meetings can be called when a social worker or another professional working with a family feels there are significant problems. The meeting is a way of getting together the professionals from all the agencies working with the child and family (e.g. School, Health, etc) and family members so that a plan can be agreed and the situation can hopefully be improved for the family.

Family and Adolescent Support Service

7 Portman Close, Bracknell RG42 1NE. Telephone 01344 464701

The Family and Adolescent Support Team (FAST) is part of the service. FAST is based at Portman Close to provide an effective service to families where there is a risk of a child over 11 becoming looked after. The team will:

- Provide a supportive service to young people living at home where there is a risk of breakdown.
- Support and help maintain rehabilitation of a young person back into the family home.
- Undertake short term work with young people under 18 who have been identified as in need of support because of relationship difficulties, risk of homelessness, social isolation and vulnerability.
- Provide an on-call preventive and crisis response service for adolescents and their families who they are working with.

If you would like support from this service, contact Children's Social Care (see contact details on page 23).

Bracknell Family Centre, Wick Hill Cottage, Warfield Road, Bracknell RG12 2JA

The Family Centre is part of the Under 11s Team. Staff at the centre work mainly with families who have children under the age of 11, though direct work with older children may be offered. We work with parents to help them to develop their skills to ensure that their children are developing to their full potential within a safe, caring, encouraging family. You may like time to talk on your own or with other parents in a group. The centre offers:

- Structured parenting assessments. This work focuses on family assessments and may provide reports for Child Protection Conferences or for Court proceedings.
- Support for families either at the centre or in the community via:

Groups

Play therapy

Direct work with children

Work with parents

How can I get these services?

If you feel that you would like support from these services you should speak to someone such as your health visitor, or you can contact Children's Social Care direct (see details on page 23).

12 Private Fostering

Private fostering occurs when:

- A parent makes a private arrangement with an adult, who is not a close relative, to care for their child or children.
- If the child is under 16 years, and the arrangement is planned to last longer than 28 days, this arrangement comes under Private Fostering Regulations.

Both the parent and the person caring for the child have a responsibility to notify us of the plan before the arrangement starts, but in any event, as soon as possible once the child has started to live with the other family.

We are responsible for making an assessment to ensure that the child's needs are being met by the arrangement. A social worker will visit the child in placement at a minimum of six weekly intervals; advice and assistance will also be offered to the carer and the child's parents.

For more information or to notify us of an arrangement, please use the contact details on Page 23 or email: private.fostering@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

13 Youth offending

What is the Youth Offending Service (YOS)?

The YOS works to reduce anti-social behaviour and youth crime and reduce the fear of youth crime by working with perpetrators of crime and victims. The YOS is made up of professionals from a variety of agencies. In the team we have Social Workers, Youth Justice Workers, Police Officer, Health Worker, Education, Training and Employment Worker, Parenting Workers, Substance Misuse Worker, Victim Liaison Officer, Volunteer Co-ordinator, Reparation Worker, and Early Intervention Co-ordinator.

Who is this service for?

Young people aged 10-17 who are offending or at risk of offending and their families/carers. The service is provided with due regard for the victims of these offences.

What help and support is available?

Depending on your needs and circumstances we offer the following services:

- Help for young people who are starting to offend
- Help for parents to manage their children's behaviour
- Help for persistent offenders to change their behaviour
- Allowing young people to make reparation to the victims of their offences
- Support to young people on bail to help prevent re-offending
- Work with young people in custody

How do I contact the Youth Offending Service?

76 Binfield Road, Bracknell, Berkshire RG42 2AR

Telephone: 01344 354300

Email: yot@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

14 Care leavers

Who is this service for?

Any young person who has been 'looked after' for over 3 months after the age of 14, including on their 16th birthday. Support will last until the young person is 21 years of age or until their 24th birthday if they are in education or training.

What help and support is available?

The After Care Team (ACT) is part of the Over 11's team and provides a service to all our care leavers. ACT will provide advice and assistance with a range of issues facing care leavers. This includes help with:

- Health
- Education, Training, Careers
- Housing
- Benefits
- Budgeting
- Relationships
- Parenting advice
- Leisure activities
- Accessing files

Or anything else that might be causing difficulties. If we can't help directly we will try to suggest who may be able to. Help is aimed at enabling the young person to overcome any difficulties and to live independently when an adult.

ACT is based at :

7 Portman Close, Bracknell, Berkshire RG42 1NE

Telephone: 01344 464701

15 Supported Lodgings

Supported lodgings are for young people aged 16 to 19 years who cannot live at home but are not quite ready to move on from their foster home or residential home to live independently. Lodgings can be room only or supported lodgings.

Supported Lodgings carers provide a basic level of practical care for the young person whilst advising and assisting them to developing skills needed to live independently.

Young people come to our attention because they cannot live with their family for a variety of reasons. This might be because of bereavement, trauma or they are at risk of harm. At this age they are usually not ready to live entirely independently but need support and guidance to prepare for adulthood.

A social worker, or adviser from the After Care team, continues to support the young person whilst a member of the Family Placement Team supports the carer. Young people and supported lodgings carers complete a Living Together agreement setting out the expectations on each other. This is reviewed regularly. Most supported lodgings placements last three to twelve months.

