

# SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDERS NEWSLETTER

A quarterly newsletter sent to you by the **Special Guardianship Support and Permanence Teams**

## Welcome...

**Hello everyone and welcome to another edition of our newsletter. Yesterday we held our summer event despite the weather warning. Thank you to all of you that managed to come to the very last-minute change of venue. We didn't want to cancel and so appreciate the extra effort in attending. As usual, we had a great time and seeing you and your children there really is a highlight of our year.**

In this edition you will find an update on our recently developed teenager group, which we are really excited about. You will also find interesting articles on the benefits of hugging plus ideas about what to do with your children in the autumn. This month we are also featuring a Special Guardian story and we would encourage all of you to read it and think about whether you would like to share yours? We know how much shared experiences benefit all of us and this is just one of the ways in which we can do it.

Take care and happy reading.

Gemma.



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### *Just a thought*

All behaviour is communication,  
including ours...

The question to consider is what is  
our behaviour communicating to  
our children.

## SUPPORT

# Special Guardian Monthly Support Groups

### An invitation to all Special Guardians in Leicestershire.

If you have ever considered going to one of these groups but something is holding you back, please get in touch with the contacts below they are waiting to hear from you and help you. They are eager to meet new people as well as welcome the old.

The special guardians that run these groups are lovely kind people wanting to listen and share experiences, please try the groups if you are looking for unique support from people that understand.

**These support groups are a really good place to discuss experiences, seek advice and receive support from other Special Guardians over a drink in a relaxed environment.**

They are run by Guardians for Guardians and as such you may find that you share similar experiences, however, we are available to attend if we are invited.

If you feel that there is a need for a group in a different location and you would like to start it up please contact us and we would be happy to help you locate a venue and get started [sgosupport@leics.gov.uk](mailto:sgosupport@leics.gov.uk) or **0116 305 3051** and ask to speak with someone in the SGO team.

#### Hinckley

Children & Family Centre, Granville Road, Hinckley, LE10 0PP

The last Friday of every month	10am - 12.30pm	Marie Chapman: 07853 525843
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#### Coalville

Marlene Reid Centre, 85 Belvoir Street, Coalville

2nd Friday of every month	10am - 12 noon	Debbie Hancox: 07900 505 055 Heather Mcpherson: <a href="mailto:heather@heathermcperson.co.uk">heather@heathermcperson.co.uk</a>
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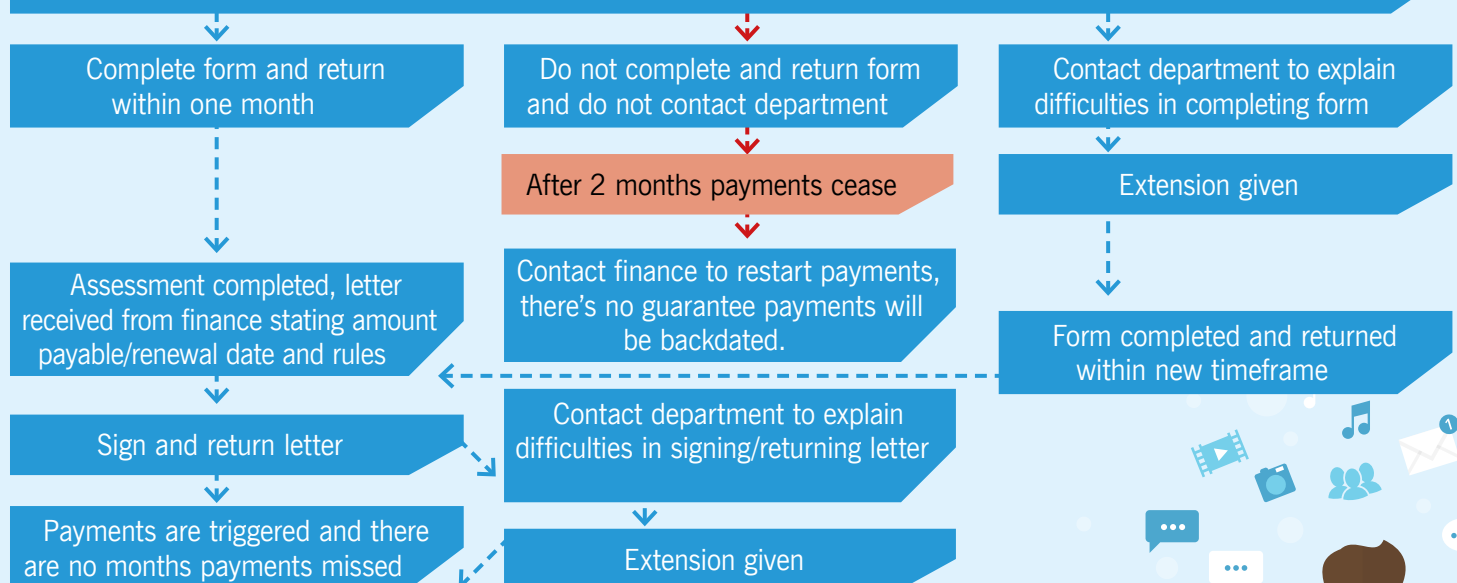
#### Braunstone Town

