

Glossary of Terms

The following definitions are provided by CAFCASS, a [service](#) which seeks to safeguard and promote the welfare of children going through the family justice system. We would encourage all attendees to read through these terms prior to the discussion.

Placement Order

A local authority or an adoption agency can only place a child for adoption if the birth parents have formally consented or the local authority has been granted a placement order.

- Parents may consent to placement and may also consent to the adoption before proceedings are issued in which case the local authority or adoption agency must ask Cafcass to appoint an officer to witness that consent.
- Alternatively, the parents may consent during proceedings in which case the court appoints a reporting officer from Cafcass.
- The consent of a parent is not valid if it is given before the child is six weeks old.
- A local authority must apply for a placement order if they conclude that adoption is in the best interests of the child, the child is at risk of significant harm, and the parents do not consent to placement for adoption.
- To avoid delay local authorities should always, during care proceedings, consider applying for a placement order where the decision is made that adoption is in the best interests of the child.

Adoption Order

An adoption order has the effect of permanently severing the legal ties between the child and the birth parents (except in the case of partner adoptions). Any orders which existed before the making of an adoption order will be extinguished and the birth parents will become former parents. The birth parent is an automatic party to adoption proceedings unless he or she has given notice that they do not wish to be informed of the proceedings. They will not receive notification of the application but will be given notice of the final hearing.

Adoption proceedings may continue beyond the young person's 18th birthday since an adoption order can be made at any time up to the 19th birthday.



Special Guardianship Order

This is an order introduced by the Adoption and Children Act 2002. It is meant to be a half-way house between a residence order and an adoption order. A special guardianship order confers parental responsibility on the special guardian who is able to exercise it to the exclusion of any other person with parental responsibility. The order provides more security than a residence order in that a parent has to obtain the permission of the court before being able to apply to discharge the order. The local authority has a range of duties to provide support to special guardians and each local authority must make arrangements for the provision in their area of special guardianship support services.

Special guardianship orders, unlike adoption orders, cease to have effect at the age of 18.

If you would like further information about the adoption landscape in England, you may find the following websites helpful: [Home for Good](#), [First4Adoption](#), [Coram](#)