If you would like to know more about becoming a supported lodgings carer or room only carer, please contact us using the contact details on page 23 or email us at supported.lodgings@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

16 Carers

What is a Carer?

Carers are relatives, friends or neighbours who regularly look after someone without being paid. Carers may be adults, children or young people either living with the person they care for or somewhere else. We are particularly keen to hear from young carers who may need support in their caring role.

What about Young Carers?

Young Carers are children and young people under the age of 18 who provide care, assistance or support to a member of their family. The person receiving the care is often a parent but could be a brother or sister, grandparent or other relative. Bracknell Forest is keen to develop the services it offers to Young Carers.

If you are a Young Carer or know someone who is, please suggest they speak to a teacher, health professional or other adult. Alternatively, the Young Carer or someone on their behalf can contact Children's Social Care (for contact details see page 23).

Who can get help?

If you are giving or intending to give regular and substantial care to another person, then you have the right to ask for an assessment or re-assessment of your needs and circumstances. We can then take your information and views into account when looking at services for the person you care for.

Our Standard

If you are a carer entitled to a carer's assessment, we aim to assess your needs within 7 working days.

What services are available?

Depending on your needs and circumstances we can arrange:

- Advice and information about helpful local resources and organisations.
- Short break care for the person you care for at home to give you a break from caring.
- Put you in touch with other carers.

Take into account your needs when assessing or reviewing the person you look after.

How do I contact Children's Social Care?

If you would like to request a carer's assessment, or would like some information or advice you can contact us in person, by telephone or by post. You will find our contact details on page 23 of this guide.

17 Comments, Compliments and Complaints

What if I have a comment or compliment?

It is good for us to know what we are doing is right and it is useful for us to hear your ideas about how we could be doing things better. If you have any compliments or comments about the service you have received, you can either contact the staff who have been working with you and let them know or contact a Head of Service.

What if I am unhappy with the service I have received?

If you are unhappy with the service that you have received, in the first instance, you should speak to the staff who have been working with you, or their manager.

If you feel unable to speak to them, or you feel that they have not dealt with your concern satisfactorily, you can contact our Complaints Manager:

Patricia Morris
Complaints Manager
Social Care and Learning Department
Bracknell Forest Council
Seymour House
38 Broadway
Bracknell RG12 1AU

Telephone: 0800 1694491 (24 hour answerphone)
01344 352119 (office hours)

Email: patricia.morris@bracknell-forest.gov.uk
childrens.servicescomplaints@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

How to contact Children's Social Care

If you would like to request an assessment or find out more please contact us in person, by telephone, by email or by post.

Children's Duty & Assessment Team / Family Placement Team
Social Care and Learning Department
Bracknell Forest Council
Time Square
Market Street
Bracknell
RG12 1JD

Telephone: 01344 351582
Fax: 01344 351521
Minicom: 01344 352045
Email: children.families-duty@bracknell-forest.gov.uk
familyplacement.duty@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Opening Times: Monday to Friday 8.30 to 5.00

What if I have an emergency out of office hours?

If you have an urgent need to contact Children's Social Care outside our normal opening times, please ring our Emergency Duty Team (please note that calls on this number are recorded):

Telephone: 01344 786543
Fax: 01344 786535
Minicom: 01344 786514
Email: emergency.duty@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Copies of this booklet may be obtained in large print, Braille, on audio cassette or in other languages. To obtain a copy in an alternative format please telephone 01344 352000.

Nepali

यस प्रचारको सक्षेपं वा सार निचोड चाहिं दिइने छ ठूलो अक्षरमा, ब्रेल वा क्यासेट सुन्नको लागी । अरु भाषाको नक्कल पनि हासिल गर्न सकिने छ । कृपया सम्पर्क गनुहोला ०१३४४ ३५२००० ।

Tagalog

Mga buod/ mga hango ng dokumentong ito ay makukuha sa malaking letra, limbag ng mga bulag o audio kasette. Mga kopya sa ibat-ibang wika ay inyo ring makakamtan. Makipag-alam sa 01344 352000

Urdu

اس دستاویز کے خلاصے یا مختصر متن جلی حروف، بڑیل لکھائی یا پہر آڈیو کیسٹ پر ریکارڈ شدہ صورت میں فراہم کئے جا سکتے ہیں۔ دیگر زبانوں میں اس کی کاپی بھی حاصل کی جا سکتی ہے۔ اس کے لیے براہ مہربانی ٹیلیفون نمبر 01344 352000 پر رابطہ کریں۔

Polish

Streszczenia lub fragmenty tego dokumentu mogą być dostępne w wersji napisanej dużym drukiem, pismem Braille lub na kasecie audio. Można również otrzymać kopie w innych językach. Proszę skontaktować się z numerem 01344 352000.

Portuguese

Podemos disponibilizar resumos ou extractos deste documento em impressão grande, em Braille ou em audiocassete. Podem também ser obtidas cópias em outros idiomas. Por favor ligue para o 01344 352000.

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