Children & Family Wellbeing Centre  
Kingsway North, Braunstone Town, Leicester, LE3 3BD.

The last Wednesday of the month	10am - 12 noon	Rosemary Campbell: 07748 841 838
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### When you receive your annual financial assessment there is a time frame for completion.

#### Special Guardians receive financial assessment form



**If anything has changed in your circumstances and it's not yet time for your annual assessment, please let us know as it may alter your payments. Contact us and we will send out a finance form for you to complete.**

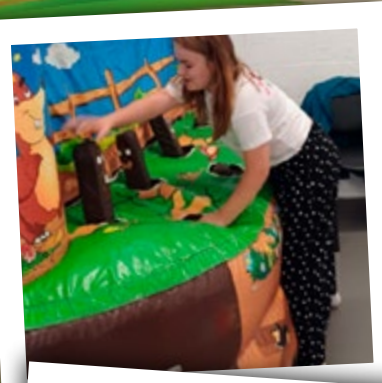
When you receive your annual financial assessment there is a time frame for completion.

If you anticipate any problems in meeting the deadlines contact us on **0116 305 3051** or via [fps.finance@leics.gov.uk](mailto:fps.finance@leics.gov.uk) so we can give you an extension.



# SGO Summer event

Thank you for coming to our Summer event in August with a carnival theme, show ponies a petting corner, whack a mole, painting, printing, ice-cream and the police joined in the fun.



“A big thank you to yourself and the team for today’s event.

The kids really enjoyed themselves and are struggling to decide what was their favourite, but they definitely liked the Guinea pigs, rabbit and ponies, face painting, crafts, bean bag games - and not forgetting the ice cream!

Thank you all”

JC & E

”



Some happy face feedback as they left.



# Empower Your Special Guardianship Journey with Our Support



## Scaffolding for SGO

Empowering Carers & Nurturing Futures

**Are you navigating the challenges of a Special Guardianship Order? Join our fully funded transformative Carer Support Course in Leicester. Designed exclusively for SGO carers like you, this course offers vital tools, knowledge, and a supportive community to enhance your role as a carer.**

### Course Highlights:

- **Duration and Schedule:** 10 insightful sessions over 12 months, with flexible timings to suit your needs.
- **Location:** Central and convenient, ensuring easy access for all participants.

- **Course Content:** From trauma-informed psychoeducation to building strong relationships and managing contact with birth parents, our curriculum covers it all. Dive deep into self-reflection and grow in your understanding and approach to special guardianship.

