Parental Responsibility:  
Information for Parents of Looked After Children

About this factsheet
This factsheet is for parents of children who are looked after by Social Services. It explains the meaning of parental responsibility. It also tells you some of the things that Social Services will expect you to do as a parent during the time your child is looked after.

This factsheet contains general information. Each child’s case is different. If you need more information about your own case please contact the Social Worker for your child.

Contact details for Social Services
If you need more information at any time, it is usually best to contact your Social Worker directly.

If you do not have a contact number for your Social Worker, please contact the Access and Initial Assessment Team on 01792 635700.

What is Parental Responsibility?
‘Parental Responsibility’ is a legal term. It means being responsible for the well-being of a child and for making important decisions about how the child lives, such as education, home and medical treatment. Parental responsibility lasts until the child is 18.

Who has Parental Responsibility?
- Mothers always have parental responsibility.
- A married couple who have children together both have parental responsibility. This continues if the couple divorce.
- A father who is not married to the mother of his child has parental responsibility if:
  - His name is on the birth certificate (if the birth was registered after 1st December 2003) or
  - He has signed a parental responsibility agreement with the mother or
  - A Court Order gives him parental responsibility.
- Other family members only have parental responsibility if:
  - The child lives with them and a court gives them a Residence Order or
  - The child lives with them under a Special Guardianship Order or
  - They are appointed as guardian to care for a child after the death of the parent(s).

Normally you, as the birth parent(s), will always have parental responsibility for a child even when that responsibility is shared with someone else.

Who has parental responsibility when my child is looked after?
Being looked after is the term used when a child or young person is living away from home and cared for by Social Services.

There are two ways in which a child can be looked after.
- When Social Services provides a place for your child to live as a voluntary arrangement made with you and perhaps also your child. In this case you still have full parental responsibility.
- When your child is looked after as the result of an order made by a court, usually a Care Order. In this case the local authority shares parental responsibility with you.
What does it mean when the local authority shares parental responsibility with you?

The arrangements for your child’s education, health and welfare will be set out in a Care Plan. This will be written after talking with you (and with your child if they are able to understand what is being talked about). The Social Worker and the carer(s) looking after your child have to make sure that the Care Plan is followed. Although we are looking after your child, you are still responsible for your child and we expect you to go on being involved in your child’s development.

What are parents expected to do?

The things we normally expect parents to do are:

- See your child as much as possible
- Take part in decisions about your child
- Come to all meetings about your child
- Go to parents’ meetings at your child’s school
- Go to medical examinations with your child
- Help your child to see their brothers, sisters, other relatives and other people who are important to your child

However this expectation won’t be the same for everyone. Each case is individual. There may be more or less things expected of you. In some cases there may be restrictions to make sure the child is safe. Exactly what we expect from you will be agreed by you and the Social Worker for your child and included in the Care Plan.

What about carers?

Carers do not have parental responsibility, but they are allowed to do what is reasonable to take good care of the child they are caring for. There are certain things that Social Services expects carers to do. These include:

- Giving your child a good standard of care
- Helping your child with day to day things like school, visits to doctor and
dentist, seeing friends, hobbies and interests
- Coming to meetings about your child

Can I see the records Social Services hold about my child?

When you are in touch with Social Services we will keep confidential information about you and your child in written records and computer files. You have a right to ask to see information we hold about you.

If you have parental responsibility you have a right to ask to see your child’s record if:

- Your child is not old enough or not able to understand the information in the files or
- Your child has given their consent

Social Services will need to be satisfied that what you ask is in the child’s best interests, and will check that the child has not told us anything they expect to be kept confidential.

If you would like to know more about how we handle personal information please ask your child’s Social Worker for the factsheet Your Personal Information.

Comments and complaints

We welcome any comments about our services – good or bad. We are interested to hear how we could do things better, and we like to know when we are doing well.

If you are unhappy with the services you receive, we encourage you to make a complaint. Full details are given in the factsheet ‘Making a comment, complaint or compliment about Social Services.’ For more advice or information about making a complaint, you can contact our Complaints Officers on 01792 637345.

This information is also available in alternative formats, such as large print, on audio CD, in Braille, or electronically. Please phone 01792 636693 for copies.