

The Social Worker must also ensure they find out the views and wishes of any other important people in your child's life, including:

- You as parent/s
- Any person who is not actively parenting but has parental responsibility
- Any other person your child and you feel has a right to be heard and a part to play.
- Any other person your child's Social Worker feels has a right to be heard and a part to play.

There will be regular meetings to review the arrangements. The first one should take place within 28 days of your child coming into care. These meetings will be facilitated by a Children's Rights Advocate. You, your child, the foster carer and Social Worker will attend these meetings to discuss the best way forward for your child.

If your child stays in care, these meetings will take place every 3 months. You will get notes of the meeting and all the decisions made.

## Will I be able to see my children and have telephone contact with them?

The Social Worker will want to support contact between you and your child. Reasonable contact that is safe and in your children's best interest will always be supported.

You will be able to work with the Social Worker to agree how contact will be managed, where it will take place and how often.

## Our pledges to children in care

1. To find the best available home for you
2. To help you stay in touch with your family and friends
3. To help you stay healthy
4. To support you to do your best at school and college
5. To help you to move on from care
6. To help you to participate and make sure your voice is heard in the decisions about you
7. To help you stay and feel safe

## Contact us

For advice and guidance please email us at:  
**togetherforfamilies@cornwall.gov.uk**

Or call us on:  
**0300 1234 101**

**If you would like this information in another format or language please contact:**

Cornwall Council, County Hall,  
Treyew Road, Truro, TR1 3AY

e: **equality@cornwall.gov.uk**  
t: **0300 1234 100**



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Together  for Families

# Voluntary Accommodation

A guide to Voluntary Accommodation under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989



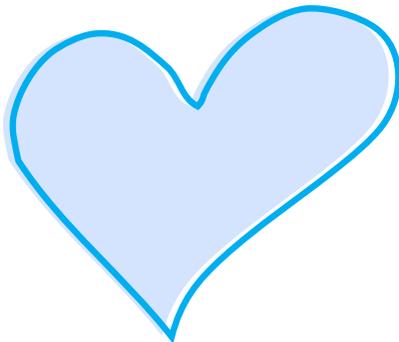
 [www.cornwall.gov.uk/childrenfirst](http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/childrenfirst)

Cornwall Council believes strongly that the **best place** for any child is within their own **families** and community. You have a legal parental **responsibility** to care for your child. We have a duty to do **everything** we can to **support** you to care safely for your child.

Bringing your child into the care of the Council must always be a last resort and should only happen if, together, we have tried everything to prevent it happening and we have looked at all the alternatives. This will include exploring your child's wider network of family and friends.

We also have to take account of your child's wishes and feelings – what they want to happen.

However, we do know that this is not always possible and where it is right for your child to come into care we will like to work with you to make sure that it is done in a planned way.



## What does 'Voluntary Accommodation' mean?

Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 allows the Council to bring your child into care, only with your written agreement, if it believes that this will protect your child's welfare.

You have to agree that this is right for your child too. If you do agree to your child coming into care, you still have legal parental responsibility for your child. This means we will consult and involve you in decisions about your child's care.

The Council will find the best way of understanding what your child thinks about coming into care and how this will affect them before making a final decision.

## Can I refuse Voluntary Accommodation and what will happen if I do?

As a parent with legal parental responsibility you do have the right to refuse for your child to come into care under a voluntary agreement. Even if you have agreed you can change your mind at any stage.

If your child's Social Worker is worried about your care of your child and believes that staying at home or returning home poses a risk to their welfare, they will explain to you what they are worried about and what they see as the risks.

If you do not agree to Section 20 accommodation and the Social Worker thinks it is not safe for your child to remain in your care, there are two legal options available to the Police and Children's Social Care:

“ If you do agree to your child coming into care, you still have legal parental responsibility for your child. ”

1. The Police can take Police protection to move your child to a place of safety for a up to 72 hours (Section 46 of the Children Act 1989) or,
2. Children Social Care can make an application to the Family Court for an Emergency Protection Order or an Interim Care Order (these are also temporary orders).

These actions depend on the nature of the concerns and the level of risk to your child, whether you accept professional concerns and whether you are willing or able to bring about the necessary changes in the way you care for your child.

You have the right to seek independent legal advice from a Solicitor of your choice at any point in this process. It is important to know that a Solicitor is the best person to advise you on whether to accept or refuse Voluntary Accommodation for your child.

## What happens whilst my child is in care?

The first aim of a Social Worker is to get your child home to you quickly but safely or, if that is not possible, to find another family member or friend to care for your child.

The Social Worker will work with your child to understand their views, wishes and feelings and these influence decisions. They will visit your child regularly.