- **ASGSF funded:** Fully funded course for those that are ASGSF eligible
- **Community and Support:** Connect with fellow SGO carers in a non-judgmental and supportive environment, ideal for sharing experiences and learning together.

### Ready to Join Us?

We are excited to support you in this critical role. For more details, scheduling information, and to express your interest, please contact **Leesha Irwin** at [info@leeshairwinpsychotherapy.co.uk](mailto:info@leeshairwinpsychotherapy.co.uk). And ask about Scaffolding for Special Guardians

Your dedication to the well-being of children is commendable, and we're here to assist you every step of the way. We look forward to welcoming you to the course!



LEESHA IRWIN ART PSYCHOTHERAPY

## TEEN GROUP UPDATE

Our newly formed Teen Group that started in May on line met up for the first time in the summer holidays. Ran by Harriet and Sarah they had been getting together every first Wednesday of the month early evening to play online games, chat and generally just get to know each other from the comfort of their own homes.

In August they met for Crazy golf and lunch. It was a casual informal meet up in a fun setting with lots of easy laughter and conversation, sharing thoughts and experiences whilst they played and later enthusiastically ate their lunch. They all loved the food, including chocolate brownie treats and milkshakes.

What the children said about the day:

'I really enjoyed it'  
J.

'It was really good'  
S.

They are already planning the next trip out "can we go bowling next time"

What the workers said about the day:

“ It was a fun day out and the food was excellent. The kids were brilliant and really opened up with each other and us ”

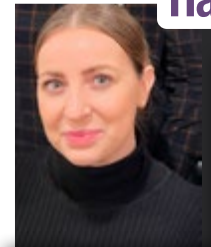
The Teen group was set up to allow an opportunity for our SG teenagers to meet up and form connections with others who may have had or be having similar experiences. If your teenager would like a chance to meet others like this, with an opportunity to make friendships, do fun activities together and get their voice heard by us as workers in the SGO team please contact [sgosupport@leics.gov.uk](mailto:sgosupport@leics.gov.uk)

## Special Guardian Advice Line

0116  
305 6645

Thursday  
9am - 12 midday.

It will be operated on rotation by one of our team and we are looking forward to hearing from you.



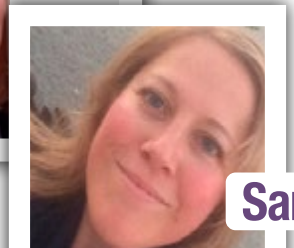
Harriet



Sheryl



Lisa



Sarah

Please call us for any questions you may have, to request advice or seek reassurance. If the line is unavailable please email [sgosupport@leics.gov.uk](mailto:sgosupport@leics.gov.uk) Special guardians and professionals are both welcome to use this line.

# Special Guardianship *success story*

“ I really want to tell you about a special guardian who I only learned about this week she became a special guardian over 17 years ago to her niece, Angel.



Our special Guardian Natalie was 23 years old when she decided to take on the responsibility of her niece who came to live with her at five days old. Natalie's younger sister (Angel's birth mum) had always struggled with severe mental health problems throughout her childhood, however, into adulthood she turned to self-medication of drugs and alcohol and was assessed as unable to look after Angel right from her birth.

Natalie was a single parent with a three-year old little girl of her own and had just had a miscarriage. Getting the special guardianship order was not easy she remembers

“ I had to fight for it, along with all the usual checks I also had a psychological assessment, I guess because my sister had mental health problems, and my miscarriage, they were cautious of me.”

The special guardianship order was granted in Natalie's favour when Angel was 11 months old, Natalie knew that there would be challenging times ahead as she had witnessed her sister's pregnancy and anticipated Foetal

alcohol syndrome (FAS) to be a condition that would affect the rest of Angel's life and future. It took until she was 4 years old to get the diagnosis of FAS.

