

The Girl Speaks



Gentle guidance for the beginning of the journey.

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"Behind every closed door in the family court... is a child, a parent, and a truth the world never hears."

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"When the System Knocks: A Quiet Guide to Holding On"

Why Social Services Might Get Involved

When you hear that social services are involved, it's natural to feel fear, confusion, or even shame. But involvement doesn't always mean something terrible has happened. Sometimes, it begins with a concern, a referral, or even a misunderstanding.

Knowing why they might be involved can help you stay grounded and respond calmly.

Common Reasons for Involvement:

- Concerns raised by a school, GP, or neighbour
 - Reports of neglect or risk of harm
- Mental health concerns (often misunderstood)
- Domestic abuse in the home (even if the parent is the victim)
 - Drug or alcohol use (even historical or occasional)
 - Housing issues or lack of support networks
- A child's own behaviour being misread as parenting failure
 - Previous history with services — even from years ago

It doesn't mean you're a bad parent. It doesn't mean they're coming to take your child.

Many referrals are resolved early with no further action. But it's still important to understand your rights and respond in a way that protects you and your family.

First Steps

This isn't a legal case — and it might never be.

Social services might be involved because someone raised a concern. At this stage, it's about gathering information. But how you respond now can shape everything that follows.

What You Can Do Right Away:

- Stay calm. This is hard, but panic will only cloud your decisions.
- Ask for everything in writing — emails are easier to evidence than phone calls.
- You have the right to record meetings for personal use (more on this later).
- Keep a log: dates, who you spoke to, what was said, what you did in response.
- Start gathering evidence: school reports, therapy records, messages from professionals who support you.
- Reflect honestly on any areas of concern raised — and write down what you're already doing to address them.
- Ask questions. You are allowed to understand what's happening and why.
- If you don't understand something they've said, ask them to explain it again — in writing.
- Begin building a paper trail that shows cooperation, stability, and change.

Social services may still be forming their view. What you do in these early days matters. You don't need to be perfect — you need to be proactive, calm, and careful.

This isn't about proving you're a 'good parent' overnight. It's about showing you're listening, acting, and aware.

Understanding Assessments:

Section 17 vs Section 47

You may hear them talk about different kinds of ‘assessments’. Two of the most common are Section 17 and Section 47. These come from the Children Act 1989 and have very different meanings.

Section 17 – ‘Child in Need’

A Section 17 assessment is used when the local authority believes a child may need extra help to thrive. This doesn’t mean they think your child is being harmed — just that there may be needs that aren’t currently being met.

It can lead to offers of support, referrals to other services, or a team-around-the-child approach.

It is ****not**** about removal. It’s about support — though it can still feel intrusive at times.

Section 47 – ‘Child Protection Investigation’

A Section 47 assessment happens when there is a concern that a child may be at risk of ****significant harm****.

This could be triggered by:

- a disclosure from the child
- a serious incident
- a referral from a professional or member of the public

This type of assessment is more serious and may lead to a child protection conference, where a plan is discussed.

It’s important to know which assessment is taking place — and to ask, in writing, if you’re unsure.

****Knowing the difference empowers you to respond calmly, ask the right questions, and prepare effectively.****

Understanding Section 20 – Voluntary Agreements

Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 allows a parent to agree for their child to be accommodated by the local authority – this means allowing the child to stay in foster care or another placement without going to court.

But it is completely voluntary.

What You Need to Know:

- You have the right to say no.
- You should not be pressured, guilt-tripped, or misled into signing.
 - It is not a legal order. You still have full parental responsibility.
 - You can withdraw your consent at any time – in writing.
 - If you're not sure, you can ask for time to think or to speak to a solicitor before signing.
- You have a right to legal advice – and should never be rushed into agreeing.

Some families are told they 'have no choice' but to sign – this is not true.

If you are unsure, do not sign anything on the spot. Ask questions. Take a copy. Get legal advice.

You are allowed to pause and protect yourself.



A quiet understanding of what social services are assessing, and how that can guide your response.

Why this matters:

When social services get involved, they're always working within something called thresholds. These are the levels of concern they believe must be met before taking serious action — such as a child being removed or placed on a Child Protection Plan.

Understanding the threshold for removal can help you respond more calmly and effectively. Social services can only apply to the court to remove a child if they believe the threshold has been met.

Knowing what those thresholds are, doesn't just help you prepare. It helps you evidence change, spot unfair assumptions, and advocate more clearly for your child and yourself.

What Social Services Must Consider Before Removal:

They typically look at whether:

- The child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm
- That harm is due to the care they are receiving (or lack of care)
- The harm cannot be prevented without court intervention

This is the legal basis for removing a child — it's called the threshold for a Care Order, and it's set out in Section 31 of the Children Act 1989.



What counts as 'significant harm'?

There are four key types of harm they look for. These can overlap, and emotional harm is often the most relied upon.

Physical harm* – injuries, force, or being hurt.

Sexual harm* – abuse or exploitation, including exposure to inappropriate materials or situations.

Neglect* – not meeting basic physical or emotional needs consistently.

Emotional harm* – ongoing stress, fear, confusion, rejection, or being made to feel unsafe or unseen.

Emotional harm is the most common reason used.* This can include shouting, inconsistent care, untreated mental health difficulties, or conflict at home.

Sometimes, social services focus on the ***risk*** of future emotional harm ,
not harm that's already happened. This is where things can feel vague or unfair.

It's okay to ask: 'What evidence is there that this harm is likely to happen?'



Before You Turn the Page...

You've just taken in a lot.

You've read about thresholds, legal terms, paperwork, harm, and decisions that feel far bigger than you.

But you're still here. Still reading. Still holding on.
That means something.

This first part wasn't just information – it was preparation. You've started building your toolkit. You've laid a foundation.

Now, we move gently into the next part of the journey.

Where we talk about how to speak.

How to document.

How to protect your peace while under a microscope.

You don't have to do it perfectly.

You don't have to do it all at once.

You just have to keep going – and we'll go together.