Contacts with birth mum were not easy but they persevered, but when birth mum went to prison and asked Natalie to bring Angel to visit her, Natalie did not feel that this was the best thing for Angel, however, she agreed to 3rd party contact. On her release from prison her sister became aggressive making accusations and death threats to Natalie and the family, in response Natalie ceased all contact of any description between her sister and the family. Natalie's sister unhappy with the situation made an application to court to reinstate the contact but with all the evidence that Natalie had the judge ruled an order of 'no contact' at all with birth Mum which remains in place.

Angel's diagnosis of FAS has had a direct and lasting impact and affects many areas of her development, including speech and language, cognitive ability, focus and self-awareness but supported by Natalie and her own desire to

learn she thrives. Initially Natalie learned Makaton in order to communicate with her and sought the support of the primary school. When she started school Angel had special needs and was still in nappies, but the school helped get Angel statemented for full hours (today this is called EHCP). "The school and the teaching assistant were absolutely brilliant and helped her remain in mainstream school" remembers Natalie.

Angel continued onto mainstream secondary school and worked hard she sat her GCSEs, something that paediatricians and professionals throughout her life had said she would never be able to do, due to her inability to retain information. Natalie has never entertained negative expectations like that and encouraged a can-do attitude in Angel and in all her children. Yes!! I say all because 10 years ago she took on 2 more SGOs for her younger brothers' children a girl aged 1 year and a boy who was 2 years old. At this time Natalie had married, they had wanted a child together but sadly there were fertility difficulties and so they were both available and willing to

take on two more children together. However, the situation had its stresses and after a couple of years the marriage came to an end "He couldn't handle the children's behaviours, he thought they were naughty, but I knew they needed me" So Natalie was once again a single mum, of 4 children this time until she found out shortly after her husband left that she was pregnant, "a miracle" she expresses, her youngest boy is now 7 years old.

Angel goes from strength to strength; the reason Natalie phoned me today is to say that Angel who will be 18 in August is continuing in education and could I inform Finance. After attending a specialist course to aid transitioning into higher education for the last 2 years Angel has been accepted at Leicester College to do an Art & Design B. Tec Level 1. "Art and drawing have always been her passion and she is really good at it" Natalie enthused, I insisted on her sending some pictures of her work and I absolutely agree!

After talking with Natalie and listening to Angel's huge achievements, I felt that all of our special guardians who know how hard it can be for our children would love to hear Angel's

success story and it might encourage some of them to follow their passions like Angel is doing.

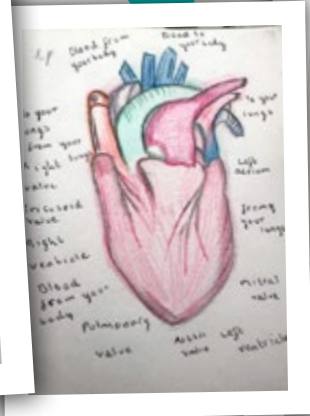
Natalie tells me that although it has been challenging, she has never regretted her decisions or been put off doing it more than once. "In fact, I want to go into fostering when I can, but right now these children need me, and I want to be here for them." By the time this goes to print Natalie will be a grandma to her eldest daughter's child, so a new baby in the house.

Natalie is cheerful and extremely modest when I say she is amazing and doing a fabulous job. In fact, when she read this, she said "but it's more about me than Angel" however I'm sure you'll agree there isn't one without the other. She puts any success down to having the right people around her, the right friends and family members. Natalie recollects "I didn't have the right friends long ago, so I had a clear out and got some good ones who understand and offer all round support."

**Natalie and Angel, we think you are both extraordinary. And wish you both good luck for the continuation of both your achievements.**

*The SGO Team*

If you would like to share your story please get in touch [sgosupport@leics.gov.uk](mailto:sgosupport@leics.gov.uk) we would love to hear from you and I know that special guardians love reading about each other...it helps.



**Angel – what a fabulous talent you have for designing and drawing - this small selection really examples your delicate touch and feel for the subject. I cannot wait to hear about your future success in the world of creativity and Art.**



# Being a Special Guardian can be Isolating



**Definition: the condition of feeling alone, especially when this makes you unhappy**

The words seclusion and solitude are common substitutes for the word isolation. While all three words mean “the state of one who is alone,” isolation stresses detachment from others often involuntarily.

Special guardians, who take on the responsibility of caring for children when the biological parents are unable to do so, often face significant challenges that can lead to feelings of isolation. Here are some reasons why they might feel this way:

- 1 Lack of Understanding:** Special guardianship is different from traditional parenting or fostering, and many people, including friends and family, may not fully understand the unique challenges and emotional complexities involved. This can make it hard for guardians to find people who can truly relate to their experiences.
- 2 Social Isolation:** The demands of caring for a child who has likely experienced trauma or instability can be overwhelming, leaving little time for social activities. This can result in guardians feeling cut off from their usual social circles.

- 3 Limited Support Networks:** While foster carers often have access to extensive support networks and resources, special guardians may have less access to such support, particularly if they are family members who stepped into the role without much formal preparation or training.

- 4 Stigma and Judgment:** Special guardians might face judgment or stigma, particularly if the child has behavioral issues or if the guardian is an older relative like a grandparent. Others might not understand the complexities of the child’s background and could unfairly judge the guardian’s parenting.

- 5 Emotional Burden:** Special guardians often carry a heavy emotional burden, knowing that they are caring for a child who has been through difficult experiences. This responsibility can be isolating, especially if the guardian does not have someone to share these feelings with.

- 6 Navigating Complex Family Dynamics:** Special guardianship often involves complex family relationships, particularly if the child is a relative. Balancing these dynamics while also acting as a parent can create tension and feelings of isolation within the family.

- 7 Lack of Recognition:** Special guardianship is sometimes less recognized or celebrated compared to other forms of caregiving, which can leave guardians feeling unappreciated or overlooked for their hard work and dedication.

These factors, combined with the intense responsibility of raising a child who may have special emotional or developmental needs, can make special guardians feel very isolated.



Overcoming the isolation that often comes with being a special guardian can be challenging, but there are strategies that can help you connect with others and find support:

- 1 Seek Out Support Groups:** Look for local or online support groups for special guardians or kinship carers. Sharing experiences with others in similar situations can help you feel less alone and provide valuable advice.
- 2 Build a Network:** Reach out to friends, family, and community members who can offer support. Even if they don't fully understand your situation, having someone to talk to can alleviate feelings of isolation.
- 3 Prioritize Self-Care:** Taking care of your own mental and physical health is crucial. Make time for activities that you enjoy and that help you relax, whether it's exercise, hobbies, or simply taking a break.

- 4 Communicate Your Needs:** Don't be afraid to ask for help. Communicate with those around you about what you need, whether it's a listening ear, practical assistance, or simply understanding.
- 5 Explore Online Communities:** If in-person support is hard to find, online communities can offer a sense of connection. Forums, social media groups, and websites dedicated to guardianship can be a valuable resource.
- 6 Maintain Social Connections:** Even if it feels difficult, try to maintain relationships with friends and family. Regular social interaction, even in small doses, can help combat feelings of isolation.
- 7 Educate Yourself:** Understanding your role better can help you feel more confident and connected. Attend workshops, read books, and engage in learning opportunities related to guardianship.

- 8 Set Boundaries:** It's important to set boundaries to protect your own time and energy. This might mean saying no to certain requests or delegating tasks to others.
- 9 Consider Professional Help:** If feelings of isolation persist, seeking help from a counselor or therapist who understands the challenges of guardianship can be beneficial.

By actively seeking out connections and taking care of your own well-being, you can mitigate the feelings of isolation that sometimes accompany being a special guardian.



**If this article has struck a cord with you, either you feel this way or used to feel this way but found your way out? We would like to hear from you, I know that sometimes a group of people can be intimidating and only serves to make you feel more isolated.**

For this reason we would like to launch something new, a list to be known as **'SGs united'** where you can either meet up in person one to one, talk on the phone or exchange text messages. For this to happen of course we need you, maybe you feel in a position to offer that individual support or in a position where you could do with it, either way there is a benefit for both of you in sharing your experiences in a safe and private connection.

Our aim is to gather those of you who would like to be part of this new collective and match you up. If you haven't yet read the special guardianship story in this newsletter, Natalie puts success down to surrounding herself with the right people, so let's get that happening for everyone.

We look forward to hearing from you at [sgosupport@leics.gov.uk](mailto:sgosupport@leics.gov.uk) use reference **SGs United**.



# Make your Hugs Count!



**Hugging has the power to transform the way that we think, feel, and live. While often perceived as a simple gesture of affection, hugging is a profound tool for emotional and physical health, particularly in strengthening family bonds.**

## Hugging Reduces Stress & Increases Self Esteem

Hugging is more than just a warm embrace. It is a powerful component of our emotional toolkit, offering benefits that are both far-reaching and deeply personal:

### ♥ Reduce Stress:

Hugging reduces cortisol levels, thus diminishing anxiety and stress. A landmark 2020 study highlighted these effects, showcasing the broad benefits of physical affection.

### ♥ Higher Emotional Intelligence:

A 2016 study in the “Journal of Child and Family Studies” discovered that children who receive more physical affection from their parents develop greater emotional intelligence.

### ♥ Calming Effects:

Hugging has been shown to improve memory performance in stressful situations due to the calming effects of oxytocin (2019 study)

### ♥ Higher Self-Esteem:

Frequent hugs have been linked to higher self-esteem in children and adults.

### ♥ Improved Long-Term Relationship:

A study by the University of North Carolina found that partners who engage in frequent hugging show improved relationship satisfaction, likely due to increased oxytocin levels, which foster trust and bonding.

### ♥ Desire to Help Others:

Research published in 2018 in “PLOS One” indicated that hugs might increase prosocial behaviors (those intended to help others) in children, such as sharing and helping others, which boosts self-esteem and reduces social anxiety.

## Hugging Builds a Stronger Immune System

### ♥ Immune System Support:

A 2015 study from Carnegie Mellon University found that hugs act as a form of social support, reducing the risk of stress-associated infections and leading to a stronger immune system.

### ♥ Heart Health:

Hugging not only improves mental well-being, but can also have physical health benefits such as lowered blood pressure and improved heart health.

### ♥ Hugs as Preventive Medicine:

A 2016 study suggests that regular physical affection, like hugging, could lower the likelihood of catching common colds or flu, as physical warmth improves the body’s ability to combat infections.

### ♥ Neuroendocrine Regulation:

A 2017 study pointed out that regular hugs could balance the body’s natural control systems for responding to stress, thereby improving overall health and potentially reducing the frequency of illness related to stress.

## Hugging Improves Memory (and Grades!)

### ♥ Emotional and Cognitive Benefits:

Frequent hugs have been linked to improved academic performance in children, as noted in a 2018 study by the Family Relations Institute.

### ♥ Impact on Learning:

A 2020 study observed that children who were hugged before school had better concentration and memory recall during lessons, which in turn impacted their academic performance positively. (Try to make this a before-school rule.)

### ♥ Longer Life Expectancy:

Regular physical contact, including hugging, has also been linked to longer life expectancy due to cumulative positive effects on the heart and endocrine systems (2018 review).

### ♥ Pain Management:

A 2019 study reported that children experience less pain after receiving hugs after minor surgical procedures, indicating the natural analgesic effects of physical comfort.

### ♥ Heartbeat Harmony and Memory Boosts:

A 2017 study found that a 20-second hug can synchronize heartbeats, enhancing emotional and physiological connections.

### ♥ Significant Impact on Longevity:

A longitudinal study conducted in 2019 among elderly adults indicated that those who received more frequent hugs and other forms of social support lived longer than those who were isolated, suggesting that the social and emotional support provided by hugging has a significant impact on longevity.

### ♥ Reduced Chronic Depression:

Further evidence from mental health research shows that individuals who receive regular hugs are less likely to experience chronic depression, contributing to overall longevity and life quality.

So it's evidently clear that a hug is packed full of benefits. It's so much more than a quick squeeze. It's a real booster for our health and happiness. So, let's make it a point to hug our loved ones tighter and longer. Today, starting now, hug your kids for 15 seconds. Aim for at least four hugs today.

Some great ways to start doing this are always by giving out good morning hugs and good night hugs. Then you have twice a day where you can say "I need a hug". (Trust me – you'll quickly find yourself hugging your kids much much more!!)

You might have a one week old or a 17-year-old... hug them either way. Don't stop just because your kids are older. Believe it or not, every hug is doing them—and us—a world of good. Make your hugs count!

## The Science

Hugs encourage your body to release oxytocin which is released by the pituitary gland to help you handle stress.

The skin contains a network of tiny, egg-shaped pressure centers called Pacinian corpuscles that can sense touch and which are in contact with the brain through the vagus nerve. The vagus nerve winds its way through the body and is connected to a number of organs, including the heart.

It is also connected to oxytocin receptors. One theory is that stimulation of the vagus triggers an increase in oxytocin, which in turn leads to the cascade of health benefits.





At the heart of our communities, our Family Hubs have been established to support families, children and young people across Leicestershire. Working with partner organisations our Hubs provide a one-stop shop and offer advice, information and resources to help families navigate every stage of life; from pregnancy, through your child's early years, later childhood and into young adulthood.

[familyhubsleicestershire.org.uk](http://familyhubsleicestershire.org.uk)



If you have any comments, suggestions, ideas or questions about the newsletter, please email: [sgosupport@leics.gov.uk](mailto:sgosupport@leics.gov.uk) or call **0116 305 3051**

## Useful websites:

[www.frg.org.uk](http://www.frg.org.uk)

(family rights)

[www.grandparentsplus.org.uk](http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk)

(inform, support & empower)

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

(any government service such as benefits, passports, education, pupil premium)

[www.childcarechoices.leics.gov.uk](http://www.childcarechoices.leics.gov.uk)

(help/advice with childcare)

[www.specialguardiansupport.org.uk](http://www.specialguardiansupport.org.uk)

(login required contact 0116 305 3052)

<https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/leicestershire-virtual-school>

(help with pupil premium and school related issues)

[www.healthforteens.co.uk](http://www.healthforteens.co.uk)

(advice and quizzes regarding teenage health issues)

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/my-activity-passport](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/my-activity-passport)

(an interactive guide to activities)

<https://yoopies.co.uk/c/press-releases/blacklivesmatter>

parents guide to BLM explanations

<https://www.today.com/parenting-guides/how-talk-kids-about-race-racism-t179138>

conversation starter

<https://guidetoallyship.com/>

how to be active against bias injustice

[www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)

free online counselling and support for young people

<https://cafcass.clickrelationships.org/mediation-2/>

for mediation of co-parenting and other

<https://beaconhouse.org.uk/resources/> Trauma informed therapeutic resources

[www.yourmodernfamily.com](http://www.yourmodernfamily.com)

tips and parenting ideas

<https://firstcontactplus.org.uk/about-us/>

a range of services

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-oWUZNhEXo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-oWUZNhEXo)

What is Therapeutic Parenting?

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-IYIkDlkGk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-IYIkDlkGk)

Understanding Your Traumatised Child

**CLOSED FACEBOOK GROUP:**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/226771768010284/>

?ref=share

for peer support and interest

<https://bit.ly/mentalhealthLLR>

Directory of mental health services for children